

## Annexation Plans Spark Sherman Uncertainty

09 Feb 2023 – The Post-Journal

By David Prenatt

SHERMAN - The joint public hearing of the town and village, which was scheduled for 6 p.m. on Feb. 2, was postponed at the last moment and rescheduled for Monday at the same time and place.

Immediately after the Feb. 2 meeting was called to order and a motion made to open the hearing, town of Sherman attorney Joel Seachrist said the town wished to postpone the hearing and a motion was made to reschedule.

Village Deputy Mayor Ryan Sanders said he could not see a reason why the town asked to postpone the meeting. "Although a legal explanation was given, from the attorney that represents the town in coordination with village counsel, it is unclear why this had to be postponed at such late notice when the petition went to the town office around Dec. 15, a month and a half ago," he said.

Town of Sherman Supervisor Mark Persons said he could not comment on the matter at this time.

The purpose of the public hearing was to review the proposed annexation of 62 acres of land from the town to the village. Previously, Mayor Colleen Meeder, who was unavailable for comment, explained the property, which is comprised of two parcels of land owned 100% by the village, runs parallel to State Route 430 on the west side along the village boundary.

According to a village official who asked not to be identified, the project was championed by village Trustees Kirk Ayers and Isaac Gratto. "They made the initial decisions, took the risk and committed to the necessary investment, knowing the benefits it would bring the residents. The current village trustees are equally passionate about supporting the project."

According to Sanders, the annexation of the land is needed to ensure the construction of the planned solar array by Solar Liberty. "For the project to be successful, we need to have the town's support for a special use permit or annex the property into the village," he said.

The project began more than two years ago when representatives from the firm Solar Liberty and the village began to discuss the construction of a community solar array.

"It is our understanding that the mayor met with the town supervisor before any of this began, about two years ago," Sanders said. "She explained the village's full intentions and purpose in taking this opportunity to support the municipal utility operations and capital expenses."

Also in a previous explanation, Meeder said that: "It is the village's intent to use all revenues generated by contractual agreements with the solar developer for the purpose of defraying costs of the operational and capital improvements related to the three multi-million utilities (water, sewer and stormwater) that serve the village and town residents. Combined, the three utilities represent \$15 million in capital improvements, and \$200,000 in annual debt service and reserves. This is all the responsibility of approximately 700 residents, ages 0 to 99, in under 300 homes and businesses."

Village Trustee Dennis Watson said the revenue from the project will benefit everyone. "Over 40% of the town residents reside in the village. This is not an us vs. them debate. Village residents are town residents," he said. "The Town Board should be representing the best interests of all their constituents, not just the 50-plus percent outside of the village boundary."

Watson went on to say: "This project will give some relief to the burden of managing the increasing expenses on a small community. Not to mention, the numerous governmental and non-profit organizations receiving Village utilities that serve the greater Sherman area."

Village Trustee Gary Emory agreed the village and town should be united in the project. "People saying 'the mayor wants to take 62 acres from the town is a very ignorant statement,'" he said. "It is not the village municipality nor the mayor that benefits from this. It is to help support all those receiving utilities within the drinking water, wastewater and stormwater service area."

Emory went on to say that the annexation would not have a negative effect on the town. "The mere \$36,700 assessment and the 62 acres represent an infinitesimal amount of the township, less than 1%," he said. "The town will only benefit from this project."

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