

# FINGER LAKES

## TIMES

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# Egg co-op supporters air concerns to Council

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GENEVA — Give peeps a chance.

That twist on John Lennon's 1969 anti-war hit "Give Peace a Chance" was the refrain of several of those speaking to City Council Wednesday in support of Jeff Henderson's solar panel and egg cooperative on State Street.

Henderson's project has generated controversy since it was proposed this past summer.

It also has generated loyal supporters, 67 of whom have joined the cooperative, taking care of the chickens in exchange for fresh eggs.

But some residents of State and Clinton streets near the property have objected to the hens, as have some Council members.

Henderson received Planning Board approval for the project, but city officials later determined the project should have gone to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a set-

back variance. Henderson refused and the city took the matter to City Court where it is still pending.

The topic wasn't on Wednesday's agenda, but during the public comment portion of the meeting several people voiced support for the project and urged Council to resolve the matter without litigation.

Doug Reilly submitted a petition with 250 signatures in support of

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# CO-OP

## Most call for open, public discussion

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Geneva Peeps, as the cooperative is called.

"We ask that the city stand behind its project approval process and conduct its business publicly and transparently," Reilly said, asking for public discussion of a policy allowing backyard hens in residential areas of the city, saying hundreds of other cities do that.

"It's an action that would showcase Geneva as a model community," he said.

Brady Leo of Geneva Street had his young daughter, Charlie, give Council her opinion of the cooperative.

"You gave Jeff a promise and you broke it. How can I trust you? I love the chickens and they love us. We take care of them," she read.

Patricia Schiller of West Street said she is bothered by the city giving Henderson a building permit to have the chickens and then saying he was wrong. She said she would not mind a chicken cooperative in her neighborhood.

"You should honor what you said," Schiller said.

Tracy Wallace of Geneva said she came back to her hometown because she saw it was "on the upswing."

"I am a co-op member and the personal attacks

on Jeff by Council members is childish and should stop, regardless of your position on the issue," Wallace said.

Her husband, Ryan, and his company, QwikSolar, installed the solar panels on the site, but she's also a cooperative member. She cited many positive aspects of the project and said the city has handled the matter poorly, which "sends a message to developers."

"I ask for a public discussion on the issue, not in emails and behind closed doors," Wallace said, adding that the city should withdraw the lawsuit and follow the proper appeal process.

Charles King of Washington Street said he and his three children, ages 3, 6 and 8, love the hens and are big supporters of Henderson's project.

"I realize that zoning is a confusing issue. We want to be good neighbors to our immediate community and city. Please be good neighbors to us as well," King said.

Jim Hogan, owner of Geneva Bicycle Center, said Henderson has shown more poise and grace during the process than he would be able to manage if he were in his position.

"It's an open secret that how does such a small

issue, filed by seven people, get to such a level with the Council?" he asked.

"I feel there is personal animosity by some Councilors because of the people involved," Hogan said, noting that Henderson and Council member Jackie Augustine are a couple.

"Leave your grudges at home," he said.

Thomas Burrall of Jay Street said it's no secret that many city residents have raised chickens in their backyards over the years, providing fresh eggs.

He said chickens and hens are not in the same category as cattle, pigs or sheep.

"Where is the risk from chickens?" Burrall said. "They don't smell, they make little noise, are creatures of habit and produce an egg a day."

More support was voiced by Nancy Jo Fisher, whose three children are co-op members; Noah Lucas, a Hobart College graduate who returned to Geneva because of the positives he saw here; and Brian Nicholson, whose Red Jacket Orchards provides food for the chickens.

"There a lot of good things happening in Geneva. I would encourage you to think about community building and endorsing a tremendous project like this. I have a lot of respect for Jeff. He's done a lot to put Geneva on the map," Nicholson said.

Henderson pleaded with

Council to have a public discussion with him.

"The litigation does not have to happen. You seem to be quiet in public and vocal in private," Henderson said.

After Leland Miller of Maxwell Avenue spoke in favor of the project, public comment ended after an hour.

Later, during Council reports, Augustine said she's recused herself from the discussion because she's a member of Geneva Peeps.

"But I feel I must speak out. There's been too much emails and no public discussion. It's been a bad process, not transparent," she said, adding that litigation is for when all administrative remedies have been exhausted, which she noted is not the case.

After more discussion, City Manager Matt Horn said the city did not go to court after Ellis Bozzolo made a complaint about the chickens at a Council meeting.

"I could lay out the timetable for exactly what happened and when. I think that will show we were flexible before engaging the court," Horn said.

He acknowledged the city was at fault for not doing a proper review of the project application before voting 9-0 to endorse it. Council agreed that a timetable would be helpful and could be the basis for a discussion at the December meeting.