

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee
Nov. 10, 2009, 7:30 pm
Copake Town Hall

Members Present: Marcia Becker, George Beneke, Rus Davis, Frank Peteroy, Dan Haas, Jeanne Mettler, Roberta Roll

Members Absent: Bill Kiernan, Fiona Hutchinson, Harvey Weber

Members of the Hospitality and Tourism Focus Group: Bill Gilbert, Catamount; Don Edwards, Catamount; David Valden, Church St. Deli; Adam Reenikoff, business consulting; Marcia Peteroy, Sunrise/Sunset B&B, Vincent Celleri and Julie Ann Mazzoni, leasing the Underhill Inn; Sonia Colon, owner of Underhill Inn.

Ms. Mettler gave an overview of the comp. plan process and asked focus group members to tell us about their businesses.

Mr. Gilbert said Catamount was built in 1939 by Jack Fisher. It was open until 1941, when Mr. Fisher went into the Army. Catamount reopened in 1946. At that time, very few people skied; it was a novelty. There was much more natural snow than there is today. Catamount had 9 rope tows. Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Edwards came to work there in 1953 and made Catamount the second place in the world to make snow. They took over in 1973. They had their best year last year, but people always want to know what they're going to do "next year." They tried summer operations in the past few years: concerts, summer skiing, mountain biking, but nothing worked very well. This year they had a ropes course with 120 items which did very, very well. 95% of the attendees said they would return. Mr. Gilbert said they plan to keep it and build around it. Mr. Edwards said they have 100,000 visitors a year - 75-80% from NYS and 10-15% of those are weekenders, 20% from Conn., Mass, and New Jersey. They have 12,000 summer visitors; next year they project over 18,000. They have 200-300 employees in the winter and most live locally. They are planning to install another chair lift. The hotel/condo complex has been approved, but they are not sure when construction will begin.

Mr. Valden has owned the Church St. Deli for 13 years. In 1996 he changed it from a grocery/deli to more of a restaurant. There was a fire in 2005 and he rebuilt and reopened in 2007. They serve 3 meals, 7 days a week and depend on the locals for year round business. He has 20 employees in the summer when the deli is packed with people, 12 in the winter when it is often empty for periods of time during the day.

Ms. Colon bought the Underhill Inn in 2004 and has done quite a bit of construction, which has been a financial drain. She is a weekender and will go to Florida for the winter. Mr. Celleri said he and Ms. Mazzoni are from Poughkeepsie and plan to open a restaurant featuring Spanish cuisine. They have been serving on weekends for a little while and have been getting a good response. They have 28 seats and want to expand.

Ms. Peteroy said hers is one of 40-50 B&B's in Columbia county. She was busy until Aug. of '08 - then the economy "killed" them. She hasn't had a skier in 9-10 years; families want to be guaranteed snow so they go to Vermont. She does get summer people who go to Catamount. Many of her guests have commented negatively on Copake regarding the "Stop the Housing Project" signs, what they perceive as

a closed school (old Roe Jan school), and the area being generally depressed. She would like to encourage cyclists and the development of theatre. Because of the economy, people are often staying only one night, but they frequently ask about theatre. People also enjoy the nature here. Her rates are less than in Great Barrington, but they go to Hudson and G.B. for events and to eat.

Ms. Mettler asked the group what could help their business. Mr. Colon said the lighting is poor; there is a streetlight, but it is out. She said she often gives out brochures of the area, including one from Catamount, to people in NYC. She has the impression that local people here do not want more business and tourism.

Mr. Valden agreed about wanting improved lighting and also said that 7/7A is very confusing. He would like to see better signage for businesses in town. Ms. Mettler asked if he would like more growth for Copake. He said that High Voltage spends money there, and they might spend it on groceries if there were a general store. His business was strong this summer, but certain businesses would be detrimental to tourism - e.g. he would not like to see smokestacks here. Other restaurants would help his business.

Mr. Gilbert said there is nothing here to draw people. He has heard there is a good restaurant at the golf course, but never sees publicity for it or the golf course. Mr. Edwards asked what does Copake want? He suggested that we invest in a nice sign on Rt. 22 for Copake - make it inviting.

Ms. Mettler asked if Copake govt. had been supportive in their planning process for the hotel/condo project. Mr. Gilbert said it took 4 1/2 years to get the permits, but they were supportive. He asked if we want to encourage locals or tourists. Ms. Peteroy said she gets locals who have guests who can't stay at the families' homes. She has guests who want to apple pick. She if there were a farmers market or a shop that supplied artisanal cheeses and breads, they might stay another day. Mr. Valden agreed, saying this is the Hudson Valley [a fertile place for food]. Ms. Peteroy said we ought to get Columbia Council on the Arts to include Copake in their events, and to contact Ken Flood and the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Reenikoff asked what other businesses used to be here. He was told of the businesses in farm equipment, insurance, medical office, dental office, refrigeration, barbershop, hotel, general store, car dealership, two lumberyards and a feedstore, and liquor store. Mr. Edwards said we should think about the assets of Copake: Bash Bish, Copake Lake, golf course. He commented that the lake has no public access and asked how the town could acquire property and boat access. Ms. Colon said she has sent people to the lake but there are no boats. There was a comment that you could get a boat at the marina. Ms. Mazzoni said that improved cell service would help; people try to call to get directions to the restaurant. She would also like consolidated phone and internet service. Mr. Celleri said he owned a restaurant 4 years ago. He is new to this area and is hearing stories of people having problems doing business here. Ms. Mettler asked what would be problems 15 years from now. Mr. Gilbert said that a hotel would be an asset, and he would like to see activities for kids along Rt. 22. Ms. Mettler asked him to specify. He spoke about the signs for activities up around Lake George area. Mr. Colon suggested an amusement park, Ms. Mazzoni a go-cart park. Mr. Gilbert suggested putting something along Rt. 7. Ms. Mazzoni asked if there was a drive-in around here. Mr. Beneke asked how much businesses are cooperating with each other.

Are they getting together, could Copake help with that or advertising, brainstorming, etc. Ms. Colon said that advertising together would cost less. Ms. Mettler asked if the Col. County Tourism board helped them. Ms. Colon said even with that, the NYC people are the ones who would come here and they don't know what is available. Ms. Mazzoni thought that Poughkeepsie, Rhinebeck and the Berkshires are areas overlooked by people. Mr. Edwards said they advertise in the Col. and Berk. county tourism guides. Ms. Mettler asked if it would help to have more inns and restaurants in Copake. - Yes. Mr. Edwards said that in 15 years, employment will grow and there will be a need for housing. There will be fewer farms and land will be available. He mentioned that the parking lot at Wassaic is often full. Ms. Roll asked what he thought about the railroad coming back up here. He thought it would raise real estate prices, there would be more people and more homes built. Mr. Dodson asked about rerouting Rt. 22 into Copake or having more business density. Mr. Edwards brought up the signage to Copake again and also said that the used car lots at the south end of town were very unattractive. Ms. Colon agreed, saying it's depressing. Mr. Edwards cited the variety of shops in Hillsdale. Mr. Dodson asked if we should create more of an intersection, as they have in Hillsdale. Someone said we need to have something for people to come in for. Mr. Gilbert asked if we had ever had antique shops in Copake. - Only the auction. Mr. Dodson said that on his trip to Italy he saw how the Italian govt. has promoted agritourism, which has skyrocketed beyond expectations. It is a huge industry, and what makes it work is very simple. They found out how many bedrooms in old farmhouses were unused; these farms became part of agritourism. At each farm there were 5-10 cars, turning over every 2 days. Our farms are decreasing in number, but we have other places. He asked if agritourism would be helpful. Mr. Edwards thought the farm concept was good - give tours. He cited the Catskill game farm as a good model and it was good for kids. Mr. Valden asked if the Italian farms were working farms - Yes. He said that a lot of farms here are not really working farms; orchards would fall into this category. Ms. Mettler said that the Rail Trail was mentioned on Sat. [vision workshop] as an asset. This area is a good cycling draw. Mr. Beneke said that Col. County should make signage for all the things available here, including the Rail Trail. When the roads are redone, they should be wide enough for bikes. Ms. Mettler said Copake could create a map with all the back roads. Mr. Edwards said Catamount would sponsor a race; it could start up on Breezy Hill Rd. and end in downtown Copake. Mr. Beneke talk about Hudson Valley Fresh, which includes eight farms now. It started in Dutchess County. It produces and markets high quality milk. The high omega-3 content gives it good foaming ability - good for lattes. They tried to select farms that people can always walk into; they are clean, there are 40-100 cows and people can go to the farms. They could work with agritourism. He spoke of the need to get the milk in more local stores, such as the Hillsdale IGA, It is in Peck's in Pine Plains. The milk is not organic, but it is free of growth hormones and antibiotics. They market in NYC and are starting to build a name. Mr. Edwards asked if farms can sell direct to consumers. Mr. Beneke said it is difficult, but it can be done. The milk is not processed on the farms, and they would need refrigeration. Ms. Peteroy said she is connected with Col. County Bounty, which links with restaurants. She commented on the loss of Aubergine in Hillsdale. The Col. County Chamber of Commerce and Southern Berk. Chamber are doing the same thing. She said there are

