

The Special Meeting of the Homer Town Board was held at the Pat Hill Community Building located in the Village of Homer, on Tuesday July 29, 2025, with Supervisor Park presiding.

Members Present:

Supervisor, Michael R. Park,
Deputy Supervisor, Barry E. Warren
Councilmember, Sarah E. Head
Councilmember, Caleb J. Leach
Councilmember, Kevin M. Williams

Others Present: Town Clerk, Heather M. Hill; Deputy Town Clerk, Brooke L. Poli; Attorney to the Town, Dan Ellis; Village Mayor, Patrick Clune; Town Historian, Martin Sweeney; Attendees: Nancy Avery Dafoe, Caoimhe Dudgeon, Miles Dudgeon, Karen Dudgeon, Bob Russell, Anita Jebbett, JoAnn Dukelow, Ward Dukelow, Sydney Lee, Terence Cahill, Susan Cahill, April Bainbridge, Chris Rockwell Norton, Sylvia Hammond, Cathy Lawrence, Gary Lawrence, Larry Jones, Linda Jones, Dan Gustafson, Emmanuel Pothos, Carmine Constantino, Stephanie & Charlie Spina, Daniel Hoffmann, Mark Foote, Victor Siegle, Ann Siegle, Reed Cleland, Alia Chowdhuny, Dan Weddle, William Lane, Tricia Dituluo, Robert & Lori Maurinuu, Kelly Preston, Michael Brady, Michael Brady, Mike Spinek, Dave Solini, Boyd & Deb Chapman, Renee Neiderman, Nick Neiderman, Erin Mahunik, Rolcend Lascari, Karen O’Niell Covell, Andy Covell, Kelley Brown, Carlton Dawson, Andrea Dawson, Tim Malchak, Virginia Shank, Michael Opsteegh, Caroline Head, Patricia Pollak, Lori Crompton, Maira Arnold, Robert Barredo, Liz Arnold, Ashley Neiderman Bonanno, Jeff Ehrlich, Kimberly Allen, Michael Broughton, Dan Dafoe, Barb Stepien, Paul Stepien, Michael Pollak, Melissa Dugan, Maria Barredo, Les Wainman, Cindy Stoker, Susan Kerr, Lily Byrne, Steve Greenfield, Maria Greenfield, David Griffin, Katie Kerr, David Lee, Kathleen, Elizabeth Hubbard, Amy Kida, Oliver Kida, Aaron Kida, Gideon Kida, Cheryl Barredo, Lois Haas, Kate Donlan, Linda Underwood, Theresa Rossiter-Kelly, Amy Rice, Charlotte Taylor, Rob Brong, Karne Lang, Helen Haldane, Chris Holl, Laurie Snyder, Virginia Dudgeon, Monica & Paul Norris, and Ralph Dudgeon.

Supervisor Park called the special meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and opened with the pledge of allegiance.

Supervisor Park stated the meeting’s purpose was an informational meeting for the town board and the process regarding off premise signs. There would be a limited time for public comments to one minute per person. Letters were received and filed concerning off-premises signs in the town clerk’s office and would not be read at the meeting. Supervisor Park indicated that the board would be discussing information related to billboard research and legal frameworks, local precedents and zoning, billboard impact concerns, billboard law details, economic and community impact, advertising content and regulation, public comments on billboards, and developer perspectives. He then indicated that to board would vote to continue the process or stop it.

Attorney Ellis reviewed the legal steps that would need to take place and there would be no formal decision or final law decided at tonight’s special meeting. If the town board decides to move forward with the process of off premise signs, there will still need to be a SEQR parts one, two, and three completed, a coordinated review with involved agencies, and a required GML review by the county planning board. A public hearing will be held after these steps, giving the public another chance to speak.

Supervisor Park read a threatening letter he received demanding his resignation by July 25, 2025, due to the billboard controversy. The letter threatened harm to his family and business if support for billboards continued. Supervisor Park condemned the threat and affirmed his commitment to the community.

Councilmember Williams started his presentation and findings to the town board and reviewed the following:

-The Highway Beautification Act, New York State Part 150 (DOTL), and the Homer Comprehensive Plan (adopted October 2, 2013). The comprehensive plan allows for commercial

and light industrial development in designated business and industrial districts, especially near the village of Homer and East Homer.

- He reviewed community members submitted letters raising concerns about billboard brightness, height, location, and economic impact. Specific feedback included worries about electronic billboards being '10 times brighter,' up to '50 foot tall,' and being the 'tallest and brightest thing for miles.' Research included guidelines from International Dark Skies and site visits.
- Potential billboard sites are around the ponds vacated by former mining operations on U.S. Route 11, within business and industrial districts close to existing infrastructure.
- Discussion of collecting metadata, letters, Facebook information, and mapping addresses to identify key areas of concern, particularly Little York. Approximately 165 properties were analyzed.
- Reviewed traffic studies that were conducted, focusing on the busy exit along 81, with 11,548 cars per day on Route 90. Accident data was sought for Route 90 and 281.
- Surveys from the Chamber of Commerce and Home and Business Association indicated local interest in advertising if affordable. No formal endorsements were requested.
- A joint meeting with the Town of Homer's planning board and town board was held to gather public input, with notes taken on all comments. Lighting was highlighted as a significant concern.
- Review of past legal cases, including the Little York Lake Improvement Society lawsuit and spot zoning issues, to avoid repeating mistakes. Discussion of zoning for solar panels, adult clubs, and chickens.
- Discussion of solar panel zoning, referencing the October 13, 2023, case where a total ban was overturned. Emphasis on the need for balanced regulation.
- Extensive research into lighting standards, including brightness levels, nighttime dimming to 3%, and adherence to New York's Part 150 and Dark Sky guidelines. Consideration of visual impact, safety, and technology for adaptive lighting.
- Review of case studies and consultation with external experts and organizations (e.g., National Institute of Health, International Dark Sky Association) to inform local policy.
- A light study was conducted for a potential site, showing a 400- to 600-foot area of light impact, with minimal spillover.
- Continued engagement with legal precedents, community feedback, and other municipalities (e.g., Orleans County) to inform decision-making.
- Discussion of lighting intensity on Mountain View Drive, comparison to billboards, and height restrictions for signs in business and industrial zones. Maximum allowed height is 40 feet, with most signs expected to be around 35 feet due to flat terrain.
- Review of zoning maps, the Highway Beautification Act, and the Town of Homer Comprehensive Plan. Emphasis on compliance with New York State Part 150 and local zoning from as early as 1959.
- Detailed explanation of placement rules: billboards must be no more than 200 feet from the highway right-of-way, not within 500 feet of interchanges, intersections, rest stops, information centers, or habitable residential structures. Special village gateway restrictions on Route 11 were discussed.
- Limits on the number of off-premise signs: no more than two in business districts (blue areas), no more than three in industrial districts (purple areas).
- Business district billboards must be at least 4,000 feet apart; light industrial district billboards at least 1,000 feet apart. Digital billboards must be 3,500 feet apart on the same side of the highway, per NYS DOT Part 150.
- 500-foot exclusion zones around sensitive areas, a 1,200-foot courtesy buffer to the neighboring town of Preble, and 200-foot right-of-way zones are established.
- Billboard illumination is capped at 280 candelas at night and 5,000 candelas during the day, with timing standards taken from NYS DOT.
- Discussion of billboard advertising's role in supporting local businesses, referencing studies showing 90% of rural billboards advertise local businesses. Cost per impression is about 74 cents. Outdoor advertising is up 7% globally as of 2018.
- Examples of local businesses and organizations using billboards, including Cayuga Medical, Guthrie, Empire Tractor, Kinney's Drugs, Guthrie, and others. Emphasis on local advertising.
- Cortland County brings in about \$39 million in sales tax; Town of Homer receives \$1.2 million annually, accounting for 60-70% of its budget. Increasing sales tax is seen as a way to reduce reliance on property taxes.

- A study cited indicates homes more than 500 feet from a billboard but within a community with billboards may see a decrease of nearly \$1,000 per billboard. Current property equalization rate is 63%, with revaluation expected in the next two years.
- Interstate 81 sees about 31,500 cars per day, with significant activity at key intersections and gas stations serving travelers.
- Discussion of Route 90 and Route 281 traffic (11,548 cars/day), potential for economic growth, and upcoming projects including a 56-room hotel.
- Summary of six months of meetings and online surveys regarding downtown Homer business types and priorities. Restaurants, breweries, and retail/shopping received 58%, 57%, and 51% support respectively.
- Highest priorities identified: supporting/growing businesses (74%), rebuilding historic buildings, attracting tourists, and creating public gathering/green spaces.
- Outreach to Chamber of Commerce, survey release, and note that most businesses seeking foot traffic support advertising, though some do not.
- Discussion on regulation of objectionable and cannabis advertising. Cannabis is legal in NY; Homer has its first dispensary contributing to sales tax.

Supervisor Park invited the public to speak for one minute each, with instructions to state name and residency. Non-residents' input discouraged.

Public Comment: Billboards

Multiple speakers, including business owners and residents, voiced strong opposition to the installation of billboards in Homer, citing concerns about aesthetics, community character, and the ineffectiveness of billboards for local business promotion.

- Residents Nancy Dafoe, Miles Dudgeon, and Terrence (surname not given) express concerns about billboard placement, light pollution, driver distraction and use of outdated studies.
- Ashley, a village planning board member and business owner, emphasized the duty of the board to represent the community, referencing 912 signatures against billboards and the need to listen to residents.
- Maria Barado challenged claims that many support billboards, noting no evidence or data has been provided, and raised concerns about transparency.
- Martin Sweeney, Town Historian, advocated focusing on heritage tourism and preserving historic ambiance instead of installing billboards.
- Michael Broughton and others called for a mailed survey to gauge business owner interest and requested clear information on billboard advertising costs, noting that after a year of research, costs remain unknown.
- A speaker highlighted the collection of over 800 online and live signatures opposing billboards, warning that ignoring this will damage board credibility.
- Concerns raised about the town website and delays in posting documents.
- Supervisor Park clarified that his property is not included in the billboard zoning and stated his supervisor compensation is \$8,000 annually for 20 hours/week.

The town supervisor also noted that the board expects to be sued regardless of the decision, referring to a letter from a lawyer and the inevitability of legal action.

Councilmember Head shared her opposition and compared Route 81 billboards (six electronic billboards between Canada and Pennsylvania, all in commercial districts) to proposed local billboards, arguing that local businesses are unlikely to afford or benefit from such advertising.

Councilmember Head also discussed current billboard advertising costs in the US (\$1,000–\$25,000/month, average \$4,000), lack of interest and affordability among local businesses, and questioning the benefit to the community. She reviewed New York State's 2024 Municipal Code of Signs, emphasizing guidelines for on-site and off-site billboard regulations and referencing the City of Austin vs. advertising company (2022) federal case supporting local authority.

Councilmember Head emphasized the need for consistent application of billboard laws to avoid favoritism among landowners and maintain community aesthetics. She stated the town board needed to seek genuine community input through the ongoing updates of the town's comprehensive plan. Councilmember Head discussed the grant that the town applied for that could fund independent consultants for a direct community survey regarding billboard opinions, as an alternative to mail-in voting. She stated she was strongly against electronic billboards in the Town of Homer.

Councilmember Williams made a motion, seconded by Councilmember Leach, **to accept the July 9th working draft as final and submit it for county planning review, with supervisor and town attorney to begin the SEQR process.** Aye Votes: Councilmember Williams, Councilmember Leach; Nay Votes: Councilmember Head, Deputy Supervisor Warren, and Supervisor Park. **RESOLVED: The motion failed.**

Supervisor Park explained his opposition was based on the ongoing comprehensive plan update and the need for a more strategic approach and work on the Comprehensive Plan.

Supervisor Park adjourned the meeting at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Brooke L. Poli