

# FINGER LAKES

## TIMES

TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2014

Geneva, N.Y. – Serving Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates Counties [www.fltimes.com](http://www.fltimes.com)

\$1.00

# Henderson cracks the code

By **DAVID L. SHAW**

[dshaw@fltimes.com](mailto:dshaw@fltimes.com)

GENEVA — Jeff Henderson has been trying to start an egg cooperative in the city for at least four years.

He finally got the go-ahead Monday night.

The city Planning Board voted 8-0 to approve a site plan, architectural and environmental review and special permit related to Henderson's proposal to locate ground-mounted solar-panel arrays and a chicken coop at 50 State St., property he owns. Henderson plans to house about 20 free-range hens there.

The decision followed three hours



Henderson

of debate. Several of Henderson's State Street neighbors voiced concerns about the chickens.

Henderson bought the vacant lot from the city at a tax auction last year. The property is zoned industrial, which allows for solar panels and the raising of chickens for egg production, provided a special use permit is granted.

Some neighbors have signed on to be part of an egg cooperative, an arrangement that involves people

taking care of the hens in shifts in exchange for a share of the eggs produced.

Henderson, who founded the highly successful Musselman Triathlon in 2004, will partner with Qwiksolar, a Geneva company owned by Ryan Wallace, to install five ground-mounted arrays containing 48 panels apiece. The electricity created will be added to the local power grid.

The site, just over an acre, will feature a 6-by-6-foot chicken coop, a small tool and work shed, a 7- to 8-foot fence and some smaller interior fences.

■ See HENDERSON on Page 5A

City planning board votes 8-0 to approve special permit for proposed egg cooperative on State Street

# HENDERSON

■ Continued from Page 1A

"I'm confident we will operate the property to minimize any negative impacts and make this a positive thing for the neighborhood and community," Henderson said.

Planning Board member Lou Ann Commesso said some State Street residents feel they don't know much about it and weren't asked.

"And as an allowed use, there's nothing they can do about it," Commesso said.

Henderson said he's involved the public, including an invitation to a barbecue held Saturday, to visit the site and interact with chickens that were there temporarily.

"I understand people may have alternate viewpoints," Henderson said. "I want to be able to talk to those people to address and mitigate those concerns."

The city ordinance does not allow the harboring of chickens within 200 feet of any house. The board became engaged in a discussion about whether the 200-foot limit applies to the distance of the coop from neighboring houses or from any point a chicken may roam on the parcel from a house.

Board chairman Jeff Rokow suggested the city Zoning Board of Appeals might better interpret the law when it meets tonight

to discuss Henderson's proposal.

Noise, smell, predators and rabies-carrying vermin were other concerns raised.

"If we do it right, and we plan to do it right, that should not be a problem," Henderson replied. "The site will be cleaned up, the chickens don't make much noise, and the fencing and other steps will keep away other animals."

No lighting or signs will be involved. Gardens and additional landscaping are planned, as well as a system to collect rain water for use on the site.

During public comments, Katrina Valerio of 31 State St. presented a petition opposing the chickens, saying it was signed by 11 State Street residents.

"They said they had no knowledge and were not contacted and they don't want it," Valerio said. "I commend you for doing something to better the property, but why not a food garden? Not chickens."

Mary Bruno of 35 Clinton St. complained the project would butt up against her backyard. Mary Lou Cannuli of 160 Exchange St. claimed the chickens would not be a good addition to the neighborhood, saying they will create problems.

Calvin Ruthven of 38 State St. is a real estate agent who said he pur-

chased his house because he saw potential for the neighborhood and Henderson's venture.

"As a real estate agent, my professional opinion is it won't hurt your property values," Ruthven said. "It can even increase them if young buyers with families look for projects like this and become involved in the neighborhood."

Cory Barrett, another State Street resident who has joined the egg cooperative, called it a positive thing, citing the educational value of showing kids how to take care of animals and share in eggs for their families. He noted that Henderson's proposal will put the site on the tax rolls.

Wallace acknowledged he has a personal interest in the project. He said he moved to Geneva, where his wife, Tracey, was raised, after visiting and seeing its vibrancy and potential.

"It's had rough times, but I see a vibrant community on the upswing," Wallace said. "Jeff has cleaned up this property to improve the neighborhood, and I'd love to live in a community like State Street where people can work together on something positive."

Henderson insisted his project will make the area better.

"If it smells, I will take care of it, but I don't expect it to be a problem," he said.

Henderson said if the project fails, it can be dis-

mantled and removed from the property in three hours.

"I'm confident that won't be the case," he added. "I'm confident it will be a positive thing."

After more debate, it was put to a straw vote.

Five members favored a liberal interpretation that the 200-foot setback apply only to industrial egg production, not just for 20 chickens. Three felt a restrictive interpretation of the 200-foot distance is needed, or at least should be decided by the ZBA.

The Planning Board then completed Parts I and II of the Environmental Assessment Form, part of the State Environmental Quality Review Act; reviewed special use permit criteria; and conducted a site plan and architectural review for the chicken coop building.

Board member Steve O'Malley made the motion to approve the project after a proposed amendment to require screening to the front fencing on the curb-side section of the project failed. O'Malley, Rich Sheils, Rokow, Commesso, Don Cass, Paul Passavant, Sharon Best and Larry Campbell all voted yes.

Molly Cadle-Davidson has resigned from the board, leaving a vacancy.

Afterward, Valerio said she hoped the project works.

"I assure you we'll do our best," Henderson said. "I hear your concerns."