

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon, New York

Minutes for October 12, 2020, monthly meeting via GoogleMeet

Attending: CAC members Jenna Barbary, Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Robert Gilson, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. The minutes of the CAC monthly meeting on September 14, 2020, were approved and will be sent to the Town Clerk for posting.

CAC link on the Town Website: We discussed the fact that the CAC link on the town website has yet to be restored. This means that the NRCP and other documents are not available. A problem with the absent link arose when our scenic viewsheds were not available to the Columbia Land Conservancy to be added to a county-wide virtual tour they invited their members to participate in. The sooner the link is restored, the better.

2021 Budget: Cynthia Creech confirmed that the requested CAC line item in the town's 2021 budget seems assured.

Trees for Tribs: David Farren noted that the proposed spring 2021 planting in Shatford Park could be for as many as 500 tree and shrub seedlings. Our Trees for Tribs contact in New Paltz made a site visit to the park in late September and was very excited about the prospects. They would provide an operator with an auger for two days, sufficient time to dig 250 holes a day. Paul Rix asked whether 500 trees was a decided quantity. David responded that Trees for Tribs will help figure out a ratio of trees vs. shrubs and the species that would work best. The project could be done in phases. Peg Munves noted that many existing trees in the park are in terrible shape, some needing to be pruned. Cynthia said that this is a great project and exactly what we should be doing. David explained that the seedlings would be planted along the stream that runs through the park parallel to Rte. 22, not along the shaded tree line at the back, unless we decide to advance that line. He has a date to walk the park with Tistrya at 1:00 P.M. on October 21. Other CAC members are invited.

Columbia County Land Conservancy Roundtables: David thinks it is important that CAC members attend at least some of virtual roundtables that the Columbia County Land Conservancy plans to host. Peg Munves made a motion that the CAC participate in two Land Conservancy Roundtables a year. Cynthia said it would be great if we could get the entire committee to participate.

3-Day Wetlands Webinar: David noted that he attended a 3-day Wetlands Webinar hosted by the Hudson River Estuary Program with Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia as one of the main instructors. A homework assignment was to review the current codes in town protecting wetlands and he noted that he couldn't find them. For NYS protection a wetland must be 12.4 acres or greater. Federal protection doesn't have limits but can be very inconsistent. Cynthia asked if the wetland between Lover's Lane and West Street is more than 12 acres and Paul believes it is. David pointed out that this wetland has extensive aquifers important for water quality in the town. Peg noted that since Lovers Lane divides the area it may not count as contiguous. David discovered a large intermittent pool on the border of his property where he hadn't walked in years. Intermittent pools were hard to find in town during NRCP site verification visits.

PFOA: Paul said that he believes the town needs to cap the landfill. He noted that all of the well testing had come back negative so far. David suggested that we should piggyback with the NYS Dept. of Health program to test private wells. The town could be divided into 5 zones and Paul said that there are 5 main aquifers and water can move in more than one direction in a zone. David

suggested asking Steve Winkley to help identify these zones. We would have to present language to the Town Board and the Zoning Rewrite Committee to initiate the study. Peg said that although these tests would not include expensive PFOF and PFOA testing it would be great if we could get this done. She suggested that 15 – 20 sites be tested in each of the five zones.

Paul has been in touch with Tistrya and the landfill issue is on hold until the pandemic is over. However, it would be great if Cornell Graduate students could do a history of water usage that would identify the locations of old commercial/industrial sites and other areas of concern. The question would be how much we take on and how much could be assigned to the students.

Climate Smart Community Task Force update: Steve Powers said that it was a productive month.

- He created Facebook groups for both the Town of New Lebanon and the Climate Smart Community Task Force. Steve said it was Facebook groups rather than pages because there is no way to filter comments on Facebook pages.
- The Task Force has been at the Farmers Market on Sundays, promoting Composting and the bike exchange. Marc Anthonisen and Moy Wong continue to refurbish bikes and get them to people who need them.
- Sarah Steadman is working with Tistrya to take over the Free Store. They would like to move it out of Town Hall and are searching for a suitable space. The Dollar Store has allowed them to put a rack of free winter coats outside.
- The Task Force is continuing with the Greenhouse Gas Inventory. It can be done without requesting information directly from the community. NYSEG supplied usage data for the entire town.
- Cara Humphrey and Jill Fauci did a presentation on Community Solar for the Town Board. They emphasized that the Town and its residents can save money for up to 20 years by switching to solar. We would make the option available to residents but no one would be obligated to switch.
- Jenna Barbary is working on signage for composting at the Community Garden.

Business Development Committee update: Cynthia said that there are a number of things going on in the sub-committees.

- The Media Committee is compiling an inventory of businesses in town.
- The Food Committee helps distribute free food to the community every other Tuesday, supplied by the Northeast Regional Food Bank. The program was moved to the parking lot at Town Hall. On a recent Tuesday, they gave out 19,000 pounds to 173 families.
- The Farmer's Market received a grant from Berkshire Agricultural Ventures to purchase local produce.
- The Beautification Committee has professionals working pro bono to look at signage and other ways to visually improve the Routes 20/22 corridor.
- The Infrastructure Committee is looking at broadband and water and sewers. It has lots of irons in the fire. However, there are no government grants available at present.

Zoning Rewrite Committee update:

- David said that there had been a public forum on short term rentals. Cynthia attended with 10-12 others. Not surprisingly, most were overwhelmingly against any regulation, some claiming that using their homes for rentals is not a business.

Comprehensive Plan Update Committee update:

- David said that John Ball and Joyce Baum attended his Seniors focus group and it was a good meeting.

- Cynthia said that the Weekenders focus group was interesting. Mostly weekenders want something to do – more restaurants, bars, etc. Residents want a grocery store/pharmacy, but the weekenders don't care.
- Cynthia recommends that a 67-page publication by the NYS Association of Realtors, *Communities Designed for Resiliency: On Common Ground Mitigating Climate Change*, be a resource for CAC recommendations to the Comp Plan Update Committee.

Planning Board update: Bob Gilson reported on the Planning Board Meeting.

- The Midtown Mall wants to turn the old OTB space into a banquet hall for M&M Tavern as well as two rental office spaces. The banquet hall space would be used for “mixed retail” until the pandemic is over. The banquet hall would be regulated by the Board of Health according to code. It is anticipated that the space could be used for events up to 52 people. It was noted that when OTB used the facility, there were violations for the septic system as well as 2 complaints about rats. Under the new configuration, the space would get less use with water usage dropping from 5,000 gallons a day to 1,000-1,500. Garbage and food waste would be dealt with in dumpsters. The town engineer noted that malls by definition are mixed use facilities, so a catering hall would technically be allowable. He said that when the mall was built in 1988 there was no site plan review at the time. Also, the town has no information about the septic system, built in 2006. Once again Laurie, the owner of the Midtown Mall, complained bitterly about having to do a site plan review.
- Cheryl Rose wants to give 2 acres to her grandson. Her property is 4.8 acres and is divided by the Wyomanock. There are also floodplain and wetland issues. The Planning Board gave tentative approval of the subdivision, but said that the new parcel would need a DEC review before a house could be built.
- Nokomis proposes to build a classroom building of 5,200 square feet on their property. Their original partner, Mountain Road School, no longer exists. The architect said that they plan to serve between 20-30 students per week at the site and would hold weekend workshops for adults as well. David noted that Wadsworth Road may be the most dangerous road in town and it would be difficult to accommodate school buses. Nokomis will present again in October.

The next meeting will be November 9 at 6:30 P.M. via GoogleMeet.

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson