

Schoharie County 2022 Goals

Renewable Energy

Schoharie County finds itself in the unenviable position of having to be at the forefront in the struggle to protect the interests of Towns, Counties and School Districts from predatory Industrial Solar and Wind Developers from unfair and inequitable taxation policies imposed upon the taxpayers by the very State within they reside. While Renewable Energy may be good for the environment in the long run, the taxation policies adopted by the State pose a significant detriment and challenge to Upstate rural communities by severely crippling host-community tax revenues. Further, these Energy projects negatively impact host-communities with serious quality of life issues including loss of prime agricultural land, noise, viewshed degradation, real estate devaluation and other negative impacts to tourism and other Upstate economic opportunities while creating virtually no long-term job opportunities. Schoharie County will do all it can, against steep odds, to always advocate and protect the taxpayers of the County and in the case of Energy Development, the entire State. Schoharie County is leading the effort for fair and compensatory taxation of large Industrial Solar and Wind Projects. If Upstate has to host these Industrial Projects, there should be adequate compensation.

When Industrial Solar and Wind Energy Developers come to Town, they monopolize the community conversation and administrative capacities of small Towns. They dominate the agenda for months, if not years. This in turn distracts local government and citizenry from important issues of REAL and TANGIBLE economic opportunities of growth and creativity. Industrial Wind and Solar Energy Development

may provide “Environmental Justice” for urban communities, but they provide Environmental and Social INJUSTICE to Upstate Host-Communities who bear a tremendously unequal burden, without fair and equitable compensation, all falsely justified in the name of “Green Energy”. Hundreds of Millions, if not Billions of dollars are at stake, as well as vast amounts of upstate acreage that will forever no longer be available for other use.

Two decades from now, or sooner, the aura and specter of decommissioning these projects will arrive. This issue will prove to be very daunting for those that follow us in local government, and we owe it to them to do all we can now to mitigate the potentially huge negative impacts, both financially and in quality of life.

Defending our rights comes at a steep cost, especially legal costs which will be difficult for the County to sustain on its own. We must seek cooperative efforts with other counties and communities to fight the unjust usurpation of our home rule rights by the unfair imposition of ruinous attacks by the State on our ability to tax energy projects as fairly as any other projects or improvements. This is nothing less than the Taxation without Representation imposed on us by the British 250 years ago.

And let’s not forget the impact widespread renewable energy installations will have on our Economic Development strategy. Less property tax recoveries would mean higher property taxes to all of us. It’s obvious that any major employer or business considering Schoharie County, or much of upstate for that matter, will make property taxes part of their due diligence in considering locating in our county. This one area alone has the potential of being the greatest

impediment to the successful implementation of the Fairweather Plan.

As we go forward there are many uncertainties where we will be relative to renewable energy in the future. Near and long term. Much of that will be played out in the courts and maybe the ballot box. What is almost certain, whether we like it or not, some degree of renewable energy development is inevitable. We do know the State is severely hindering our ability to recover a fair property tax and/or the ability to negotiate a reasonable PILOT program. To recoup at least some of our lost property tax revenues, we must look at additional revenue strategies in place elsewhere or those under discussion. In addition to the paltry property taxes, we should examine fees to cover a number of obligations which will fall on local government and the impact these developments will have on our communities. Some examples are annual code enforcement inspection fees, watershed restoration fees, and environmental justice fees to name a few.

On a more positive energy note, great progress has been achieved in cooperation with the New York Power Authority with regards to greatly improved community communications and flood mitigation efforts in the Schoharie Valley. The Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Project represents another significant Green Energy Project hosted by Schoharie County in spite of the inherent risks posed by the project dams. But recently NYPA has done all that is possible to assist the County and host-community in providing protection and mitigation of flood events. Now, new progress is being seen in cooperation with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection as the same efforts relate to the operation and management of the Gilboa Reservoir. The County will continue to

strive to have both these Agencies work independently, in-concert and in cooperation with the County to promote flood safety as well as to provide recreational, economic and tourism opportunities to Schoharie County. We are just getting started but the results are tangible, real and already reaping benefits.

