

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting on December 14, 2020, via Google Meet

Present: CAC members Jenna Barbary, Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Robert Gilson, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix and guest Monte Wasch

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. The minutes for the monthly meeting on October 12, 2020, were approved as amended and will be sent to the Town Clerk for posting.

Trees for Tribs: David Farren spoke with Anna Palmer at Trees for Tribs and she seems very positive about the town's application for spring planting in Shatford Park. The application deadline is in early March and we won't likely be notified of the award until late March with delivery taking place perhaps as late as late May. We will be able to request specific varieties of tree and shrub seedlings and their numbers, having plotted their locations. Peg Munves asked how we could inform residents about the project, noting that there would not be much time between March and May to get the word out. David said that the Town Board approved the plantings for Shatford Park in October, so preliminary discussion has already taken place. David also said that 95 potted seedlings had been planted this fall by 8 volunteers at the Roseman property in a second phase.

Hudson River Valley Greenway: The Hudson River Valley Greenway has awarded the \$10,000 grant to the Town of New Lebanon for the Comprehensive Plan update, after a long delay. The grant is retroactive to March 5 of this year and the Update Committee will decide at its meeting tomorrow evening whether to accept the grant. The application submitted last December had requested \$10,000 mainly for professional services. In the interim, volunteer committee members have accomplished much of that work product. The grant requires a match and the town had budgeted \$10,000 in 2020 that was then reallocated once COVID hit. Before the Greenway could award the grant – they had announced their intention – New York State decided that all grants would cease. Steve Powers asked if the 2021 town budget had an amount for matching purposes. A reduced amount has been budgeted to cover legal fees and printing. Fortunately, volunteer hours calculated at a high hourly rate can be submitted for matching purposes. David said that the town had also applied to the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation for update funding and expected an award before the foundation repurposed that grant money for COVID-19 relief throughout Columbia County.

CAC Goals: David asked which goals the CAC could achieve in 2021. Peg said that she had looked through the NRCP guidelines and noted we could assemble a list of action items. There are many things we could be doing independent of advising the Planning Board. Cynthia Creech reminded us that we had carefully evaluated which action items in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan should be retained, many of which are similar to goals established by the Climate Smart Communities Task Force. To make our work more visible, she and Peg suggested a call to arms to make other boards in town pay attention. Our meeting date on the second Monday, the night before the Town Board monthly meeting, means that we haven't been notified of the Planning Board's agenda, as they meet on the third Wednesday. Peg suggested that we try to find another time to meet in advance of the Planning Board but after Michelle posts the meeting agenda. We would then be able to reach a consensus on how we respond. In the best of all possible worlds, we need to let applicants know our thoughts before the final step in the Planning Board process, which usually requires 60 days. David suggested that we revisit 2021 goals next month based on the action items from the NRCP that Peg assembles.

Zoning Rewrite/Comprehensive Plan Update Committees: Cynthia said the ZRC has decided to slow things down in favor of additional meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. The revision process needs all hands on deck if it is to be completed by mid-2021 as planned.

Water Study: Peg's phone meeting with the NYS Department of Health went well. Steve Winkley, Tistrya and David joined the call. The plan is to do testing of residential wells down gradient from the CeramTec and Bouchard sites in March or soon after winter breaks. We aim to choose sites for the water study where residents will share the results. Steve Winkley has been very helpful. We hope to convince the DOH to include PFOA, PFOS, and heavy metals in the study. NYSDOH will do 15 – 20 tests, and perhaps more, with no charge to the town or well owner. They seem focused on testing wells in areas with marble, which would be close to the Taconic Crest. NYSDOH prefers water samples from unfiltered outdoor spigots. Cynthia complimented Tistrya for being involved and backing the testing. We should know more about the town's water situation next year.

Climate Smart Task Force update:

- Steve Powers said based on approval by the Town Board, that the CSC Solar Subcommittee had interviewed 7 solar providers. After speaking with each of the providers, and doing second interviews with 3 finalists, we have decided to go with Ampion, a Boston-based company. Of all of the NYSERDA recommended providers we spoke with, Ampion was the only company that has enough capacity *now* to accommodate us. They have great customer service, they will give both the Town and our residents a 10% discount on electrical bills, and they will donate \$100 to the town for each residential customer signed up for their service. This action will provide points toward our Climate Smart Communities bronze status, however, because of delays at NYSERDA, we will not get those points this year. Steve suggested that the Town start a fund with the \$100 donations that would help pay to install solar panels on the roof of Town Hall. This will need Board approval.
- The Farmers Market has started a *Buy Local/Buy Green Campaign*. Consumers can place orders and pay for goods online and pick them up on Thursdays.
- The Waste Reduction Committee is encouraging townspeople to compost and recycle. Michael Carey has opened a new recycling center for returnable bottles and cans in a space next to the Family Dollar. The proceeds will help to fund the Jonathan Foundation.
- There are a lot of old bulbs in Town Hall. Steve met with someone from NYS to discuss upgrading lighting in the town's buildings. This would produce significant energy saving for the town and NYSEG will pay up to 55% of the costs of the upgrades. He noted that they tried to get into the Highway Department but couldn't. Steve hopes they will be able to get the project done by the end of the year.
- Jill Fauchi has identified someone who can do the Greenhouse gas inventory for the town.

Economic Development Committee: Monty Wasch said that the EDC is trying to work with adjacent communities to try to attract a medical facility to the area. David said a medical office on Route 295 across from the Canaan Highway Department is now a private residence. Monte noted that there seems to be little interest in improving the infrastructure on the "Miracle Mile." Monte said that the Committee was looking in to finding grant money to build a new commercial zone for the town that would attract new businesses to the community. Peg asked how much development the Wyomanock can sustain and suggested that the former location of the Shed Man would be a great entry area to the town and a natural area with access to the Shaker Swamp. David mentioned that last he heard the property was still for sale at a steep price. Peg said that she brought up the idea of purchasing the property and turning it into a nature preserve at the May 2019 public hearing for the Corkscrew Rail Trail and has spoken to Karen Ross, a founder of the Shaker Swamp Conservancy and board member of Columbia Land Conservancy, who thought it was an interesting idea.

Planning Board update: We discussed the December 16th agenda which had been posted on December 9.

- David said that Lebanon Valley Ventures (Richard McCarthy) wants to combine 2 lots on Old Ghost Road in Deer Ridge off C.R. 5 to make a single 17.75-acre lot. We all agreed that this is a good idea because it will help preserve a larger swath of woodland.
- David said that Nokomis is using a 5-acre parcel on their 100-acre property off Wadsworth Road for their proposed education center. They have been instructed that they can only take down trees between November and March to protect habitat for Northern long-eared bats that have been sighted in the area. To date, Nokomis has said they intend to cut down trees only along the driveway to make it wider. Nokomis has changed their plan and now say they want to bring 25-30 students a day to the education center. High school teachers are reportedly excited to work with them. David continues to voice concern about school buses on Wadsworth Road. The road is narrow, curvy, and dangerous. Nokomis has yet to hear from the County Department of Health about their proposed septic system.
- Andrew Schrupp of Stephentown has offered to purchase the Shed Man property on Route 20 for his landscaping business. He would use the property to store his equipment and landscaping materials. Bob Gilson will write a response from the CAC stressing that the 100-ft. buffer along the Wyomanock be maintained.
- Laurie Bashour is again on the agenda to talk about the Midtown Mall. David said that between the defective septic system and rats, it seems to be a scary situation. The permit for the septic ran out in 2015 and has not been renewed. Cynthia pointed out that Ward Hatch had not installed the septic system properly and there have been serious problems ever since. M&M has applied for a permit for outdoor dining.
- Peg suggested that the CAC form a subcommittee to review the Planning Board agenda and that we communicate with them by email until it is safe to attend the meetings in person again. We would need to meet after the agenda is posted and before the third Wednesday when the Planning Board meets.

Peg suggested that we use Google Drive to share documents. We can centralize our communication and send fewer emails. Peg said that she would share her spreadsheet of action items from the NRCP. David mentioned that he had trouble reading a very wide spreadsheet posted by Steve Winkley.

David said that he will work on the annual report but likely won't complete it before the January meeting. He and Steve Powers are planning to attend a DEC information meeting the following morning via WebEx. No one volunteered to attend the NYSACC meeting that will follow in the afternoon.

The next meeting will be January 11 at 6:30 P.M. via Google Meet.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson