



# **Copake Economic Advisory Board Vision for Economic Development**

**Presented to the Comprehensive Planning Committee**

**March 18, 2010**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Copake Economic Advisory Board (CEAB) eagerly awaits the adoption of the Copake Comprehensive Plan. We look forward to this roadmap that will guide our initiatives well into the future.

We have great respect for the effort the Comprehensive Planning Committee has put into this endeavor and appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspectives as a group passionate about economic development in Copake. We have bounded our discussions by topics that were strongly endorsed in the committee's community survey. If the committee feels that some of these topics require additional analysis, we would be happy to pursue them further.

## **VISION FOR COPAKE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The broader Copake area is comprised of seven distinct hamlets, each of which presents its own strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities for growth and development. However, they all face a common challenge of having limited population, economic and tax bases.

There are a number of key demographics that support economic development:

- The area benefits from socioeconomic and age diversity.
- The growth of second homeowners is a significant factor in the economic health of the area. It could be classified as a "bedroom community" because a large percentage of weekend residents and commuters work outside the area.
- Average age is significantly older than the state or national average, but on par with Columbia County.
- The area benefits from proximity to Metro-North.

The CEAB believes that looking at the broader Copake Valley as an interconnected unit and building a pool of resources will be the most effective way to achieve scale for the community. These resources are contained in the following key categories:

- Parks and Recreation
- Cultural and Historic
- Scenic Beauty
- Agriculture
- Support for existing businesses and enterprise development

The CEAB recognizes that making Copake a desirable destination for people to both live and visit will be an integral part of any comprehensive plan whose goal is to spur economic growth. Over the long term, establishing Copake-wide cultural, historic and recreational "districts" consisting of documented itineraries (of, for example, historic homes, buildings and sites) will help to highlight the community's assets for both residents and visitors alike and bring about a greater sense of unity between the hamlets. In short, the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts.

Ensuring access to robust information about the Copake area will be as important as the work involved in inter-linking the hamlets and developing the pool of common resources. There is both a short- and long-term opportunity to build on the solid base the Copake.org website has established to organize and make available information around the key assets of the community outlined above. Because Web- and/or cloud-based access will evolve into the primary mode of obtaining information over the next 20 years, tying the pieces of our community together virtually and economically will have a mutually reinforcing effect.

## **STRATEGIES FOR THE BROADER COPAKE AREA**

The CEAB undertook a detailed SWOT analysis (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) of the seven Copake hamlets: The Copake Town Center, Taconic Shores, Copake Falls, West Copake, Copake Lake, Craryville, and what we call North Copake. By conducting this bottom-up analysis of the hamlets and a top-down analysis from the perspective of the whole town we came to recognize that there were more commonalities than differences among the various communities. Below are our overarching strategy recommendations for the broader Copake area.

### ***Parks & Recreation, Cultural & Historic, Scenic Beauty & Agriculture***

It is astounding to reflect on the vast number of major assets that already exist, including but not limited to Catamount, Copake Golf and Country Club, Taconic State Park, the Bash Bish Falls, Copake Iron Works, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail, institutional summer camps, the Clarion and Winds in the Wilderness concert series, summer theater, historic homes, scenic views and multiple lakes. How many rural communities can boast such a rich list of existing recreational and cultural assets? Clearly the opportunity exists to leverage these assets to a greater degree. Here are some potential strategies:

1. Establish Copake as a biking destination.

Build on the success of the Rail Trail to build a network of bike trails that links the Copake hamlets. Encourage families as well as serious bike athletes.

2. Encourage and support development of off-season uses of seasonal assets.

Establish policies that ensure the continuation of Catamount as a winter and summer recreation spot. Catamount's winter activities complement our other summer recreation venues, providing jobs and drawing visitors at a time of year when other venues are less active.

Cooperate with reasonable requests for the golf course, marinas and other venues to invest in expanding their businesses, especially for off-season use.

Encourage year round uses of the institutional summer camps.

3. Encourage local agricultural endeavors.<sup>1</sup>

- Support 'buy-local' initiatives.

- Include agricultural assets in our tourism promotions.

- Support the new Farmer's Market

4. Enable access to robust information about the Copake.

- Information about the area will be as important as the work involved in inter-linking the hamlets and developing the pool of common resources.

### ***Collaboration with nearby communities***

Economic health does not stop at town boundaries. Providing local jobs means reasonable commutes to well paying jobs. Every town does not need to duplicate nearby assets. Establish policies that encourage Copake to work with their neighboring towns creating a win-win atmosphere rather than a win-lose environment.

5. Recognize that the economic health of Copake is enriched by the economic health of Hillsdale, Ancram, Taghkanic and other nearby communities.

- Support businesses in nearby communities and do not think of them as competitors. Instead Copake should encourage new businesses that complement what is already available in the 'greater Roe Jan community'.

- Staunch the growing fear that Hillsdale is eager to annex North Copake.

### ***Housing & Interim Accommodations***

Often we focus our economic development discussions on drawing in people from elsewhere, a worthwhile effort. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that robust communities need full-time people of various socio-economic levels to provide a unique sense of character and place, and to routinely support businesses within the community throughout the year.

6. Within the plan allow communities to grow in a way that maintains the current culture of the area.

- In accordance with the comprehensive plan community survey, Copake should primarily seek to provide housing for people that already live here and their children as they establish new households.

- Grow slowly and pause/stop when the rate of growth threatens to change the community from the vision in the comprehensive plan.

7. Encourage visitors by providing more and various types of overnight accommodations at all price and service levels.

- Support bed and breakfasts, family accommodations, youth hostels, cabins and camping, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Pursue the feasibility of applying for Food Desert grant funding.

## ***Overcoming obstacles***

Do not lose sight of existing obstacles that inhibit our economic growth.

8. Real estate taxes inhibit growth and discourage a socio-economically diverse community.

Many issues related to real estate taxes are beyond the control of local governments. However, by adopting a comprehensive plan that allows Copake to gradually expand its population and by supporting the growth of clean businesses we will broaden our tax base and mitigate some of the effect of real estate taxes.

9. Because of our focus on scenic beauty as an engine of economic growth we need to ensure that town ordinances are enforced. For example:

Ensure landlords and homeowners maintain properties in a way that allows the town to market itself as a scenic recreational and historic destination.

Ensure that construction projects are completed promptly and meet local standards.

Foster a business friendly mind-set among town officials.

## **VISION BY HAMLET**

The CEAB SWOT analysis allowed the group to see the common themes for the community. But not all strategies are appropriate for all communities. The adopted Comprehensive Plan will result in changes to the Zoning Ordinance that will vary by area. Here is the CEAB vision for the various hamlets for the next 20 years.

### **Copake Town Center**

The Copake Town Center is a livable community for the elderly and families, and a center of activity that people from within and outside of the Town of Copake want to visit for recreational, cultural and historic activities.

### **Taconic Shores**

Taconic Shores is a community known for alternative energy solutions and a pristine waterfront that contributes to the vibrancy of the Copake Town Center.

### **Copake Falls**

Copake Falls is an active center for the Copake tourism initiative, optimally leveraging all of its recreational, historical and cultural resources. Local businesses thrive as a result of this activity.

### **West Copake**

West Copake is a community that benefits from the over-arching strategy for economic development through tourism and greater utilization of existing facilities.

### **Copake Lake**

Copake Lake is a community with half the population being full timers that includes middle class families, retirees and working professionals.

Residents can walk to purchase a newspaper or milk all year round.

The golf course and other businesses provide a thriving off season venue like cross country skiing, etc. that attracts locals and visitors.

### **Craryville**

Craryville is a hub and crossroad within, and an entrance to, the Town of Copake.

It is a thriving community that includes a business park, farms and affordable housing.

### **North Copake**

The proximity to Hillsdale and location on Route 22 enables North Copake to become a strong commercial center for businesses that need to depend on high traffic to be successful. These initiatives include a Medical Arts facility and reuse of the old Roe Jan School consistent with the overall goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

## **STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES/OPPORTUNITIES/THREATS BY HAMLET**

Below are the details of the SWOT analysis that led to the visions for each community.

