

## Switzkill Farm Board Meeting

Town of Berne  
PO Box 57  
Berne, NY 12023

**Date:** September 6, 2016

Board members present: Ted Kunker, Lee Jones, Diane Kingston, Charles Burgess, Richard Ronconi, members of the Helderberg Earth and Sky Observatory (HESO) committee and other interested citizens.

Ted Kunker called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**HESO Presentation:** Charles Burgess introduced members of the Helderberg Earth and Sky Observatory committee and made opening remarks regarding the committee's background and mission. Reasons why Switzkill Farm as being ideal for an observatory were noted. Ron Barnell read aloud HESO's mission statement and discussed associated short and long term goals.

Mr. Relles stated that the location and elevation of Switzkill Farm allows it to be classified as "dark sky" and would draw people to the area. He said that the observatory could generate revenue for the Town and local businesses and would create local jobs. Nighttime stargazing would be a main activity. Existing buildings could be renovated for lodging purposes. Speakers and educational presentations would be offered. Astronomy bed and breakfasts and summer camps for students are possible, he said. Funding for the observatory would begin after HESO secures a location, establishes a 501-C3 and incorporation from the NYS Education Dept. A possible 5-year timeline for securing funds with monetary milestones was discussed.

David Barnard spoke regarding possible educational programs and events at the observatory including astronomy/cosmology, weather studies and earth sciences. Displays would aid in visitor learning.

Thomas Burgess introduced and explained the architectural sketches for the observatory buildings. Estimated cost of the main observatory building would be approximately \$1 million with \$750k for structure, utilities and ground improvements and \$200+ for exhibits and equipment.

Charles Burgess suggested that the Town and HESO possibly establish a memorandum-of-understanding where funding for the observatory would be raised and a long-term lease for the land agreed upon.

Letters of support were received from the Berne-Knox-Westerlo Central School, Forever Rural, The Open Space Institute, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, SUNY Albany and the Town of Berne.

A general discussion about funding sources, programs and land use followed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Hill Brown  
GFR Board Secretary