lots of local cheeses that can be promoted. Mr. Beneke said there are 25, and we also have local wines. Ms. Mettler said it seemed as if there needed to be more interaction between businesses. Mr. Edwards/Mr. Gilbert said they have passes for 10% off at restaurants, in addition to supportive interaction with other local businesses. Mr. Valden said we have many assets; we need to count them, not focus on the things that are wrong. He doesn't see govt. as able or the appropriate body to do much in the way of promotion. Someone asked about the need for a map of the area. Mr. Dodson said there is already a fall foliage map. Ms. Mettler suggested we not call it fall foliage [to make it more comprehensive and usable]. Mr. Dodson asked about energy needs, wind and solar. Mr. Gilbert said this year they will be using 25% less energy. Ms. Roll asked how. - New design in equipment. Ms. Mettler noted Jiminy Peak's new windmill and asked if Catamount would want one. - Absolutely. Mr. Dodson said that the newer aerodynamic design makes it possible to install them on a house. One windmill can provide all power needs. Two can serve a 4,000 sq. ft. house. Mr. Kiernan said there are very small ones coming out, but can people afford them? Mr. Dodson thought that the price would come down. Mr. Edwards said that they could do solar panels too. Mr. Gilbert said his son installed one in California and it will take 20 years to recover the cost. Mr. Dodson asked if there were other aspects of tourism that we hadn't mentioned yet. Mr. Gilbert brought up activities for kids; Catamount won't have what Jiminy Peak provides. Ms. Colon mentioned water sports. Mr. Edwards agreed, saying water parks are popular with kids, citing some examples in Pennsylvania. Ms. Peteroy said we have our own water park - Bash Bish Falls. Ms. Colon said kids want to go down slides. Mr. Gilbert said a water park could attract 5,000 people a cloudy day. Ms. Mettler asked how many people came to TSP. Ms. Peteroy replied 200,000 and that TSP has been named the best state park in the country. It bothers her that the historic sites, such as the old RR station, are not being used. Mr. Edwards asked how do you get people from TSP to Copake. Ms. Mettler mentioned previous discussions about connecting Copake via the Rail Trail. Ms. Roll mentioned that signage has also come up in discussions. Mr. Edwards came back to the idea that water attracts kids. Ms. Mettler wondered if there were things that Ancram or Hillsdale were doing that we could do. Mr. Edwards mentioned farmers markets and tastings in the Berkshires. Ms. Colon talked about the opening of the 5-theatre moviehouse in Pittsfield. Artists are facilitating this. Mr. Dodson asked if there were things the participants would not like to see Copake initiate. Mr. Edwards replied, build a ski area. He said just do things that will bring people in. Mr. Beneke spoke of the need to "connect more dots," to find the focal points and have more cooperation between various groups in Copake. The group was thanked and the business portion of the meeting commenced. The vision workshop on Saturday was attended by 144 people, with about a 50/50 split between full-time residents and weekenders. There were a number of "new" faces - those who tend not to come to other meetings. Mr. Beneke said there seemed to be general consensus on the major issues and didn't seem to be any NIMBY. Mr. Reenikoff said that he got a clearer picture of the community and was impressed. Whatever idea he had about what we want was wrong. He thought the survey was well done and that the enthusiasm was strong. Ms. Mettler spoke to Ms. Irwin, who will write a report, run it by us and then publish it on the website. We have an email list of over 300 addresses now. Ms. Irwin also said she could put up the power point presentation. Mr. Dodson said people using

