

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting on April 12, 2021, via Google Meet

Present: CAC members David Farren, Robert Gilson, Donald Lamonaca, Adelia Moore, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix; Guests Deb Gordon, Bruce Shenker

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. We approved the minutes for the monthly meeting on March 8, 2021, and they will be sent to the Town Clerk for posting.

Trees for Tribs: David Farren announced that New Lebanon has been awarded 500 seedlings to be planted in Shatford Park. The seedlings will be delivered from New Paltz early on May 27. Trees for Tribs operators will dig the holes with augers that day and perhaps the following day. Anna Palmer has promised a siting plan for trees and shrubs and Phyllis Stoller, a local landscaper, has volunteered to help with the choice of shrubs and trees and the design. Planting by volunteers will kick off on the morning of May 28. When David reports to the Town Board tomorrow evening, he will request a budget for topsoil, starter fertilizer, etc. He will also schedule a time to meet with Jesse Newton and Donnie Sears to identify staging areas in the park and requisition processes. Any leftover materials would be available for other uses by the town. Deb Gordon has volunteered to plant raspberry bushes along the creek and could use compost.

Adelia Moore noted that we will need an adequate watering system for what Peg Munves presumes to be weekly watering. David will look into purchasing a bladder, if the town does not have one. A call for volunteers will be highlighted in the upcoming town newsletter and also Grow the Valley. Peg will look into lining up local high school students. We should have a month and a half to plan once we receive the planting proposal from Anna Palmer.

Webinars, Lectures: David announced that the Hudson River Estuary Program will host a webinar on Model Local Laws to Increase Resilience on April 20 from 1:00 to 2:15 P.M. Adelia confirmed that three upcoming webinars on wetlands will be held on May 5, 12 and 19 from 3:00 to 4:30 P.M. The next Rensselaer Plateau Alliance lecture on April 15 at 7:00 P.M. will be on Clean Energy and Climate Solutions presented by Ethan Winter. David is still writing the 2020 Annual Report. It will focus primarily on Trees for Tribs.

Water Study: Peg said that the NYSDOH water testing of 21 wells throughout town will be completed this week. She has devoted hours to the project. Samples will be taken from all of the town's geologic areas and results should be available within two weeks. Although the results are confidential, well owners have agreed to share their results with the town. New Lebanon is one of three pilot sites in New York State for this study and it should provide good information about the status of the town's water supply. They have decided not to test for PFOAs and PFOSs but the town could later do so. The CAC would need to include those costs, likely \$300 per test, in our 2022 budget request. So far, NYSDEC testing of wells down gradient from the abandoned town landfill, where tests of monitoring wells showed excessive PFOA levels, have been negative.

Critical Environmental Areas: Ingrid Haeckel of the Hudson River Estuary Program invited the CAC directly to apply for free training and assistance with Critical Environmental Areas. The application is straightforward and due by April 30 and goes to Gretchen Stevens at Hudsonia. David will request that the Town Board approve the application tomorrow evening. We have discussed identifying CEAs as a goal since we published the NRCP and narrowed our choices to areas rich in unconsolidated aquifers, cool ravines, hedgerows in agricultural fields, steep slopes and unfragmented forests as possible sites. We agreed we would first propose the cool ravines we identified on land owned by Uli Rose and Paul St. Germain, although Uli Rose has since sold that parcel to Philip Gellert of Hillsdale. While the town would not want to tell current owners what to do with their properties, we hope to enlist the owners in calling attention to the special habitat of cool ravines on their properties. Deb Gordon and Steve Powers suggested this may be a political hot potato. David viewed the webinar on CEAs offered by the Hudson River Estuary Program, which featured the CEA process in Kingston. There, the key CAC person also works for the city. Peg pointed out how complicated the whole CEA process seems to be and expressed reluctance about proceeding. David pointed out that the application is for free technical assistance and the only CEA currently approved in Columbia County is Greenport's public water supply. Steve made a motion to submit the application as long as CEAs would not be a mandatory outcome, Paul Rix seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Open Space Index: The Hudson River Estuary Program has invited applications due June 2, 2021, for a minimum grant of \$10,000 over two years to cover a consultant and other expenses for updating our 2014 Open Space Inventory and proceeding to an Open Space Index that the Town Board would certify. The 2014 OSI focuses on the 2005 Comprehensive Plan; the timing of the grant should allow us to revise the OSI and move forward to an Open Space Index by tying the inventories to an updated Comprehensive Plan. Before proceeding with the application, we would need the Town Board to be on record with a resolution supporting it. The application process would be all online through the NYS Grants Gateway. Steve noted that the grant would require matching funds and David pointed out that volunteer hours qualify at \$30+ per hour. Steve moved that we request a resolution from the Town Board to approve the grant application. Peg seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Planning Board: David mentioned that owners of the Shaker Chair Factory on Darrow Road have been extensively renovating that property and have proposed opening an event space, in part to recoup their investment. The owners had requested a hearing before the Planning Board. Although their proposal would require approval by the ZBA of a change of use, the Planning Board endorsed it after expressing concerns about water use, sewage disposal and parking. As a business, the proposal would require environmental controls. David pointed out that it was a little late in the evening to take up the subject but we should advise the ZBA of our concerns. Deb Gordon supports preserving the property and pointed out that we may need to loosen the rules. Steve suggested that the business could be set up as a nonprofit. However, Deb's experience with grants is that costs increase by half due to all the hoops one is required to jump through. Peg, having heard the owners' presentation to the Business & Economic Committee, was impressed and suggested we meet them where they are. David proposed forming a subcommittee to respond to proposals before the Planning and Zoning Boards. Bob, Peg, Steve and Deb Gordon volunteered to serve with David.

Comprehensive Plan Update Committee: David mentioned that the committee has begun meeting twice a month and has the help of a consultant courtesy of a Hudson River Valley Greenway grant. Goals and indicators for climate change that are achievable over the next three years will be included. Meanwhile, the Zoning Rewrite Committee will begin meeting again.

Climate Smart Communities Task Force: Steve said that two students from Cornell, Jesse Hughes and Waqar Akhtar, are working on the Hazard Mitigation Plan and a climate vulnerability study for the town and would like to survey community members about climate change. He praised their efforts and noted that while Cornell is an outstanding resource for expertise in achieving CSC goals, we would need to apply through Marc Anthonisen's advisor at Cornell's MPA program for each new project.

The next CAC meeting will be May 10, 2021, starting at 6:30 P.M. via Google Meet.

The meeting adjourned at 8:03 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson