

# FINGER LAKES

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# ‘Can’t see chickens in the city’

Immediate neighbors still upset with project

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GENEVA — Marie Bruno stood in her 35 Clinton St. driveway on a warm Saturday afternoon and looked past the railroad tracks in her backyard, toward Jeff Henderson’s property.

She was joined by Ellis Bozzolo of 30 State St.

They saw a new workshop and steel framing for four rows of solar panels. They could not see a small chicken coop and about 20 hens in the back of the property.

Nonetheless, neither was happy with Henderson’s use of the property, particularly the chicken coopera-



Spencer Tulis / *Finger Lakes Times*

**Work continued on installing solar panels Friday at the site of the controversial chicken cooperative on State Street in Geneva.**

tive. Neither mentioned the much more visible solar panel structures.

“I can’t say I can hear or smell [the chickens], but who knows about the future. I just don’t like the

idea of farm animals in a residential area,” Bruno said. “It will probably devalue my property.”

She’s lived in her house for 30 years and can’t understand why the indus-

trial zone that existed when first a canning factory, then a paint warehouse, were on-site wasn’t changed.

Bruno’s first thought when told that Henderson

was planning a cooperative: It would be a food cooperative or store.

“I just can’t see chickens in the city,” Bruno said.

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# CHICKENS

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"Why can't he go in the town and do this? He can't do it on his own property on South Main, so he does it here."

She remembers when the State Street site was the location of a three- or four-story brick warehouse for Comstock Foods, which had a canning plant off North Street. When that closed, it was a paint warehouse for a period of time.

Comstock built a conveyor to shuttle canned foods from the plant to the warehouse. There was a loading dock at the warehouse for trains to pick up and deliver the food to markets.

The city acquired it for back taxes and demolished the building, leaving the green space.

"I think they should have rezoned it residential or at least kept it open, maybe a park for kids to play," Bruno said.

"That would be preferable to this," she added, waving a hand in the direction of the Henderson property.

State Street is one of the city's older, established neighborhoods. It connects Exchange and Genesee streets and consists mostly of modest, single-family, owner-occupied homes. It's bisected by railroad tracks.

In the middle of the block, at 48-50 State St., is a grassy, open space.

After the vacant building there was demolished, some children played baseball and other games in the open space. However, the rear of the property also became a magnet for trash and drug paraphernalia.

The zoning, however, remained unchanged.

Enter Henderson, stymied by the city zoning code when he tried to establish an egg cooperative and educational coop on Elizabeth Blackwell Drive several years ago. He was told to look for an industrial zone that allows chickens and found it on State Street, buying the two parcels when they were auctioned off for back taxes.

Henderson established the Geneva Peeps Egg Cooperative. He cleaned up truckloads of junk and submitted plans to the county Planning Board for approval of a chicken cooperative and equipment shed, along with rain collection barrels.

He proposed 20 to 25 egg-laying hens and a bank of solar panels for the front of the property.

The Planning Board voted 8-0 July 21 to approve the site plan and architectural review. Henderson put in the coop, shed, fencing and solar panel structural support steel. He added some 23 hens, and cooperative members signed up for the care of the hens in exchange for a share of the eggs they produce.

A handful of residents, including Bruno and Bozzolo, showed up at the Planning Board meeting to object, saying the project was not appropriate for the neighborhood.

Several other neighbors came to defend it, saying they've joined the cooperative and feel it is an asset to the neighborhood and city.

After the Planning Board approval, several neighbors came to the Aug. 6 City Council meeting to present a petition and ask that the project be stopped.

Bozzolo said several in the neighborhood didn't support the project and feel their concerns should be considered. He said the opposition expressed at the Planning Board and City Council meetings didn't seem to be taken seriously.

"My concern is that we were not really told what was going on, what was planned for the site," Bozzolo said. "Mr. Henderson owned it for a year and knew what he was planning, but only notified us a few days before it went to the Planning Board. He lives elsewhere. Some of us don't believe it enhances our properties."

He said many residents didn't fully understand what might happen to the site, saying farm animals weren't the industrial use they envisioned.

"I realize it is zoned industrial and that allows chickens, but only with proper setback, buffering

and landscaping," Bozzolo said. "That part seems to have been ignored."

"It's not the place for chickens," Bruno insisted, suggesting the parcel across the street from the old Geneva Foundry site would have been more preferable.

"If he complies with the zoning code, we have no basis to object, even though we might not like it," Bozzolo said.

Bozzolo also doesn't object to the theory of a cooperative where all members share the work and the benefits — in this case, fresh eggs.

"But only if it is in an area that is not objectionable," he continued. "Right in the middle of a residential area is an issue."

Randy Cook has lived at 35 State St. since 2000, when the old warehouse was still standing.

"I have no problem with the solar panels," Cook acknowledged. "I think that's a good idea and a good use of that lot."

The chickens are another story, he said. Cook said city officials let the residents down in allowing the cooperative, predicting that in time, the hens will produce odors and attract vermin.

"If he wants a chicken cooperative, live in the country," Cook said. "This a city, and something like that will devalue our properties."

Some Council members joined the opposition and asked city staffers to see if it could be stopped. They seized upon a section of the zoning code regarding setbacks in an industrial zone.

Henderson was asked to apply for a variance. He refused, saying he received the Planning Board approval and already was invested in the project.

City officials said they likely would obtain a stop-work order to serve on Henderson, sending the matter to city court for a decision.

However, as of Sunday, all of the solar panels had been installed, and the major work involved with the project appeared to be complete.