

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting on May 10, 2021, via Google Meet

Present: CAC members David Farren, Robert Gilson, Donald Lamonaca, Adelia Moore, Peg Munves, Steve Powers, Paul Rix

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. We approved the minutes for the monthly meeting on April 12, 2021, and they will be sent to the Town Clerk for posting.

Zoning Board of Appeals: Adelia Moore, David Farren, Peg Munves and Steve Powers attended the Zoning Board of Appeals Public Hearing on May 4 to object to the proposed RV storage facility proposed for the former Shedman site. All told, the ZBA received more than 30 letters and emails objecting to the proposal. It was clear that the ZBA would not approve the necessary variance. They tabled the vote until their June 1 meeting, however, due to the time needed to write the decision documents. Chair Tony Murad, contemplating a possible lawsuit, tried to be evenhanded. In his remarks at the Public Hearing, Steve called for the NYSDEC to analyze how the proposal would encroach on the Shaker Swamp. David emphasized the dangers of building on the floodplain, citing statistics provided by Marc Anthonisen.

Critical Environmental Areas: David announced that New Lebanon has been awarded free assistance and training in identifying CEAs in town following a competitive application process. Gretchen Stevens and Estuary Program staff will be the instructors. The first session will be in early to mid-June via Zoom and CAC members should plan to attend.

CAC as sponsor of a naturalist presentation at the Summer Recreation Program: Paul Rix will reach out to Michelle Bienes and to Michael Clough to establish a date for a another presentation to the summer campers.

Quad Board meeting on April 28: David reported that the focus remains on creating procedure manuals for the Planning Board and ZBA, simplifying applications, and addressing site plan reviews. Same use applicants find them cumbersome and unnecessary.

Scenic Resource Protection in the Hudson River Valley: The June 15 webinar by the Estuary Program will be on protecting scenic resources in the Hudson River Valley. Peg has found their webinars to be rewarding. The recent Wetlands webinars had three presenters covering three topics with great information and excellent visuals. All webinars are recorded and available on the HREP website. The final Wetlands webinar on May 19 from 3:00 to 4:30 P.M. will be on legislative strategies and David will attend.

RPA Lecture: The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance will host a lecture at 7:00 P.M. on May 20 via Zoom on land stewardship. Jim Bonesteel will lead a panel with land trust heads from the area, including Troy Welty of CLC, and the Conservation Funds' regional director. Pre-registration is required.

2020 Annual Report: David will share a draft within the week and reminded CAC members to send him their list of training activities during the year.

Trees for Tribs: Sharon Powers created a visually appealing poster for the Trees for Tribs planting marathon in Shatford Park. Many volunteers have stepped forward to plant trees and additional CAC members are needed as team leaders. Delivery from New Paltz will be on May 27 and will include an auger operator to dig holes. The kickoff event will be at 9:00 A.M. on May 28. Dig Safe New York has to determine if any buried utility lines are present within ten days of delivery and Steve volunteered to meet David late in the day on Sunday, May 16, to help mark the planting area's periphery with white flags that Peg was kind enough to purchase.

Phyllis Stoller, a local landscape designer, has worked with us in planning the site. The goal is to plant everything in May and June. David, Peg and Adelia have been working hard to ensure that this event is a success. Paul suggested we contact Berkshire Bank to see if this event fits into their volunteer days. Adelia asked that everyone plan to volunteer. The Chatham Press is interested in doing an article in August. Regretfully, that will be too late to help recruit volunteers.

Regarding continuing maintenance that will consist primarily of watering during the first two years, Adelia mentioned that we can rely on the park's several hundred feet of hose and the stream itself. Jesse Newton has promised a gator and water pump and can help with watering. However, volunteers will be needed for watering throughout the summer and fall. One approach would be for a volunteer to adopt a certain number of seedlings and water once a week. Another option would be for a volunteer to water a larger number of seedlings once a month. David noted that some of the planting areas, particularly along the stream bed, should stay wet and the watering plan will vary according to need.

David reiterated the primary goals of Trees for Tribs in creating riparian buffers, which are to prevent stream erosion and mitigate floodwaters. They estimate an 80% survival rate for the seedlings. In 30 years, the area we are planting will be transformed. The wooded park we envision could have mowed paths through meadows with mature trees and shrubs offering food sources and habitat to birds, butterflies and other wildlife. After we complete planting, we can order mulch to help conserve moisture under the weed mats. We should involve summer campers as much as possible in spreading the mulch and in watering. This is the first phase of a possible multi-phase project. Paul suggested that the project should increase use of the park.

Water Study: Peg Munves reported that we have received results of the well tests for 20 of the 21 sites tested – one person chose not to share their results. We had been concerned about the pond that does not freeze at Ceramtec but in general the results are good. Some people were upset by e-coli issues, but those are easily remediated. The results are confidential, so no one knows anyone else's results. We will know more about next steps after a conference call with NYSDOH on Thursday. We hope at some point to get findings on PFOAs and PFOSs, which would need to be budgeted for next year. Steve Winkley continues to work on his Source

Water Protection Plan and helped select NYSDOH testing sites. The test results will be valuable as he completes his plan.

Open Space Inventory and Index: David reported that the Town Board will be asked to approve the CAC's application for an Estuary Program grant to revise the 2014 Open Space Inventory and create an Open Space index. He spoke to Gretchen Stevens, who said Hudsonia would be happy to work with us again. The grant would be for a minimum \$10,500 and she thought our project would appeal to the Estuary Program. The application deadline is 3:00 P.M. on June 2 and must be done online through the NYS Grants Gateway. With the current OSI focused on the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the timing of the grant award would allow us to refocus on an updated Comprehensive Plan, expected later this year, and incorporate maps and findings from the 2017 NRCP. In creating a first-ever Index, we would categorize open space in town -- how many acres of hayfields, crops, orchards, pasture, meadow, shrubland, working forest, ancient forest, riparian corridors, etc. and their estimated value. That snapshot could be updated every ten years or so to see how New Lebanon develops decade by decade.

Climate Smart Communities Task Force: Steve reported that the CSC has been busy.

- CSC has begun a battery recycling program. Steve found a company in Ohio that recycles batteries. They have sent boxes which will be placed in several convenient locations including Town Hall, the post office and high school where batteries can be recycled. The boxes hold 43 pounds.
- The CSC is looking into having an electronics recycling day when town people could bring their old electronics to a central location for recycling.
- A CSC team cleaned up the area where the electric vehicle charging stations will be installed. There is no pad and no gravel, but the project is expected to be done by the end of the month. We will receive quarterly reports from the State on usage. Signs will direct people to the charging stations and the location will appear on phone apps. A full charge would take 7 hours.
- The CSC is looking into having a Repair Café. Sarah Steadman and Adelia have met with two people involved in the movement. The plan is for the first Repair Café to coincide with the first music event of the season in Shatford Park. The service is free and intended to teach people how to make their own repairs. Pittsfield currently has a repair café and its repairers move from café to café.
- The bike program is in full swing. Fourteen bikes have been placed this spring and the first stolen bike has been reported.
- The Columbia County CSC Task Force is up and running with Steve, Bruce Shenker and Tristya as New Lebanon members. In all, 18 people are on the committee.

Planning Board: There will be no Planning Board meeting in May.

Zoning Rewrite Committee: The Zoning Rewrite Committee has reconvened monthly meetings on the fourth Thursday. Planning Board Chair Elizabeth Brutsch will join the committee and an additional member from the CAC could also be added. A new member would need to read and understand current local ordinances. The committee is currently working on rules governing

food trucks, subdivisions, and site plan review. The ZRC is also considering an historic district overlay on Mt. Lebanon, as requested by the Town Board after a presentation by the owners of a proposed event venue on Darrow Road. The owners are restoring Shaker sites on their parcel, including the Chair Factory, and would need a variance for change of use to host events. They would like to grandfather in their renovations using the same principles that the non-profit Darrow School used for the Tannery.

Comprehensive Plan Update Committee: David reported that the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee has been meeting twice a month and now works with consultant Nan Stolzenburg. The NRCP and its maps will be an integral part of the updated plan. David submitted goals, indicators and strategies for Natural Resources with a focus on what can be accomplished over the next three years. He has shared that document with everyone. The committee pushed back on the NRCP action plan that calls for removing buildings from the floodplain. That won't happen. Nonetheless, our business district is located on the floodplain and would not survive the 500-year flood. Committee member Winfried Fuchshofen is writing goals and indicators for Environmental Sustainability and Agriculture.

Gravel Pits: Peg suggested that the CAC should express concern about sand and gravel permitting. The town has no jurisdiction over mining, deferring to NYSDEC as the lead agency since by law they issue permits and enforce them. The NRCP advocates for gravel mines, noting that abandoned mines become unique habitats for wildlife. Once areas have been mined, NYSDEC requires that they be reclaimed. Steve suggested that the CAC research the issues and provide input to the Town Board. Adelia asked if there are good enforcement regulations. The Town Board meeting tomorrow night has as an agenda item to approve NYSDEC as the lead agency for the Amlaw gravel pit's expansion. Peg suggested we keep an eye on things and Steve responded that it's hard to advise on things we don't know enough about.

The next CAC meeting will be June 14, 2021, at 6:30 P.M. in the Shatford Park Pavilion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Gilson