dial up will have a very slow time downloading it, but that he could probably fix that. Ms. Mettler said now we will be able to send out information via the email list. Regarding focus groups, she asked Mr. Beneke if he had heard from Harry Dodson. Mr. Kiernan has spoken to him. Letters have been sent to farmers, but there are not many. We need to know about their volume, number of employees, impact of economy, how long they plan on staying in business, ideas for agritourism, Ag & Markets laws. Ms. Becker suggested that we find "boutique" farms. Mr. Beneke said there are some, but they are not a good match for other working farms. Are large dairy farms going to be receptive to small farms? He said farmers markets could help vegetable growers develop. Ms. Roll asked if he thought the dairy farms would not want to be at a meeting with boutique operations. He said maybe, but there are not many farms anyway - it will be a small group. He said milk prices had gone from \$14 to \$10 and it costs them \$16. He asked about changing the date. Mr. Dodson said even if Mr. Beneke, Mr. Kiernan and Mr. H. Dodson were the only ones at the meeting, we will still become informed. Ms. Becker said she thought her daughter, who has horses, would be interested in attending. She asked if Camphill was invited. Mr. Peteroy said perhaps Phil Gellert ought to be invited, as he is in business with farmers [leasing and owning land]. Mr. Davis said that this discussion is difficult and brings up the question of whether we are really an ag. community. Mr. Beneke said we will be surprised at the employment and income figures [low]. Mr. Dodson said the wealth of this community is about 1 billion and the ag. percentage is small. He urged us to have the meeting and we would get some information. Mr. Beneke agreed, saying that the farmers are all interested in Copake. Ms. Becker brought up Phil Gellert and his perspective as a land owner. Mr. Peteroy asked what he does with the crops. Mr. Beneke said he might collect a little rent, but the tax rate is lower. Ms. Becker asked about Don Duksa. Mr. Peteroy responded that he is in Ancram. Mr. Dodson mentioned Weir Stuart who recently stopped farming, obtained a lot of money for his land, sold some to Housing Resources, and gave 200K to the new library. Ms. Mettler asked who were the remaining family farms in the area - Kiernan, Miller, Maines, Pierson, Beringer, Clapp. She then asked who would coordinate the home-based business meeting. Mr. Dodson volunteered, and Ms. Becker said she would help make phone calls. Ms. Mettler said Dec. 17 was a good time for Ms. Irwin to meet with us. She asked about other focus groups. We discussed young people under 30, 22 and under, 22-32. We also discussed meeting with the police dept., and members of the Ancram and Hillsdale planning committees. Mr. Davis brought up idea of a town manager and said he thought we had to be a class A town in order to have a manager. Mr. Dodson said we could petition to become another class. Mr. Haas recalled what Ned Schneier had said about the complexity of applying for grants. Mr. Beneke wondered if we would antagonize people. Mr. Davis noted that usually we elect people to town government with very little business acumen. The town is a business and we need to run it efficiently. Mr. Beneke said that we had heard so many ideas from different groups that it was hard to sort them out. It was noted that Great Barrington has a town manager and a five-year plan. Ms. Mettler came back to the focus groups. We discussed the scheduling and decided that home based business is a varied group and needs a full evening. Mr. Dodson wondered if so much variety should be lumped together - medical equipment sales, consultant to the U.N., etc.; we decided to invite them all to one meeting. Ms. Becker and Mr. Weber will

contact young people 17-30 and Ms. Mettler will contact Ancram and Hillsdale planning committee members. Mr. Dodson reported that 9 more surveys were submitted. They will not be included, but the comments will be looked at. Ms. Mettler brought up Ms. Hutchinson's status on the committee and said she had tried to reach her. We decided that she should resign; Ms. Mettler will request this and notify the town board. The town policy manual states that a committee person may only miss 6 meetings. Mr. Dodson said he had offered to make reports on each focus group; he has completed one and would like suggestions. Ms. Mettler said it would be helpful to capture the consensus in the groups. Mr. Reenikoff asked what is our ultimate goal. We said vision, blueprint, action plan. The next meeting will be on Nov. 19th. Mr. Davis made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Roll seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll