

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting on February 8, 2021, via Google Meet

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. We had interviewed the two candidates for the open CAC position starting at 6:00 P.M., but not without technical challenges using Google Meet. We had to transition to the Zoom account of Peg Munves and stuck with it for the regular meeting. We agreed we would welcome both Donald Lamonaca and Adelia Moore as CAC members, Adelia to fill Cynthia Creech's unexpired term and Donald as an added member. If the Town Board approves the addition tomorrow night, as expected, both 2-year terms would be up for renewal at the beginning of 2022. We then approved the minutes for the monthly meeting on January 11, 2021, and they will be sent to the Town Clerk for posting.

David Farren wondered whether Donald Lamonaca might be interested in joining the Zoning Rewrite Committee as a second CAC member. He attended the first Quad Board meeting held via Google Meet on January 20, at which both the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals chairs agreed to iron out their missions and procedures. The meeting dealt mainly with clarifying Cissy Hernandez's dual roles as Code Enforcement Officer and Zoning Enforcement Officer.

David reminded everyone that the first virtual Columbia County CAC Roundtable will be on February 17 starting at 5:30 P.M. The meeting will focus on sharing among the various CACs. The RPA lecture on February 18 starting at 7:00 P.M. will focus on floodwater mitigation.

David continues to work on the 2020 Annual Report. He has not heard from everyone about the training they participated in during the year. Also, David submitted a letter of interest for the Planning Board open position and will be interviewed tomorrow.

Trees for Tribs: David is preparing the application for the Trees for Tribs project in Shatford Park with help from Peg Munves. Adelia Moore has also volunteered to help. We will know whether it is awarded sometime in March. The potted seedlings would be delivered towards the end of May and a Trees for Tribs auger operator would dig as many as 250 holes a day over two days. The project could span several phases with spring and fall plantings. The planting plan would allow spacing for customary mowing.

CAC/CSC Cooperation: David asked how the CAC and the CSC can help to support each other's work. Peg said that we have so many members in common that the CAC can do a deep dive into projects to help the CSC get points toward Silver certification. We need to come up with doable, achievable goals, as well as figure out how longer-term projects can be achieved. We will need funding for some projects. David pointed out that many of the Silver status projects are more complex and will require expert assistance. Silver status would be where we start to achieve meaningful changes for the town. Steve Powers highlighted the overlap of 4 members of both the CSC and CAC and suggested that we need to agree officially to work together. Peg noted that we all serve at the pleasure of the town

to work together to achieve meaningful changes that will improve the quality of life in New Lebanon.

David suggested that some goals require a regional approach. Our water comes from other areas including Stephentown and the Taconic Crest. He asked how long it would take to achieve Silver status. Steve applauded Marc Anthonisen and attributes his knowledge as the reason we were able to achieve Bronze status so quickly. Silver may take several more years due to bureaucratic issues and the complexity of requirements. As it is, several projects submitted for Bronze status were rejected and need to be revisited. The good news is that most Silver status projects require more work and expertise and offer more points. Marc suggested that we consider CSC goals as we establish goals for the CAC and not miss opportunities to collaborate. He said the current project to develop a Source Water Protection Plan would be an excellent goal. Peg praised Steve Winkley for his help with our Water Study; he has helped other towns with their Source Water Protection Plans.

Steve Powers attended a water study meeting in Richmond, Massachusetts, as a factfinding mission and found Richmond to be way ahead of us. Grants have funded consultants to help with their projects, often without the town having to apply.

Climate Vulnerability: Marc underscored the Lebanon Valley's higher risk from climate change than other areas. Intense rain and flooding in the Northeast are probably our highest risks. FEMA is slowly updating floodplain maps which are out of date, as is the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Watershed flood management is extremely important due to New Lebanon's extensive floodplain. Our water comes from the north and east and we need to understand the hydrology. Anything we can do to slow the flow of floodwaters will be helpful to towns downstream. North of us, the Rensselaer Plateau is extremely impermeable. Our shared goal with neighboring communities should be to slow water flow caused by flooding. Marc emphasized the importance of cooperative relationships with neighboring towns, including those in Massachusetts. David believes we would need contracts with neighboring towns that take effort and time.

A Hudson River Estuary Program grant helped fund a study by the Chazen Companies for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance that produced a 200-page report with recommendations on how to mitigate floods along the Poesten Kill. That study could serve as a model as we begin to assess how best to manage the Wyomanock and Kinderhook. The Poesten Kill empties into the Hudson in Troy and caused serious flooding during Irene and Lee in 2011. It was important to find ways to mitigate floodwaters upstream and suggested measures include reconfiguring naturally the slope of riverbanks, narrowing exits from wetlands and diverting water into adjacent wetlands.

Marc suggested that we update the Hazard Mitigation Plan for the town, which ties closely to the Columbia County plan. Due to climate change and long-term risks, we only know that a major event will happen, just not when. It would be helpful, therefore, to have a more effective plan in place. David mentioned that Matt Larrabee had been the town's liaison for the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Marc said that the town is required by law to update the plan every 5 years. The current plan dates to 2008 and the last FEMA floodplain study dates to the mid-1980s. Marc believes that a FEMA study is underway.

The Lebanon Valley has a high potential for flooding. Marc shared statistics that 47 incidents of flooding occurred on only 5 properties in the floodplain in recent years, resulting in claims that averaged \$175,000 per incident. Paul Rix pointed out that the town has incentives to become involved in floodwater mitigation. Since flooding causes considerable damage to our roads, DOT grants could be used to repair and rebuild culverts. Marc pointed out that the Cornell Cooperative Extension Service does culvert studies and we should alert them to our needs. Adelia Moore noted that if we connect a Flood Mitigation Plan to road maintenance, we could get more buy-in from some townspeople who might otherwise not be interested. Repairing culverts would cut down on storm damage and decrease repair costs for roads. Peg said that we could be forward thinking and ask the Climate Smart Task Force to help us.

2021 CAC Goals: David believes that the CAC's goals for 2021 should include Trees for Tribs in Shatford Park, the launch of a floodplain mitigation study, continuing (and possibly concluding) the Water Study, completing the Scenic Resources inventory by creating an interactive website, proposing to the Town Board that cool ravines be designated the first Critical Environment Areas in town, and sponsoring once again a naturalist presentation to the Summer Recreation Program, should that program take place.

Water Study: Peg reported that NYSDOH has agreed to test every well on the list we presented. She is seeking background information on previous NYSDEC tests. One person in the Bouchard area has backed out of the planned study. The DEC checked her well in 2009 and again in 2015 and this person is concerned about the steps that may be required to mitigate. Everyone else is on board and has agreed to share the test results. NYSDOH should begin the study toward the end of March and participants would first need to complete a questionnaire. The 2 or 3 wells downgradient from the Bouchard area will be tested for PFOA and PFOS. The test results from NYSDEC for the 8 wells downgradient from the abandoned town landfill, tested last fall, were all negative for PFOA and PFOS. Paul Rix said that he had been purifying his well water with a charcoal water filter. He noted that although the initial installation was expensive, he now changes the filter every 2 years as compared to every 3 months in Hoosick Falls.

Marc said that the population of Columbia County is aging and projected to shrink rapidly. This provides great opportunities to conserve land and to implement ecological resilience measures. He also noted that Cornell MPA students may be able to conduct a climate vulnerability assessment for the town.

The Planning Board is not scheduled to meet in February.

The next CAC monthly meeting will be March 8, 2021, starting at 6:30 P.M. via Google Meet.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson