

Joseph Wetmore
Town Board Member Report
May 2026

New York Planning Conference
April 19–21, 2026

Katherine Ember, AICP “Why Design Guidelines Matter”

Katherine Ember emphasized that communities feel more cohesive and enjoyable when they follow clear design standards. She highlighted key elements such as streetscapes, building design, and historic preservation, explaining how these components work together to create a unified visual identity. The concept of “Complete Streets” was also discussed as a strategy to ensure roadways are safe and accessible for all users.

Ember outlined how municipalities can adopt and implement design guidelines through planning and zoning processes, stressing the importance of community involvement throughout.

Key Takeaway:

Design guidelines are practical tools that enhance community appearance, functionality, and overall livability.

David Plante, AICP, CEP “Beyond the Rulebook: Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Planning and Zoning Board Decisions”

This session explored the complexities of decision-making beyond procedural compliance, focusing on situations where legal requirements and ethical responsibilities may not align. A central theme was maintaining impartiality while managing external pressures such as community expectations and potential conflicts of interest.

Through interactive, scenario-based discussions using anonymized case studies from across New York, participants examined common ethical “gray areas,” including conflicts of interest, ex parte communications, the appearance of impropriety, social media interactions with applicants, personal relationships in small communities, and the tension between representing constituents and serving in a quasi-judicial role.

Attendees engaged in “what would you do?” exercises to evaluate how different boards handled challenging situations and the outcomes of those decisions. The session concluded with practical strategies for identifying ethical risks, making defensible decisions, and fostering a culture of integrity.

Key Takeaway:

Ethical awareness, consistency, and sound judgment are essential for effective planning and zoning governance.

Sarah K. Yackel, AICP “Navigating SEQOR”

During this session in the Fennimore Room, Dennis R. Bagamani presented an overview of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), with a focus on its coordinated review model.

The presentation explained that SEQRA requires state and local agencies to evaluate environmental, social, and economic impacts as part of the decision-making process. This approach ensures that development proposals are reviewed comprehensively before approval.

Key topics included the different types of SEQR actions (Type I, Type II, and Unlisted) and how they determine the level of environmental review required. The session also emphasized the value of coordinated review among agencies to streamline processes and improve efficiency.

Key Takeaway:

SEQRA is a structured framework that supports informed decision-making by helping agencies identify and mitigate potential impacts early in project planning.

Max Stach, AICP “When the Answer is ‘No’: How to Defensibly Disapprove Site Plans, Subdivisions, and Other Land Use Applications”

This session focused on how to defensibly deny land use applications within the framework of SEQR and local regulations. The speaker emphasized that denials must be grounded in clearly established site plan and subdivision standards.

Participants were advised on the importance of building a strong administrative record, clearly defining board authority, and adhering to legal and procedural requirements. Best practices included ensuring fairness to applicants, properly timing decisions, avoiding procedural errors, and coordinating disapprovals with SEQR and General Municipal Law (GML) review processes.

Key Takeaway:

Defensible decision-making depends on consistency, transparency, and strict adherence to established procedures and legal standards.

Frank Armento, AICP “SEQRA Meets Environmental Justice: Preparing for DEC’s Proposed Amendments”

This session addressed proposed updates to SEQRA regulations under New York State’s Environmental Justice Siting Law. The changes require agencies to more thoroughly evaluate impacts on disadvantaged communities, including cumulative environmental burdens, and to incorporate these considerations into environmental impact statements.

Agencies were encouraged to begin using draft SEQR forms and guidance tools, as environmental justice criteria will need to be explicitly addressed during project reviews. The updates aim to improve consistency, transparency, and the overall effectiveness of the review process, particularly for housing and development projects.

Key Takeaway:

Agencies should proactively begin using draft SEQR forms and guidance tools to ensure compliance with new requirements that explicitly incorporate environmental justice criteria into project review.

Diana Smith “Public Engagement and Conflict (Part 2): Turning Challenge into Opportunity”

This session focused on managing conflict in public engagement, framing disagreement as a constructive force rather than a problem to avoid. Diana Smith built on prior discussions and introduced strategies to support more productive dialogue in public settings.

The presentation emphasized communication tools that help participants navigate disagreements effectively and use conflict as an opportunity to strengthen relationships and build more cohesive communities, particularly among civic leaders.

Key Takeaway:

Effective public engagement embraces conflict as an opportunity for collaboration and stronger community outcomes.

**Cayuga Solar Strategy Discussion
Wednesday, April 22·12:00 – 1:00pm**

Ruth and I met with Matthew A. Eldred to discuss our thoughts on the Cayuga Solar Host Community Agreement.

**Parks, Recreation, and Trails Working Group
Meeting Date: April 23, 9:00 AM**

The Working Group reviewed progress on the Comprehensive Master Plan with consultant Josiah Simpson. A subgroup has identified key trail routes, priority landowners for outreach, and several “choke points,” including a proposed Gulf Creek crossing via the existing Triphammer Road bridge. MJ will explore safety improvements for this location.

Additional constraints include large private parcels. One landowner (Sun Down Farm) has declined trail access, though alternative routes are available. The plan will include a general greenway map and key destinations. The WG requested a broader list of tax parcels along proposed routes, not just adjacent properties.

Members also discussed integrating trail access considerations into the Town’s ongoing zoning code revision.

Survey Update:

Preliminary results show about 75% of respondents support or strongly support town trails, while roughly 20% oppose them. Main concerns include cost, competing priorities, and property rights. Full results will be shared with the Working Group.

Planning Board
Monday, April 27·6:30 – 8:30pm

* Minor subdivision at 8–18 Verizon Lane and 6 Verizon Lane in the IR zoning district. The proposal would divide an existing 13.21-acre parent parcel into two parcels: Parcel 30.-1-16.32 (9.15 acres) and Parcel 30.-1-16.31 (4.06 acres). Although the parcels are already separated by a lease line, they have not been formally subdivided before. Topics included the subdivision layout, fire turnaround access, and outstanding required materials. The project was tabled to return to the Planning Board in May pending submission of the remaining materials.

* Special Use Permit request for 8–18 Verizon Lane (TPN 30.-1-16.32) in the IR zoning district. The proposal would allow a volleyball court inside an existing building to operate as an indoor recreation facility. The project was classified as a Type II SEQR action, meaning no further environmental review was required. The board discussed the building’s prior use as a trade show space, its conversion to volleyball use, and the possibility of adding pickleball in the future. The facility would mainly serve players and coaches for practices and training sessions, with up to 12 participants at a time. Lighting, parking, and restroom facilities were also reviewed. The Planning Board recommended approval of the special use permit to the Town Board, with the condition that indoor recreation activities not exceed the site’s existing parking capacity.

* Minor subdivision at 40 Newman Road (TPN 7.-1-23.2) of an existing 82.03-acre parcel in the AG zoning district. The proposal would create Parcel 1 (2.71 acres) and Parcel 2 (2.49 acres), along with four lot line adjustments affecting an additional 2.379 acres of the property. The project was classified as an Unlisted/Uncoordinated SEQR action, requiring a SEAF Part 2 review, and was considered for a public hearing and SEQR review. The board approved the subdivision requests without conditions.

* Minor subdivision project at 204 Wilson Road involving the division of an existing 6.146-acre property into two parcels: Parcel A consisting of 1.229 acres and Parcel B consisting of 4.917 acres. The property, identified as Tax Parcel No. 27.-1-36.24, is located within the RA Zoning District. Under SEQR, the project is classified as an Unlisted/Uncoordinated Action and requires completion of SEAF Part 2. Anticipated actions for the project include a sketch review, public hearing, and SEQR review. Board set a public hearing for May 18, 2026.

* Site Plan Review – Scott Kobylarz, TeraWulf Representative, 228 Cayuga Drive TPN 11.-1-3.212 and TPN 11.-1-3.211

Project Description: Site Plan Review of proposed data center. Phase 1 includes the creation of three 50 MW buildings and expanding infrastructure on a 433-acre vacant and former industrial site. This project is located in the IR zoning district.

Scott Kobylarz, Site Lead – Adam Millspaugh, Cayuga Data Construction Manager and John Marabella, Sr Construction Manager at Summer were present to discuss this project and gave a brief presentation. A copy of the presentation is available in the Public Documents section of the Town website.

Aimee Caffrey recused herself.

- Discussion focused on how to move forward with the project application. The Board determined that a complete application has not yet been submitted and stated that a complete application is required before the review process can proceed.
- Public hearings will be conducted as part of the Site Plan Review once a complete application is received.
- The Planning Board was asked to provide comments by Friday, May 1, 2026.

Meet with Mikey, Lunt
Friday, May 1·12:00 – 1:00pm

With the weather getting warm again we met to decide on the exact location of the Benjamin Joy historic marker. Mikey's crew will be installing it soon.

BENJAMIN JOY
1800-1869. LED NYS MOVEMENTS
FOR ABOLITION & TEMPERANCE.
KEPT STATION ON UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD IN LUDLOWVILLE.
LIVED ON THIS PROPERTY.

Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council, Inc.
Tuesday, May 19·10:00 – 11:30am

- * Director's Summary
- *Treasurer's Audit and Finance Report
- * Lake Level Report
- * Cayuga County Parks and Trails Conservation Projects Update
- * NYSDEC Finger Lakes Watershed Program
- * Owasco Watershed Lake Association Update
- * Watershed Inspection Monthly Report