

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting on January 11, 2021, via Google Meet

Present: CAC members Jenna Barbary, David Farren, Robert Gilson, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix, Guest Marc Anthonisen

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

Climate Vulnerabilities in New Lebanon: Marc Anthonisen shared his PowerPoint presentation on climate vulnerabilities in New Lebanon with a focus on drought. He had shared a similar presentation with the Climate Smart Community Task Force the previous week but massaged the slides for the CAC, creating a unique presentation. He relied on NOAA Climate Explorer for his research. The data points suggest slow creeping risk and no scenario where this just goes away. However, the Northeast will be in better shape than many parts of the country and we can expect people from Florida and other areas to start moving back as conditions worsen.

Drought and flooding are two sides of the same coin. With floods, the ground cannot absorb water and replenish the water table. We are fortunate that Steve Winkley is working with us to develop a necessary source water protection plan. We could also study the Kinderhook watershed, working with adjoining towns to ensure the best outcome. New Lebanon's water flows from the Rensselaer Plateau and Massachusetts and since only about a mile of the Kinderhook flows through New Lebanon, our only chance to control flooding is through collaboration.

Predictions are that the area will be 5 degrees warmer by 2050, about the equivalent to Virginia or North Carolina presently. The increase in temperature could result in shorter winters, rainier springs, and droughts in August and September. Storms would become more severe, invasive species would proliferate, and wildfires may become common, as may flooding. As we absorb more sunlight, the evaporation rate would increase and elevate the risk of drought. Predictions are that western New York will be dryer than the Eastern part of the state. However, we are already starting to see the effects of seasonal drought – 3 wells ran dry in New Lebanon this past summer and Pittsfield had a water emergency. As summers get dryer, we will see more dry wells and more crop damage. Peg Munves noted that hay production was down by 40% this year.

Marc suggested that the CAC help reevaluate the Town's 2018 hazard mitigation plan and advocate for a more proactive approach to damage control. There should be opportunities to control water before it hits the Wyomanock and thereby mitigate flooding. Perhaps we could work on Trees for Tribs with surrounding towns to help secure the Kinderhook watershed – the more Trees for Tribs, the better. Following Irene and Lee, Howard Commander placed boulders along the creek to solve his flooding problem, which may have accelerated the stream's velocity downstream. As the climate changes, we may see storms we have never seen before. How do we plan for more catastrophic climate scenarios? David Farren noted that in recent years the town has repaired a huge amount of damage along roads, the result of severe storms.

CAC Open Position: David announced that Cynthia Creech had resigned from the CAC and will soon move with her Randall herd to southern Virginia. It appears that we will receive at least two letters of interest and perhaps both could be appointed, one to fill Cynthia's unexpired term and another as an additional member on an expanded council. David noted that Cynthia also represented the CAC on the Zoning Rewrite and Comprehensive Plan Update Committees. Peg wondered whether it makes sense at this late date to add a CAC representative to the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. Ted Salem chairs both committees and is anxious to have another CAC representative.

Additions to Columbia County Agricultural Districts in New Lebanon: David introduced the recommended additions in town to Columbia County's agricultural districts. After discussion, the CAC determined that it has no objection.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Information Session: Steve Powers and David attended via WebEx the DEC Environmental Update on December 17 from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. but neither could stay and join the afternoon meeting of NYSACC. Steve found much of the information redundant. David enjoyed most the humorous presentation by JR Jacobson of Fish and Wildlife retelling the history of a particular DEC pipeline review. Other topics included climate change, water public safety, dams, aquatic invasive species, the plastic bag ban, as well legislative updates and DEC's online mapping service.

Trees for Tribes: The next Town Newsletter is scheduled for February 1 and David asked if we should submit a CAC update and specifically whether it made sense to highlight the potential Trees for Tribes project in Shatford Park. Peg will write a draft and include the Water Study.

Planning Board: Should we be thinking about a different date and day of the week for our CAC meetings? The consensus was not to even though our monthly meeting occurs before the PB agenda is distributed, putting the CAC at a disadvantage in submitting timely responses. The PB has also been fast tracking proposals lately, so it would be good for the CAC to respond earlier in the process. Peg suggested forming a CAC subcommittee to see whether that helps with timely responses. During the pandemic, the PB has not always met regularly and meeting in person is still risky.

Google Drive tutorial: Peg and Marc will offer a tutorial on using Google Drive on Wednesday, January 13, at 6:30 P.M. and again on Thursday, January 14, at 10:00 A.M. Google Drive would allow us to work collaboratively without having to send countless emails back and forth. With CAC & CSC starting to work together, Google Drive would be a much better way to organize everything.

Taconic Hiking Club: David reminded CAC members that Taconic Hiking Club membership renewals are \$10.00 for the year.

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance: RPA holds Zoom lectures on the third Thursday of the month at 7:00 P.M. Marc attended the December one on trails and can vouch that it was excellent. The lectures are open to everyone with a suggested \$5 donation. This year's topics relate to natural resources on the plateau. Peg noted that there is real economic value in having a trail network and Steve noted that expanding recreational opportunities in town meets CSC goals and earns points.

Corkscrew Rail Trail: David said that the Corkscrew Rail Trail is planning to open the section off Lover's Lane to the public this spring. The annual insurance premium has been paid. Demolishing the fire-damaged home on the property would need funding from grants or someone's largesse.

2021 Goals: We still need to reach consensus on CAC goals for the year with a view towards meshing them with CSC goals. Peg has looked at the NRCP action plan and those goals work well with CSC goals. She would like action items to be doable and will elaborate on suggested goals for discussion at the February meeting.

Water Study Update: Peg has worked with Tistrya to develop a preliminary list for the water study survey to be performed once winter breaks by NYSDOH at no cost to the town. Everyone on the list has agreed to cooperate and share test results with the town. While personal information will be

kept confidential, the survey will give specific information about the Town's water status. This is both a short term and long-term project and will provide opportunities for CAC and CSC collaboration. Steve Winkley will post the well water survey on Google Drive and has covered all areas of concern, checking all the boxes with DOH. Water samples are taken preferably from outside, unfiltered faucets. Paul Rix believes that DOH will probably not test for PFOA although that is possible at wells downgradient along Rte. 20 from CeramTec and the Bouchard junkyard. There is also interest in testing the water at the mobile home park.

The next meeting will be on February 8 at 6:30 P.M.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson