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MEETING MINUTES

JEFFERSON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Jefferson County Office Building, 175 Arsenal St.
2nd Floor Conference Room

August 25, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lisa Ruggiero, Chairperson, Neil Katzman, John Stano, Jean Waterbury, Richard Nuijens, Mitch Robinson, Karen Freeman, Joe McLaughlin.

STAFF PRESENT: Alicia Dewey, Deputy Director
Andy Nevin, Senior Planner
Aileen Anderson, Community Development Coordinator
Emerald Macilvennie, Secretary

PUBLIC PRESENT: Jim Taravella- RIC Development
Caleb Scott- RIC Development & the American Solar Grazing Association

CALL TO ORDER AND ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM: Lisa Ruggiero opened the meeting at 4:01 p.m. and stated that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE JULY 28, 2026 MEETING MINUTES: The motion was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Richard Nuijens, and carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS: Lisa Ruggiero asked if there were any communications. There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (OTHER THAN AGENDA ITEMS): Lisa Ruggiero asked if there were any public comments (other than on agenda items). There were none.

NEW BUSINESS: Andy Nevin reports that there is no other new business to share.

A. General Municipal Law, Section 239m Referrals:

1. Rutland (T) RIC Development, LLC Special Use Permit T Ru 1 - 26

Andy presented this project to the Board. He shared the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and the site plan. This project is being reviewed due to proximity to NYS Route 12. The applicant resubmitted a proposal to construct a 5MW solar-powered generation facility.

He discussed County/State related matters:

During the **previous** review of the project, the Board recommended disapproval. That recommendation was based on aspects of the project that were not consistent with the Town of Rutland Zoning Law solar requirements.

Within the October 2025 response letter to the Town, it was noted that the majority of the project installation was proposed on prime agricultural soils well over the ten percent limit established by the Town of Rutland. However, the Town Zoning Law states "unless the project design allows for compatible agricultural uses within that area, including but not limited to cover crops, grazing, etc." At that time, it was recommended that if the applicant intends to maintain agricultural activity within the project area, a plan for agricultural use should be submitted, as outlined in the Town Solar law, detailing how specific crop production or grazing will be accommodated to ensure that meaningful agricultural use continues on-site.

Other items noted in the October 2025 letter were the glare hazard analysis and corresponding responses from Fort Drum Wheeler Sack Army Airfield and the Watertown International Airport. These have been submitted as part of this application.

Outstanding items from the letter include: completing FAA Form 7460 and the applicant contacting NYS DOT regarding drainage improvements or potential stormwater that could impact NYS Route 12 drainage facilities.

A Jefferson County Building Permit is required for commercial solar projects.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local comment in the October 2025 response letter noted the visual simulations, which illustrate the appearance of the panels after construction, did not include simulation of the above ground interconnection wires, poles, and inverters or mechanicals yet. They should be submitted to the local board to allow their effective review of the project's visibility from the public roadways and nearby homes.

The local board should ensure the proposed landscaping meets the Town's solar law standards for height, spacing and variety of plantings in the large-scale solar screening provisions. The local board should consider semi-annual or quarterly landscape inspections to ensure "unhealthy vegetation shall be removed and replaced immediately", as required by the Town Solar Law.

Long-term monitoring should also include ensuring the grazing activities continue to take place to satisfy the Town requirements that agriculture uses continue for the life of the project.

Jean Waterbury asked if the parcel would be subdivided, the answer was no.

Mitch Robinson asked if they intended to drill wells to provide water for the sheep. RIC Development representative Caleb Scott, also of the American Solar Grazing Association spoke about normal processes that do not include drilling wells and there is no intent to do so. He said the sheep retain most of the water they require from grazing, and they move/ fill water totes as needed to provide for the animals.

Joe McLaughlin asked how long the project typically operates. The representative noted that

it is generally a 25 year span.

<u>Motion</u>: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of approval with the condition that the submitted Agricultural Integration and Grazing Management Plan and Sheep Grazing Agreement be executed and the farming/grazing activities continue for the life of the project, was made by Richard Nuijens, seconded by John Stano, and carried unanimously.

2. <u>Watertown (C) Greg Fishel Area Variance, C 7 – 26</u>

Aileen presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to NYS Route 3 and municipal boundaries. The applicant is seeking an area variance for signage above the maximum 200 square feet permitted.

She discussed County/State related matters:

In reviewing the area variance, the local board should consider the benefit to the applicant as weighed against the detriment to the health, safety, and welfare of the community, using the five factors for an area variance as stated in NYS General City Law.

There were no locally related issues discussed.

Mitch Robinson asked why the board is seeing this project, it was explained that this is the type of project that the 2026 239-m exemption will eliminate the need for the board to review minor variances such as this, as the communities adopt the reciprocal resolution.

<u>Motion</u>: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Richard Nuijens, seconded by Mitch Robinson, and carried unanimously.

<u>OTHER BUSINESS:</u>

Andy Nevin gave a presentation on the 2026 239-m exemptions for the members, detailing what the new exemptions are with examples of each and how it will impact the content that the board reviews. Members were also informed of two fall training sessions we will be hosting in September. On September 9th, 2026 there will be a 2 hour course: “Get Grant Ready Workshop” that is geared toward communities seeking funding. Also on September 28th 2026, NYS DOS will offer two sessions in the “Beyond the Basics Workshop” in the afternoon from 3:30 – 5:30. This presentation will be geared toward Public Meetings and Hearings and Record Keeping, and later, an evening session Hot Button Land Uses will be presented from 6:30 to 8:30pm.

<u>Adjournment:</u>

Richard Nuijens made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:05pm, seconded by John Stano.