### ***Copake Town Center***

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Some strong anchor businesses in downtown area (banks / insurance and real estate firms / auction house) provide base from which to build
- Citizenry motivated to make improvements and interested in supporting local businesses
- A funded Columbia County highway project is in development for the Copake Town Center. This rehabilitation project will not only address traffic safety issues but will encourage & support “multi-modal” transportation (bicycling, walking in addition to vehicular traffic). The project will also provide “context-sensitive” solutions that will help restore and enhance the existing historic character of the downtown area as well as incorporate progressive, environmentally-sound engineering practices.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Limited services (stores / restaurants / gathering places / lodging) gives both residents and visitors little reason to stick around
- Unappealing entrances to town from Rt. 22 creates a lack of “draw” for first-time visitors (and associated challenge of drawing people in off the main roads / highways)
- Too many boarded-up buildings / stores in center of town creates air of desperation
- Limited transportation and communications infrastructure
- Lack of town identity – what is the Copake Town Center about? (in part tied to lack of business base and unified town vision)

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Establish cultural, historic and recreational district comprising the broader Copake area – e.g. historic homes / buildings / arts attractions / antiques / parks and campgrounds, etc. – with signage at major town approaches and tied to broader Columbia County tourism initiatives.
- Improve the Copake website to make visitor-focused information easier to find, more updated and organized around seasonal activities (e.g. camping / hiking / biking / skiing) and better optimized for search engines (alternately, segment out visitor and recreation-focused information into a separate portal).
- Potential for closer ties with neighboring towns within Columbia County and across border in the Berkshires.
- Marketing/promoting the highway project. Even though construction is likely years away, increasing awareness could attract new businesses to downtown & cause “old” businesses to re-invest/expand services.

#### **THREATS**

- Inaction in short and long term will lead to inability to retain / motivate citizens and draw in visitors to the area
- Failure to improve downtown area will perpetuate vicious cycle of under-development and lack of use

**Vision:**

**The Copake Town Center** is a livable community for the elderly and families, and a center of activity that people from within and outside of the Town of Copake want to visit for recreational, cultural and historic activities.

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***Taconic Shores***

**STRENGTHS**

- Taconic Shores is a private community with the highest concentration of year round weekenders' homes that support industry in the rest of the town.
- Taconic Shores also has a high percentage of fulltime residents who are raising families.
- There is a real sense of community between full & part time residents.
- The privacy and serene beauty of the lake is very attractive for home seekers.
- The Shores attracts residents and guests who enjoy other resources in the community.
- Taconic Shore residents provide jobs for many tradesmen in the community.
- The lake provides a diversity of recreation (using low power motors <10hp) for residents and guests.

**WEAKNESSES**

- Most of the non-resident activity takes place in the summer, and therefore the strengths do not provide benefits throughout the year.
- Improvements to the infrastructure are totally dependent on community residents.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Taconic Shores could be ideal community to pilot alternative energy solutions (solar and water).
- Residents of the Shores are more likely to shop in the Copake Town Center because of its proximity.

**THREATS**

- The lake requires constant vigilance and funding to keep it healthy.
- Pollution of the lake from the Roe Jan River and other sources is a growing concern.
- Viability of the dam that enables the community environment.

**Vision:**

**Taconic Shores** is a community known for alternative energy solutions and a pristine waterfront that contributes to the vibrancy of the Copake Town Center.

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## ***Copake Falls***

### **STRENGTHS**

- Taconic State Park (TSP) generates jobs and recreation opportunities for residents and brings thousands of visitors to the hamlet each year. The park provides swimming, hiking, biking and camping opportunities for visitors. Bash Bish Falls is a beautiful part of the TSP. The park also includes historic treasures focused around the iron ore mines including a furnace, workshop with original tools, original iron workers homes and many other original structures. The Ore Pit is the lake that was created when the iron ore mining stopped. It is a wonderful swimming area and another beautiful feature of the TSP.
- The existence of a segment of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail
- The Roeliff Jansen Historical Society Museum
- The Taconic Wayside Inn, Depot Deli, and Bash Bish Bicycle businesses
- Many historic homes and churches, many built during the era of the Copake Iron Works industry
- Small town, friendly atmosphere where everyone knows almost everyone.

### **WEAKNESSES**

- Properties in the heart of the hamlet which are not owned by residents, and are poorly maintained, detracting from its historic ambiance.
- Potential cut-backs in state funding for the parks. The town government and citizens of Copake should be encouraged to be actively involved in lobbying the state legislature and governor to allocate funds to keep our parks open.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Two new citizens groups: the Copake Falls Day Committee and Friends of Taconic State Park are citizen activist groups that promote the attractions of the hamlet and the park. The Friends group is actively seeking grant monies to preserve the historic iron works buildings, particularly the furnace, and develop the historic district as a tourist destination. The Copake Falls Day Committee is working on its third annual event, scheduled for the third week in August, which features artists, gardens, and recreation opportunities in Copake Falls.
- The Roeliff Jansen Historical Society, another group of citizen volunteers, is researching the historic houses and buildings of the hamlet, with the goal of putting together a walking tour of the hamlet, with information on its historic buildings.
- Continued enlistment of the support of Copake Falls' three businesses: Bash Bish Bicycle, The Depot Deli, and Taconic Wayside Inn, to promote them for tourists.
- Winds in the Wilderness, a new group offering classical music concerts performed in the historic Church of St. John in the Wilderness, should be encouraged to continue its

successful first series of three concerts. These concerts brought many new visitors to the hamlet.

#### **THREATS**

- The State has cut funds to the park system and could cut the funding for the Copake Falls TSP, which would dramatically alter the landscape of the town. It would reduce the number of tourists that come to Copake Falls as well as remove the major forms of recreation in the township. For instance, people come from Hillsdale, Great Barrington and Millerton to swim. If the hours the Ore Pit is open are reduced, there would be fewer people visiting from neighboring towns. The Ore Pit is also a draw for crowds that are visiting the concerts in nearby towns.

#### **Vision:**

**Copake Falls** is an active center for the Copake tourism initiative, optimally leveraging all of its recreational, historical and cultural resources. Local businesses thrive as a result of this activity.

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### ***West Copake***

#### **STRENGTHS**

- The existence of Camp Pontiac, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest employer in the town of Copake and the largest employer in West Copake.
- There are 2 other camps in the hamlet
- The benefit of several Lakes which add to the tourist environment and economics of the Hamlet.
- The sale to new owners of Oleana Campsites with membership in KOA and the improvements to the property including a possible store for public use.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Contact between the hamlet and town with the Etra Bros, owners of Camp Pontiac, has not been positive. There are several possible opportunities for the enhanced use of these existing facilities.
- Better contact with Camp Pontiac and the other 2 Camps in West Copake.
- Problems with lake management will inhibit this growth.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- More tourism and greater utilization of existing facilities.

#### **THREATS**

- The continued deterioration of real estate values.
- The heavy burden of real estate taxes causing retirees, second homers and full year residents to abandon their commitment to the Hamlet.

**Vision:**

**West Copake** benefits from the over-arching strategy for economic development through tourism and greater utilization of existing facilities.

## ***Copake Lake***

### **STRENGTHS**

- The Golf Course is a resource that supports the tourism industry in the rest of the town.
- The Golf Course restaurant stays open all year (5 days a week).
- The Marinas offer dining (and dinner theater) in the summer.
- The Marinas and golf course provide jobs, mostly in the summer.
- The lake attracts residents and guests who enjoy other resources in the community.
- Lake residents provide jobs for many tradesmen in the community.
- The lake provides a winter sports venue (snowmobiles and ice fishing).
- Bird roads provide affordable housing for middle class families.

### **WEAKNESSES**

- Most of the activity takes place between Memorial Day and Labor Day, and therefore the strengths do not provide benefits throughout the year.
- Relatively few residents are full time.
- There is limited public access to the lake.
- Spring and Fall there is little activity on the lake.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Cooperate with reasonable requests for the Golf Course and marinas to invest in expanding their businesses.
- Encourage more businesses in the lake hamlet, e.g. take-out food, year-round convenience store.
- Cooperate with reasonable requests to convert seasonal homes into full time homes.
- Encourage full timers and part timers to purchase memberships at the Golf Course rather than golf elsewhere.
- Adopt policies that will not force full time middle class families to leave the Bird roads.