Former Public Safety Building

First, a brief recent history. As you know, since the issues associated with the county's ability to sell the Former Public Safety Building were resolved, there have been several efforts to construct a lease or sale contract with the goal of bringing jobs to the county. We were close on an excellent win-win deal that fell through not because of what we offered but more due to internal factors with the other party.

The time has come to relieve the county of the burden of the costs associated with the building with no tax or economic benefit to the county. The last thing we want is for the Former Public Safety building to become another Guilford Mills.

If the Board agrees, the county should put out a request for proposal for the sale of the building. Selection of who to sell the building to should be based on the BEST value, not necessarily highest bid. We will want to know what plans the interested parties have for the building and what economic benefits, including jobs, they would bring to the county.

A special committee composed of town, village, county, and public stakeholders will review proposals for the best benefit to the community, and most likely interview or seek presentations from those who may be on a short list. Based on the bids and discussion

with the potential buyers the special committee would make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

That committee will be chaired by Broome Supervisor and Chair of the Buildings Committee Steve Weinhofer. Other members of the committee will be:

- **Schoharie Town Supervisor Alan Tavener**
- **Schoharie Village Mayor Larry Caza**
- **Gilboa Supervisor and Economic Development Committee Chair Alicia Terry**
- **County Administrator Steve Wilson**
- **SEEC Executive Director Julie Pacatte**
- **IDA Member Wanda King**

Sales Tax Distribution

This is my ninth year here and it took quite a while to find out the methodology of how sales tax revenues are distributed to the Towns and Villages which I am told is based on the pro rata share of the property assessments among the sixteen towns and six villages. But I have never seen anything in writing which I am sure exists...somewhere. Regardless, it's time to re-visit the logic of the methodology behind the county distribution of tax revenues to the Towns and Villages.

I am asking Phil Skowfoe, Harold Vroman, Werner Hempel, and Jeff Haslun to be on a committee chaired by Alex Luniewski to explore this subject and report back to the Board with their findings and possibly a recommendation.

The committee may find the present process is still a good one. Or they may decide the present methodology needs to be tweaked or replaced. We should already have the data available, and I believe this study and a recommendation can be concluded in time for the 2023 budget cycle which would mean no later than the June Board Meeting.

Economic Development

Economic Development in Schoharie County happens through a partnership of multiple institutions including SEEC, SUNY Cobleskill, Destination Marketing Corporation, and the Industrial Development Agency (IDA). In recent years, the pace of economic development progress has picked up with projects associated with the Route 7 Corridor, projects that SUNY Cobleskill is developing and digital strategies projects.

The IDA promotes economic development in Schoharie County by offering financial assistance through grant funding, bond financing, low interest rate financing, and real property and sales tax benefits to startup businesses creating jobs and existing businesses that want to expand while retaining and creating additional jobs. By utilizing the statutory powers of the Agency as set forth under the provisions of New York State laws, the IDA collaborates with Schoharie County's local government bodies. The IDA Board members are appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the Schoharie County Board of Supervisors. Stakeholders include: (1) residents and taxpayers of Schoharie County and taxing jurisdictions, (2) businesses currently located and businesses intending to locate in Schoharie County, (3) not-for-profit organizations of Schoharie

County, (4) Schoharie County Economic Enterprise Corporation (SEEC), (5) the local workforce, and (6) the State of New York.

It is important that the economic development organizations be strengthened in advance of their need to develop and manage complex economic development projects. In 2022, The Economic Development Committee should develop a plan to better integrate the IDA into the county's overall Economic Development Strategy as identified in the Fairweather Report.

In Conclusion

The most daunting of the areas I covered is the impact of renewable energy on our county which will be an ongoing effort which will not see full resolution this year. But we must be committed to a strategy which will hopefully yield some victories we can build on.

I don't believe the other three areas I discussed are stretch goals. I think they are quite attainable in 2022 if the Board is committed to them with a sense of urgency which I believe our citizens demand of us. Let's not let them down.