***Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon***

Monthly Meeting Minutes for December 12, 2016

Samson Environmental Center, Darrow School

Present: CAC members Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Peg Munves, Craig Westcott; Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia, guest

David Farren, Peg Munves and Craig Westcott met in advance starting at 5:10 P.M. to prepare a Powerpoint of the progress report on the Natural Resources Conservation Plan (NRCP) to be presented to the Town Board tomorrow night. The presentation will be the first item of business on the agenda. Peg provided a memory stick with all the photographs she has taken during site verification visits and Craig created the Powerpoint following an outline that he and David had agreed on previously.

The CAC monthly meeting was called to order at 6:40 P.M.

There being no recommended changes, the minutes for the previous meeting on November 7 were approved.

We noted that the Town Board in November authorized the town supervisor by unanimous vote to send a letter of support to the Town of Kinderhook for their resolution to add the Kinderhook Creek to the list of “designated inland waterways” in New York State.

Cynthia Creech confirmed that the Zoning Re-write Committee will present proposed language on solar energy zoning to the Town Board although no action would be required at tomorrow’s meeting. The CAC will be asked to respond to the proposed zoning regulations on solar arrays.

David Farren confirmed that the Town Clerk ordered the field equipment that Craig Westcott had researched. Since the purchase price for 3 items was under $500, the Town Board did not need to approve the requisition. Adding the CAC to the town’s Verizon account will cost an additional $30 per month.

We devoted the balance of the meeting to the Natural Resources Conservation Plan. Gretchen Stevens distributed a draft schedule for the remaining months of the project, now slated to run through September 2017, and requested that the CAC undertake the additional task of confirming which land in town is currently being farmed. She distributed four maps representing the town’s quadrants with rough outlines of agricultural lands (i.e., rough pixels) and suggested that drive-by verifications would suffice to determine whether land is used for crops, meadow, orchard or pasture. In addition, we would note which fields are bush hogged annually or less frequently. No data currently exists on land use in town for specific agricultural purposes. Cynthia volunteered to provide an initial analysis of Gretchen’s maps based on her knowledge of farming in town.

After conferring with the CAC and the Farmscape Ecology Program about conservation targets and priorities, Gretchen will submit a first draft of the NRCP to the CAC in February. Once the CAC responds and Hudsonia submits a 2nd draft, we will ask for review and comments from staff at the Hudson River Estuary Program. David will be the point person with the HREP. Once we agree on priorities, we will schedule a presentation to inform the public about the project and request feedback and input from concerned townspeople. Gretchen recommended that notices for the hearing stress that refreshments will be provided. We also plan to continue to present periodic progress reports to the Town Board.

Gretchen suggested that we approach schools to request photographs from students as well as townspeople to include in the final NRCP as cited illustrations. Peg will reach out to the schools and make the first pass on photo selection. In addition, we agreed to approach the Lebanon Valley Historical Society and Corkscrew Rail Trail Association to request that they include a progress report on the NRCP on their meeting agendas. Cynthia will approach the LVHS and David the CRTA. We also discussed creating poster boards to be displayed at the Farmer’s Market when it resumes in 2017, the Town Picnic in July, and other possible venues. In the interim, the posters could be displayed at Town Hall. Craig will research possible materials and costs for the poster boards.

We will likely wait until spring to resume site verification visits. Snow on the ground makes it more difficult to assess natural resources. The last site visit in 2016, to Mountain Road School on December 7, involved 4 Darrow Hands to Work students and 5 Mountain Road School 8th Graders, who know the natural features on their property intimately and guided us on an informative walk to the Kinderhook Creek. Unique features were the number of mature American Sycamores we found near the creek and a huge Eastern Cottonwood (41.4” diameter) we measured in the hardwood swamp.

The next CAC monthly meeting will be held January 9, 2017, starting at 6:30 P.M. at Darrow’s Samson Environmental Center.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 P.M.

*Respectfully submitted by David Farren*