

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

**2019 Annual Report**

Members: Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Bob Gilson, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix

Monthly CAC meetings (6:30 – 8:00 P.M., second Mondays, New Lebanon Town Hall): Jan 7, Feb 11, Mar 11, Apr 8, May 13, Jun 10, Jul 8, Aug 12, Sep 9, Oct 7, Nov 11, Dec 9 (*minutes posted on town website*)

*Overview of activities*

The CAC welcomed three new members at the start of the year and lost two, Jack Lancto and Craig Westcott, who had moved out of town. The new members are Bob Gilson, Steve Powers and Paul Rix. We began the year by co-sponsoring a Conservation Forum with Grow the Valley, held at Town Hall on Saturday morning, January 12. Peg Munves helped Craig Westcott, our retiring member, construct a PowerPoint presentation called “It’s All About the Shed, Man,” which Craig presented to a good-sized, appreciative audience. Cynthia Creech also presented and put the kibosh to the notion that the town loses tax revenues due to conservation easements.

During the year, we focused on four main goals: updating the Scenic Resources inventory in the *Natural Resource Conservation Plan* (NRCP) and converting it to an interactive web link on the town’s website; identifying Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) in town with a view towards proposing a prioritized list to the Town Board for their ratification; sponsoring a youth-oriented nature presentation to the Summer Recreation Program in Shatford Park; and continuing to respond to proposals before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. In addition, we coordinated with Steven Winkley of the New York Rural Water Association in his Source Water Study for the Town of New Lebanon. We devoted nearly the full monthly meeting on December 9 to Steven and his study.

David Farren and Steve Powers traveled throughout the town on April 23 to scenic viewpoints that had been identified just before the NRCP was published in October 2017 and were therefore not included in that publication’s Scenic Resources inventory and map. Steve took many photos with a view towards including them in the anticipated interactive web link. We also identified scenic roads. Regarding CEAs, we agreed that cool ravines, aquifers, steep slopes, hedge rows in hayfields, wetlands, the Knob and Shaker Swamp should all be considered. We also agreed that once the town elects a new Town Board, we should order them by priority and propose that specific CEAs be ratified.

New CAC members attended training sessions in Albany offered by the Hudson River Estuary Program (HREP) and many members attended two Columbia County CAC Roundtables. Bob Gilson represented the CAC at Planning Board meetings and CAC members attended Town Board meetings regularly, offering updates on CAC activities. On November 9, David Farren attended a full-day workshop in Castleton on Hudson, Inventories to Action, sponsored by Hudsonia and HREP. To a full room, Gretchen Stevens used New Lebanon visuals to underscore many of her examples and numbers of attendees praised the NRCP that Gretchen had helped us produce. Afterwards, David shared take-aways and the workshop materials he had gathered with the CAC team.

#### Natural Resource Conservation Plan (NRCP)

Printed copies of the NRCP sold out and the Town Clerk ordered a reprint. The town's photocopier contract includes printing services at a much more reasonable per copy cost. The NRCP continues to earn accolades within the conservation community.

#### Outreach

On Saturday, March 2, Peg Munves coordinated a Water Quality Forum at Town Hall sponsored by the New Lebanon Democratic Committee. Invited speakers addressed the crises that had plagued Hoosick Falls and Nassau and recommended ways for New Lebanon to insure safe drinking water.

On Friday, August 2, the CAC sponsored a raptor presentation to all campers at the Summer Recreation Program in Shatford Park. Michael Clough drove from the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum in West Marlboro, Vermont, with four live birds. Paul Rix persisted and was able to arrange the presentation. Michael is particularly adept at working with children and he intrigued campers of all ages for an hour and a half with his engaging presentation. Steve Powers took photographs and Cynthia Creech and Peg Munves attended. We later submitted an article to the town newsletter with Steve's photographs. The CAC budget covered Michael's fee and expenses.

On February 28, the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association (CRTA) submitted the winning sealed bid for 16 Lovers Lane at a foreclosure auction in Hudson and on March 21 closed on the 3.44-acre parcel. A half-mile segment of the abandoned rail bed runs the length of the property, which also has a fire-damaged house and several sheds. The CAC had supported the Columbia County Board of Supervisor's original offer of a \$500 sale, removing the parcel from auction, and demonstrated their support at two public hearings in February and May of 2018. However, the Town Board in a split vote opposed removing the parcel from auction and a county subcommittee subsequently withdrew the \$500 offer. The CRTA plans to open the parcel for public recreation in summer 2020.

### Zoning Rewrite and Comprehensive Plan Revision Committees

Cynthia Creech and David Farren represent the CAC on the Zoning Rewrite Committee (ZRC) and the newly formed Comprehensive Plan Revision Committee (CPRC). All members of the ZRC serve on the CPRC. In addition, at the Town Board's behest, we interviewed candidates from the community with no ties to formal town boards for the committee. Seven expressed interest in serving, we interviewed six, and the Town Board appointed four consensus choices. The 13-member committee met for the first time on September 17 and once monthly thereafter. David researched grant opportunities and was tasked with applying for the grants and Cynthia helped plan and arrange focus groups. For their ZRC work, Cynthia focused on farming definitions and David on ponds.

### CAC Responses to Proposals before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals

No development proposal before the Planning Board stood out particularly during the year. The ZBA dealt mostly with requests for variances from the revised sign ordinance but did reject an application from Darrow School for a use variance to install large solar arrays on existing hayfields. The arrays would have been built and operated by an outside contractor. The town's zoning ordinance permits solar arrays only in the commercial district.

### Budget Line Item

Cynthia Creech attended the budget workshops held during the last fiscal quarter with Meg Robertson presiding as interim Supervisor. She helped secure a \$1,200 line item for the CAC in the 2020 Town Budget.

### Prospective work

The CAC plans to complete action items identified in the NRCP. First, we plan to revise the Scenic Resources Inventory with an updated map and convert them to an interactive link on the town website. Other tasks are to justify Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) in town, starting with cool ravines, and to propose them to the Town Board for ratification. We also plan to sponsor another presentation to the Summer Recreation Program, to engage youngsters more deeply with nature. We will continue to work with the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals to underscore conservation priorities for the town and respond to development proposals before the various boards.

### 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 serves on the board of Grow the Valley and helped organize celebrations honoring New Lebanon's two centuries of history. She retired in June from her position as Court Clerk. At monthly Town Board meetings, Cynthia reported faithfully on CAC developments and she also attended budget workshops

during the last fiscal quarter and an occasional ZBA meeting. In addition, she served as an advisor for the booklet *Farming in the Lebanon Valley*.

### **David Farren**

In addition to CAC activities, David's schedule throughout the year included the following activities related to his CAC role. Many of them afforded training.

- Jan 11, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.: Planning meeting for Conservation Forum, Town Hall
- Jan 12, 10:00 A.M. – Noon: Conservation Forum, Town Hall, co-sponsored with Grow the Valley (operated slide projector; Craig Westcott and Cynthia Creech presented)
- Jan 16, 9:30 A.M. – 2:30 P.M., Winter hike with the Taconic Hiking Club (THC), Grafton Lakes State Park to the Fire Tower and back
- Feb 27, 7:30 – 9:00 P.M., Bio-Regions lecture, Hawthorne Valley Farm, Ghent
- Feb 28, 8:00 A.M. – 1:30 P.M., Capacity Building workshop, Latham, sponsored by the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region (attended with Executive Director, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance)
- Mar 7, Jun 6, Sep 5, Nov 7: Farmscape Ecology Program First Thursdays, 6:00 P.M., Creek House, Ghent, hosted by Conrad Vispo and Claudia Knab-Vispo
- Apr 4, 6:30 – 8:45 P.M.: Hosted RPA Lecture on Grandma Moses by Jamie Franklin, Bennington Museum curator, Sand Lake Town Hall
- Apr 11, 5:30 – 10:45 P.M., RPA Spring Woodland Gala, Old Daley Inn on Crooked Lake
- Apr 30, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M. w/Steve Powers: Hudson Valley Natural Resource Mapper training session w/Ingrid Haeckel and Nate Nardi-Cyrus of HREP, Colonie Town Library
- May 2, 9:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.: Trail Work Day on the Taconic Crest Trail with THC
- May 2-3: New York State Land Trust Alliance Symposium, Saratoga Springs (evening reception May 2, full-day workshops May 3 followed by reception; commuted)
- Jun 10, 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.: Forest Mapping w/Housatonic Valley Association & RPA, Averill Park
- Jun 15, 9:00 A.M. – 3:30 P.M.: Spencertown Academy Hidden Gardens Tour
- Jun 16, 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.: Walking tour with Margaret Roach at Windy Hill Farm, Great Barrington
- Jul 4, afternoon: New York Botanical Gardens, the Bronx
- Aug 21, 7:30 – 9:30 P.M.: Cemetery of the Evergreens fundraiser, The Theater Barn
- Sep 7, 4:00 – 8:30 P.M.: RPA Woods & Water Heritage Circle reception, Historic Eastfield Village, East Nassau
- Oct 28, 10:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.: Mindful Nature Walk (RPA event), Poestenkill Community Forest
- Nov 9, 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.: "Inventories to Action" workshop, Castleton on Hudson, with Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia and Ingrid Haeckel and Nate Nardi-Cyrus of HREP
- Nov 16, 2:30 – 3:15 P.M.: Launch party for the booklet *Farming in the Lebanon Valley*, New Lebanon Library
- Nov 20, 1:00 – 2:00 P.M., Biodiversity webinar, Hudson River Estuary Program

Town Board meetings (7:00 P.M. start, second Tuesdays, Town Hall): Jan 8, Feb 12, Mar 12 (until 10:25 P.M.), May 14, Sep 10 plus mandatory personnel training: Mar 25, 6:00 – 7:30 P.M.

Zoning Rewrite Committee meetings (6:30 P.M. start, fourth Tuesdays, Town Hall): Feb 26, Mar 26, Apr 23, May 28, Jun 25, Jul 23, Aug 27, Sep 24, Nov 26

Comprehensive Plan Revision Committee meetings (6:30 P.M. start, third Tuesdays, Town Hall): Mar 30 (3:30 – 5:15 P.M. meeting with Nan Stolzenburg, consultant), Jun 12 (interviews with community candidates), Sep 17 (first committee meeting), Oct 15, Nov 19, Dec 17

In addition to his town responsibilities, David serves as Treasurer of the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association and contributes to fourth Thursday meetings that rotate between New Lebanon and Stephentown. He participates in trail Work Days and makes many runs to the Stephentown post office, to the Iron Rangers at the Knapp and Wyomanock Road trailheads in Stephentown, and to Berkshire Bank in New Lebanon. He serves as Director of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA) and attends board meetings on third Mondays in Petersburg. He serves on two RPA committees: Development as Chair (second Tuesdays in Averill Park) and the Advisory Board of Rensselaer Youth Outdoors (RYO) (periodic meetings at various locations). In addition, he hosts one RPA lecture (second Thursdays) at Sand Lake Town Hall each year.

David is a member of the Taconic Hiking Club (THC). He is a long-standing class agent and reunion planner for Phillips Exeter Academy and head agent for 13 years and reunion organizer for his Williams College class. He also served a 3-year term as Vice Chair of the Williams Alumni Fund. David's most treasured role is Papa to young grandchildren in San Francisco, where his eldest son and daughter-in-law live. His wife, Barbara DeBuono, takes equal delight in grandparenthood. Their younger son lives and works in D.C. David estimates that he travelled 3,676 miles during the year for his volunteer activities.

### **Bob Gilson**

Bob and his wife Rae are long-time second-home owners in New Lebanon. Once Bob retired from his job as Director of Cultural Programs at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in Manhattan, he became a full-time New Lebanon resident with occasional forays to New York City, where Rae works as a realtor. Rae is a board member of Shaker Museum | Mount Lebanon and Bob has been a trustee of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. In retirement, he takes great delight in fly fishing and photography. He captures with his camera unusual juxtapositions in nature and on city streets, always from just the right angle and with perfect lighting. Bob attended most of this year's Planning Board meetings as the CAC liaison.

### **Peg Munves**

Peg owns and operates a dog training business, Step in Time Training, and served on the board of Women Build, sponsored by Habitat for Humanity. Peg attended nearly all monthly

meetings of the Town Board and every CAC monthly meeting. Peg took the lead as the CAC's liaison to Steven Winkley of the New York Rural Water Association and his Source Water Study for the town. She also organized a Water Quality Forum on Saturday, March 2, sponsored by the New Lebanon Democratic Committee. Peg and husband Moy Wong have lived full-time in New Lebanon for more than a decade but bought their home overlooking the Shaker Swamp in the late 1980s. Peg and Moy are proud parents of Chi, a champion yellow Labrador Retriever with multiple performance titles.

### **Steve Powers**

Steve, his wife Sharon and family relocated to New Lebanon in 2019 from Long Beach, Long Island, and quickly integrated into the community. Steve runs a travel company of long standing, Hidden Treasure Tours, and lived for many years during his early career in Nepal. Steve enjoys bird watching and photography and has contributed to updating the NRCP's Scenic Resources inventory.

### **Paul Rix**

Paul and his wife Anna Duhon homestead in New Lebanon, growing and harvesting their own food crops and raising goats and chickens. Paul left his job at Darrow School, where he ran the furniture workshop and tutored ESL students, to work for Hawthorne Valley Farm in Ghent. Anna is the long-serving staff anthropologist for the Farmscape Ecology Program at the farm. Paul and Anna are proud parents of Adriana, a toddler. Paul persisted in lining up Michael Clough, who offered the raptor presentation to the Summer Recreation Program on August 2 to ringing acclaim.

### **A note about former members Jack Lancto and Craig Westcott**

Jack volunteered to serve on the town's Compensation Committee. Craig accepted the position of Director of Philanthropy at the Columbia Land Conservancy in Chatham and bought a home in Canaan. His two sons are enrolled at Darrow School and Craig continues to closely follow New Lebanon CAC developments, lending his support when possible.

*Respectfully submitted by David L. Farren, March 11, 2020*