

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon, New York

## ***2015 Annual Report***

*Members:* Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Jack Lancto, Craig Westcott (one vacancy)

*Monthly meetings* (6:30 – 8:00 P.M. at Darrow School): Mar 9, May 18, Jun 29, Jul 20, Aug 10, Sep 14, Oct 12, Nov 16, Dec 14 (meeting minutes are posted on the town web site)

### *Overview of the year's activities*

The CAC agreed late in 2014 to focus on a Natural Resources Conservation Plan (NRCP) as our next project and to invite guidance from Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia, Ltd., and the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program. Gretchen had been instrumental in producing a plan for Ancram, working closely with the Ancram CAC, and Claudia and Conrad Vispo of the Farmscape Ecology Program have accumulated much New Lebanon data through their site work over the years, including an exhaustive natural resources inventory of the Shaker Swamp.

An NRCP would delve into the natural resources of the town in much more depth than did the Open Space Inventory prepared by the CAC in 2014 and would provide more targeted guidance to the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals for their decision making. After discussion with Gretchen Stevens and the Vispos, we decided to concentrate foremost on water resources, especially intermittent woodland pools that have never been mapped in New Lebanon, and on ancient forest patches. In producing a first-ever NRCP for the town, the CAC would provide new, updated maps for use by town officials and decision makers. The last detailed evaluation of the Wyomanock and Kinderhook floodplain dates back to 1984, for example, and acreage under conservation easement continues to increase in town nearly every year.

To introduce the public to our plans and invite their participation, we scheduled a community forum for Monday evening, January 26, from 6:00 to 7:30 P.M. at Town Hall. Due to inclement weather, the event had to be rescheduled for Monday evening, April 20. At the forum, we screened the 25-minute "Liquidity" DVD provided by the Hudson River Estuary Program, about the importance of conserving water resources, and then discussed our plans for the NRCP. Attendance was 18, our largest turnout to date, and a number of attendees volunteered to assist us while others agreed to open their land for verification visits. The question period became a lively give and take with an engaged audience.

Following the forum, David Farren vetted the town assessment rolls and compiled a list of landowners with tracts of 35 acres or greater, 123 landowners in all. From this list, he created a ranked list of the 30 largest tracts in town, ranging from 518 acres to 144.5 acres.

On May 22, the Hudson River Estuary Program reissued a request for proposals for local stewardship grants that included a category for Natural Resource Inventories. Total funding for seven categories was announced as \$600K with the application deadline set at 2:00 P.M. on June 15. David Farren completed the application online through the New York State Grants Gateway, meeting the deadline, and on November 18 the Hudson River Estuary Program announced that the New Lebanon CAC had been

awarded a grant for the period November 1, 2015, through October 31, 2017, for the requested amount of \$21,520. The application could not have been completed without timely help from Colleen Teal, the town's Grants Gateway administrator, and suggestions from Christine Vanderlan, the Columbia Land Conservancy's community projects manager. A detailed NRCP proposal submitted in advance by Gretchen Stevens proved invaluable in completing the application. The grant will allow the Town of New Lebanon to hire Hudsonia and the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program as consultants for the duration of the NRCP project, which we expect to complete before October 31, 2017. Funds are expected to begin being disbursed in January 2016.

#### Wyomanock Creek designation

Thanks to the efforts of Cynthia Creech and a CAC resolution passed in June (a first for the CAC), the Town Board passed a resolution at the September meeting, following discussion that began in June, proposing that the Wyomanock Creek be added to the list of "designated inland waterways" in New York State. State Senator Kathy Marchione is to introduce a resolution in the State Senate and Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin in the State Assembly to that effect. Without the designation, organizations such as the Shaker Swamp Conservancy and Corkscrew Rail Trail Association would be ineligible for waterway revitalization grants issued through the state's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). Note that the 2016 state budget increases EPF funding to \$300 million from \$177 million in 2015.

#### Climate Smart Community

Bruce Shenker, the town's representative on Columbia County's Environmental Management Council, attended several of our monthly meetings. He suggested that the CAC encourage the Town Board to pass a resolution supporting the science behind climate change. Rather than act on that request, the CAC will decide when and how to approach the Town Board to consider the Town of New Lebanon becoming a Climate Smart Community. Again, with that designation, many more grant opportunities would open up.

#### Budget Line Item

Cynthia Creech attended the budget workshops held during the last fiscal quarter and succeeded at securing a \$2,500 line item in the 2016 budget expressly for the CAC. At its December meeting, the Town Board approved the budget with the line item, a first for the CAC.

#### Recruitment

Beginning in October, CAC members reached out to other townspeople who we believe may be interested in joining the CAC. Our monthly meetings are open to the public and we hope to enlarge our membership.

#### Training

##### **Cynthia Creech:**

In late 2014, Cynthia attended "Woodlands, Wetlands and Water: What Local Decision-makers Need to Know" in Claverack, offered by the CLC, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Hudson River Estuary Program. She received a copy of the "Liquidity" DVD, which had been screened. She also inquired of landowners she knew whether they would be willing to open their large tracts for verification visits and secured several important assents.

Cynthia also serves on the Recreation Commission and the Zoning Rewrite Committee for the Town of New Lebanon and as clerk to the Town Assessor has been helpful in interpreting data on the tax rolls.

**David Farren:**

Jan 19: CLC program on Animal Tracking, Hand Hollow Conservation Area, 10 A.M. - Noon

Mar 16: CAC Roundtable, Joslen Blvd., Hudson, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

Apr 1: CLC-convened Rail Trails Roundtable, Chatham, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

Apr 10: CAC Conference Call to confirm roles at public meeting, 5:30 – 6:00 P.M.

Apr 20: CAC Public Forum at Town Hall, 6:00 – 7:30 P.M. (postponed from Jan 26 due to weather)

May 14: Columbia County Rail Trails Task Force, Chatham, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

May 22: Cornell Coop Ext. Serv. Forestry Div., Emerald Ash Borer program, Acra, NY, 2:30 – 4:30 P.M.

Jun 8: Full-day NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation information day for CACs and EMCs, Albany

Jun 11: CAC Roundtable, Chatham, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

Jul 5: Farmscape Ecology Program walk, Lewis Swyer Preserve, Stuyvesant, 9:00 A.M. – Noon

Jul 15: Columbia County Rail Trails Task Force, Chatham, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

Jul 16: Farmscape Ecology Program lecture, Greenport Historical Society, 7:00 – 8:30 P.M.

Jul 28: Noise Ordinance Hearing, New Lebanon Town Hall, 7:00 – 9:00 P.M.

Aug 8: Farmscape Ecology Program walk, Steepletop, Austerlitz, 9:00 A.M. – Noon

Sep 10-12: Short Course on Habitat and Water Resources Assessment, Hudsonia & Hudson River Estuary Program, NYSDEC Regional Office, New Paltz, 8:45 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. each day (daily commute)

Sep 26: Farmscape Ecology Program “Walk & Talk” in New Lebanon, 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Oct 3: Biodiversity and Habitat Assessment Workshop, Nature Institute, Harlemville, Farmscape Ecology Program/Hudsonia/Hudson River Estuary Program, 8:45 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Oct 17: Woodlot Owners Workshop, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance/NYSDEC, Poestenkill with site visits to RPA’s Community Forest (E. Poestenkill) and NYS Wildlife Management Area (Berlin/Stephentown border), 8:30 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Nov 15: Farmscape Ecology Program walk, “No Bottom” Pond, Austerlitz, 9:00 A.M. – Noon

David serves as Treasurer of the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association with monthly meetings on the third Thursday and occasional work days throughout the year. He also volunteered at several work days at the Shaker Museum|Mount Lebanon. At its December meeting, the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance board approved David as a Director and he will attend monthly board meetings on the third Monday as well as numerous training opportunities and volunteer obligations scheduled by the RPA throughout the year.

**Jack Lancto:**

Jack inquired of landowners he knew whether they would be willing to open their large tracts for verification visits and secured several important assents.

**Craig Westcott:**

Craig served on a committee in the Town of Otis in the Berkshires that wrote a first-ever Comprehensive Plan for the town. He also arranged for the Hands to Work program at Darrow School to collaborate with the CAC’s NRCP project.

*Respectfully submitted by David Farren, January 14, 2016*