## THREATS

- The lake requires constant vigilance and funding to keep it pristine.
- Some of the older houses around the lake threaten polluting the lake.
- If the Golf Course isn't successful there has been past pressure to turn it into a housing development.

### Vision:

**Copake Lake** is a community with half the population being full timers that includes middle class families, retirees and working professionals.

Residents can walk to purchase a newspaper or milk all year round.

The golf course and other businesses provide a thriving off-season venue like cross-country skiing, etc., that attracts locals and visitors.

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## *Craryville*

### STRENGTHS

- Taconic Hills School
- RT. 23 main road from Hudson & Taconic Parkway. To Mass. (the Berkshires)
- RT. 7 / 11 / 23 intersection
- Post Office
- Near school , many pass through every day
- Available land
- Sir William Farm & Market
- Old Train Station, track bed as hiking or bike trail

### WEAKNESSES

- Old market is derelict (North/West of Intersection)
- Random Harvest is closed (North/East of Intersection)
- Junk Yard, with a possible swamp behind (further east)
- Not many businesses

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Try to get traffic to slow down so people will see/stop/shop
- Try to get new business into old buildings or build new
- There was interest from Salisbury Bank, can we follow though?
- Encourage "Sir William" to do farm tours and get involved with "Columbia County Bounty"
- Create a "business park" (clean operation)

- Craryville needs to be cleaned up and further developed. Try to obtain grant money to upgrade the junk yard and to possibly create a business park. Also explore possible available farm or vacant land for affordable housing south of rt.23 / west of rt. 11.

#### **THREATS**

- Hillsdale moving the town line ½ mile south
- Nothing being improved or done!

#### **Vision :**

**Craryville** is a hub and crossroad within, and an entrance to, the 'Town of Copake'.

Ideal location for:

Business park

Farms

Affordable housing

### ***North Copake***

#### **STRENGTHS**

- The activities at the new library could stimulate this part of the hamlet.
- A year round program at Catamount could also affect the residents of North Copake. This is especially true on the end of Breezy Hill Road.
- The Roe Jan State Park has potential. Still in its formative stage.
- This section of Copake has amazing views and is extremely beautiful.
- A major state highway (22) runs through the middle.
- A large percentage of state land that can be leveraged to support the Rail Trail initiative.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- There is no need to go to the Copake Town Center for shopping purposes. Hillsdale supplies all that is necessary.
- The northern section of the town, especially north of the Roe Jan school, is perceived as Hillsdale. That is also true of the end of Breezy Hill Road that is in the hamlet.
- Over time, very little has been done by the town to incorporate the northern section of the hamlet into the overall Copake community.
- There is a physical separation at the northern tip of Copake from the remainder of the town. This is hard to overcome.
- The Roe Jan School is slowly decaying without any signs of future use.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- The activities at the library would seem to be the greatest opportunity. Although the library is shared among several towns, it is still in Copake. The town could schedule programs in the multi-purpose room geared to Copake residents. This is also true of the

new state park. These are stretches because the two facilities are perceived to be in Hillsdale.

- The old Roe Jan School could be turned into many different things – all would require money.
- A medical arts facility similar to Valatie Medical Arts would help meet community needs and enhance North Copake as a commercial center.

## THREATS

A drive could be initiated to have a referendum put on the ballot so that the northern section of the town on 22 could become part of Hillsdale. There have been rumors to that effect.

### Vision :

The proximity to Hillsdale and location on Route 22 enables **North Copake** to become a strong commercial center for businesses that need to depend on high traffic to be successful. These initiatives include a Medical Arts facility and reuse of the old Roe Jan School consistent with the overall goals of the comprehensive plan.

## NEXT STEPS

The Copake Economic Advisory Board proposes the following steps:

- Share this document with the Town Board and other key constituencies in the community to stimulate community dialog on these ideas. These constituencies may include:
  - Planning Board
  - Zoning Board of Appeals
  - Park and Recreation Committee
  - Conservation Resources Advisory Committee
  - Environmental Committee
  - Columbia County Planning & Economic Development Department
- Continue to dialog with the Comprehensive Planning Committee to ensure alignment of CEAB activities with the final Comprehensive Plan.
- Identify selected initiatives the CEAB can undertake that are not dependent on the final Comprehensive Plan.