

***Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), Town of New Lebanon, Columbia County, New York***

**2018 Annual Report**

Members: Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Jack Lancto, Peg Munves, Craig Westcott

Monthly CAC meetings (6:30 – 8:00 P.M. at Samson Environmental Center, Darrow School, or New Lebanon Town Hall): Jan 8 (DS), Mar 12 (DS), Apr 9 (DS – convened at Jimmy D’s), May 7 (DS), Jun 11 (DS), Jul 16 (TH), Aug 13 (TH), Sep 10 (TH), Oct 8 (TH), Nov 12 (TH), Dec 10 (TH) (*minutes posted on town website*)

*Overview of activities*

The CAC focused on presenting a particular area from the *Natural Resource Conservation Plan* (NRCP) at each Town Board meeting, to keep the NRCP in the public eye and to underscore its usefulness in land use decisions.

*Natural Resource Conservation Plan (NRCP)*

During the two-year project, we estimate that we visited roughly 22% of the acreage in town – 4,603 of 20,995 acres – and are grateful to landowners for their permission. In all, we visited 22 properties and devoted more than 725 volunteer hours to the project.

We regard the NRCP as an exemplary document that will serve New Lebanon well in the coming years. We thank Gretchen Stevens, Conrad Vispo and Claudia Knab-Vispo heartily for their work on behalf of the town. We are also grateful to the Hudson River Estuary Program and New York State’s Environmental Conservation Fund for their faith in awarding the grant that made the NRCP possible. The grant stipulated that we match in volunteer hours 25% of the \$21,520 awarded. We blew past that commitment several quarters before the grant period ended on October 31, 2017. To help cover printing costs for additional copies, the Hudson River Estuary Program approved allotting an unexpended balance in the grant.

*Outreach*

David Farren and his wife, Barbara DeBuono, hosted a cookout at their home on the Fall Equinox, September 22, to celebrate the NRCP. Cynthia Creech and Peg Munves helped with the arrangements. Conrad and Claudia Vispo guided a half dozen early arrivals on a nature tour of the property (23 acres with a pond, stream, ravine, meadows and extensive woods) before 25 guests gathered for the cookout. Some who had hoped to attend couldn’t. Gretchen Stevens and her husband attended, as did all CAC members, several Planning Board and ZBA

members with their spouses, and several landowners who had given permission for site verification visits. One landowner sent a thank you saying it was the best party she had ever attended in New Lebanon. Well after dark, we acknowledged our debt to Gretchen and the Vispos. Coyotes on the nearby hillside chose that moment to echo our thanks.

#### CAC Responses to Proposals before the Planning Board

The Land Use Office continues to request that the CAC respond to proposals before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. We discussed and responded to Stewart's Shops proposal for an expanded store on property abutting its current location on the Routes 20/22 business corridor and also attended Planning Board meetings to voice our views. We were concerned about compromising the unconsolidated aquifer that lies right behind the proposed expansion parcel.

#### Prospective work

The CAC anticipates new members in 2019 and plans to complete action items identified in the NRCP. Foremost among these are updating the Scenic Resources Inventory together with an updated map, which could be converted into an interactive link on the town website. Among other remaining tasks are identifying Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) in town, especially in the floodplain and watershed, and to propose that the Town Board ratify them. We will continue to work with the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals to underscore conservation priorities for the town. We will also continue to address development proposals and submit our responses in timely fashion to the various boards. David Farren joined the Zoning Rewrite Committee as the second CAC member, and late in the year Cynthia Creech rejoined to replace Peg Munves, who resigned.

#### Recordkeeping

David Farren worked with Town Clerk Tistrya Houghtling to keep careful records of all activities related to the NRCP grant. The last quarterly Progress Report and Financial Report were submitted in December 2017 and by the end of January the Hudson River Estuary Program had reimbursed the town in full.

#### Budget Line Item

Cynthia Creech attended the budget workshops held during the last fiscal quarter and secured the CAC's line item of \$1,200 in the town's 2019 budget. This amount will cover \$40/month for the unlimited data plan for the Verizon Ellipsis tablet that the town purchased for the CAC in December 2016. We use the Ellipsis during site visits to help evaluate proposals submitted to the Planning Board.

#### Activities and Training

**Cynthia Creech**

Cynthia owns and operates Artemis Farms on Cemetery Road, raising Randall cattle, a breed she rescued in the 1980s in Vermont when fewer than 10 remained. She served as Deputy Town Supervisor and member of the Recreation Commission and Zoning Rewrite Committee. She also serves as Court Clerk. In addition, Cynthia reported faithfully on CAC developments at monthly meetings of the Town Board and attended budget workshops during the last fiscal quarter.

### **David Farren**

In addition to the CAC meetings, David's schedule throughout the year included the following CAC-related activities. Most of them afforded training.

- May 3, Sep 6, Dec 6: Farmscape Ecology Program First Thursdays, 6:00 – 8:00 P.M., Creek House, Ghent, hosted by Conrad Vispo and Claudia Knab-Vispo
- Jan 29, Nov 8: CAC Roundtables convened by Columbia Land Conservancy, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Methodist Church, Joslen Blvd., Hudson
- Feb 3: Winter nature walk with Claudia Knab-Vispo and Conrad Vispo, 10:00 A.M. – Noon, Flying Deer Nature Center, East Chatham
- Feb 17: Winter nature walk with Claudia Knab-Vispo and Conrad Vispo, 10:45 A.M. – 12:30 P.M., Shaker Swamp (hosted by Shaker Swamp Conservancy)
- Mar 8: Hosted RPA lecture on maple sugaring, 6:30 – 8:15 P.M., Sand Lake Town Hall
- Mar 14 & 21: Planned Zoning Rewrite Committee assignment w/Peg Munves, Jimmy D's
- Mar 15: Presentation by Bob Freeman on NYS Open Meetings law, 6:30 – 7:30 P.M., Town Hall
- Apr 1: Beta test of Water & The Word, an historical tour of New Lebanon, 10:00 A.M. – 1:30 P.M. (both driving and listening) (followed up with extensive written feedback)
- Jul 2: Presentation of final Water & The Word, 9:30 – 10:50 A.M., Town Hall
- Jul 14: Nature walk with Claudia Knab-Vispo, 10 A.M. – Noon, Rheinstrom Hill Audubon Sanctuary, Hillsdale
- Aug 4: Talk by Conrad Vispo and Anna Duhon of Farmscape Ecology Program at Canaan Historical Society, 2:00 – 3:30 P.M.
- Aug 8: Lunch with Karen Ross, Blueberry Hill Café, Noon – 1:30 P.M.
- Sep 16: Guided walk through Farren property at 190 Kelly Road with the Vispos
- Sep 22: CAC NRCP Celebration with 25 guests, including nature walk with the Vispos, 190 Kelly Road, 3:30 – 10:00 P.M.
- Sep 27: Columbia County Rails Task Force, Hudson, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.
- Oct 9 – 14: Land Trust Alliance Rally, Pittsburgh, PA
- Oct 25: Breakfast with Tom Gerety, Bucky's, 8:30 – 10 A.M.
- Oct 31: Meeting with Lee Alexander, CLC, about land donation to the Corkscrew Rail Trail, 3:00 – 4:00 P.M., Chatham
- Dec 12: 45-minute phone call with Nan Stolzenburg, consultant, about Comprehensive Plan revision (following earlier call with Jack Yurish)
- Dec 17: Planning meeting for Comprehensive Plan revision, Town Hall, 1:00 – 2:00 P.M.

New Lebanon Town Board Meetings (7:00 P.M. start, Town Hall): Jan 9, Feb 13, Mar 13, Apr 10, Aug 14, Sep 11, Nov 13, Dec 11 plus Quad Board meeting on Jan 30

New Lebanon Planning Board Meetings (7:30 P.M. start, Town Hall): May 16, Jul 18, Aug 15

New Lebanon Zoning Rewrite Committee Meetings (6:30 P.M. start, Town Hall): Feb 27, May 22, Aug 28, Sep 25

In addition to his town responsibilities, David serves as Treasurer of the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association and attends monthly meetings that rotate between New Lebanon and Stephentown. He participates in occasional trail work days and serves on the Columbia County Trails Task Force. Also, he serves as a Director of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA), attending monthly board meetings in Petersburg and serving on three RPA committees: Development (meets monthly in Averill Park), Trail Vision (meets 2-3 times per year), and Rensselaer Youth Outdoors (RYO, meets periodically including strategic planning sessions). In addition, he hosts one RPA lecture each year at Sand Lake Town Hall. David estimates that he travelled more than 2,600 miles during the year for his volunteer activities.

**Peg Munves**

Peg owns and operates a dog training business, Step in Time Training, and serves on the board of Women Build, sponsored by Habitat for Humanity. Peg attended nearly all of the Town Board's monthly meetings and all of the CAC's monthly meetings. For most of 2018, Peg served on the Zoning Rewrite Committee. In addition, she assisted Craig Westcott in formatting a presentation for the Conservation Forum hosted by Grow the Valley at Town Hall on January 12, 2019.

**Craig Westcott**

Craig served as Assistant Headmaster for External Affairs and Sustainability at Darrow School until he resigned at the end of the 2017-18 academic year after 18 years at Darrow. He purchased a home in Canaan and in August joined the Columbia Land Conservancy as Director of Philanthropy.

*Respectfully submitted by David L. Farren, February 11, 2019*