

Minutes of Comprehensive Planning Committee  
Oct. 13, 2009, 7:30pm  
Copake Park Building

Members Present: Roberta Roll, Harvey Weber, Russ Davis, Jeanne Mettler, Dan Haas, Marcia Becker, Bill Kiernan, George Beneke, Frank Peteroy

Members Absent: Fiona Hutchinson, Charles Dodson

Members of the Business Community: Lewis Johnson, Jacob Johnson, Diana Jamieson - kitchen and bath design, Diane Shadic - carwash, Marcia Peteroy - Sunrise/Sunset B&B, Nancy Rutter - Key Bank, Mac Simms, Gina Hosier - canine B&B, Mrs. Biondi (mother of Gina Hosier), Joe Flood - Eastern Well Drillers, Bob Rosegarten - artist, Doreen Rappaport - author, Leslie Wood - Leslie Wood Research, Lindsay LeBrecht - Copake Realty.

Our focus group was the "bricks and mortar" business community. Ms. Mettler began with an overview of the comp plan process and our work thus far. She also spoke about the CEAB meeting "Around the Clock" on Oct. 20 and urged business owners to attend, as it will specifically address the hamlet of Copake. Dr. Beneke let the group know that we are seeking input and are open to any and all ideas. Ms. Mettler put out the questions, How can Copake help your business thrive in 15-20 years? What are the things that stand in your way? What are the issues facing you? What can we do? What are some solutions? Mr. Flood spoke of taxes, citing the example of the expansion in Millerton in the early 90's when businesses were given a ten year period to bring their tax payments up to the full amount, paying a 10% increase each year. Ms. Wood said that internet access was key - right now it's expensive and not very accessible. Ms. Rappaport agreed, saying it is not dependable. Mr. Weber said we need better cell service. Mr. Flood thought that cell tower restrictions are too strong. Ms. Biondo said Verizon was coming into Ancram, why not here? She also said (as secretary for the Young at Hearters) that the economy is bad for seniors. They used to get money from the town, but now they get nothing. Ms. Mettler asked that we keep to the topic of business for this meeting. Ms. Rutter talked about the need for businesses in town -- a movie theatre, general store, cafe, etc. Ms. Biondo said that the Copake Theatre Co. at the Grange had been a great thing, now gone. People are afraid of change. Ms. Mettler told of the businesses that were in town during her childhood and asked why are they gone? Ms. Biondo said that the wrong people are owning them. Ms. Wood said that people are going to larger, big box stores and using the internet. Ms. Rutter disagreed, saying that the general store was great and if it was there again, people would use it. There are so many local products that get sent to NYC; why not have them here too. Mr. Beneke said that a major factor is that in the 1950's, the bypass was created - Copake Flats; we are not at an intersection. Ms. Peteroy

said that there were no family members or other younger people who stepped up to take over the stores. As people get older they tend to return to the area. As a B&B owner she hears several complaints: Housing Resources signs, it is a depressed area and the old school closed, Rt. 7A is confusing. Mr. Rosegarten said that we have "turned off" the residents and weekenders; there is no reason for them to go downtown and it's embarrassing. Ms. Mettler offered the idea of success breeding success and the converse idea. Ms. Biondo said that everything looks depressed and we have four eyesores in town. Mr. Flood said that many years ago, Larry Brown made a proposal to sell to the town the property on the righthand side as you come into town from the south entrance (where the old RR station was) and convert it into a welcome center and ballfield. The town rejected the offer. Mr. Weber told us that Austerlitz is putting together an historic town. We could do the same here; we have a history of three native American tribes and there could be a museum.

Ms. Mettler asked if zoning was an issue. The general consensus was that it was not. Mr. Rosegarten said that no one in the government had a vision. Mr. Weber thought that having decorative lights put up in town around the holidays would be a good idea. Ms. Rutter stated that we need jobs and places to gather and socialize, but if taxes are so punitive, no one will want to do business here. Dr. Beneke told how he decided to expand his veterinary hospital without government stimulus money or help from the town. He employs fourteen people. He was told that he needed to see if the SCOZ would impose any restrictions, which it didn't. The building inspectors were very helpful, and he employed all local contractors and suppliers (Herrington's). Mr. Flood stated that the SCOZ limits building size to 7500 sq. ft. Some houses are bigger than that and new business buildings may be larger. Dr. Beneke said we might want to change zoning that is extremely restrictive. Mr. Flood stated that it takes months and months to get permits for businesses and the costs are too high. Dr. Beneke said that some of Millerton's success is due to the restrictions in Salisbury and Lakeville. Ms. Hosier said that when she decided to open her business, she had a difficult time finding property that allowed her to have a home business. Also, there were restrictions on signage. Mr. Rosegarten said that no one advocates for business. Ms. Rutter talked about keeping the young people here. Ms. Wood said that she has offered jobs, but that young people need a social life and network. The CEAB had a meeting with the principal of TH, who said that young people (18-25 yrs.) don't want to work here because there is no "action," nightlife, etc. Ms. Rappaport said we can't provide this; let's do what we can; obtain better internet and cell service; and the farmers' market would be a boon. Ms. Shadic said that the previously proposed storage business by the south entrance to town would have been a good thing. Ms. Wood said that was not a viable business. Ms. LeBrecht offered the example of what Jason Nastke did as mayor of Valatie. They had a revolving fund at the local bank to give loans to local businesses. Ms. Wood said that

sounded like microfinancing. Ms. Rutter said the Community Reinvestment Act does this type of thing.

Ms. Mettler asked what are the solutions. Ms. Rutter cited the example of Hudson giving loans and incentives for restoration of old buildings. Ms. LeBrecht offered the idea of a business “package” which would streamline the process, as well as tax incentives. Both Mr. Flood and Dr. Beneke agreed, saying that tax incentives would not affect anyone else’s taxes. Ms. Peteroy asked how do we get businesses to come in. Ms. LeBrecht said we need to recruit. Ms. Rappaport stated that we need to be tenacious in making the town government act. Ms. Rutter told us that she is on the Columbia Council of the Arts and that there is an “art crawl” in Millerton on Oct. 24. There will also be an arts career night at TH on Oct. 26; they will also establish an artist mentoring program. We could get involved in these kinds of activities. We could do also dowhat Pittsfield did - feature arts and crrafts in empty storefront windows. Ms. Wood said that in Pittsfield the buildings were also made available to the artists for work studios. Someone asked if our town govt. could do that. Ms. Mettler asked, could we have more festivals? Ms. Rutter said there are many artists “hiding in the hills” who could participate. Ms. Zelley thought that we should not wait for govt. She spoke of the success of Copake Falls Day and how it has spawned a chamber music series for this winter. Ms. Mettler encouraged more discussion on whether govt. or grassroots efforts would be more effective. Mr. Flood thought that anyone going through the govt. regs. for opening a general store would have to wait too long and would go somewhere else. Ms. LeBrecht said that Copake has a reputation for being difficult to work with. She also asked Ms. Rutter if the arts were being overused, and thought perhaps Copake could find an agricultural niche. How about a festival with blacksmiths and other craftspeople? Ms. Rutter said crafts, quilts, etc. were perfectly viable. Copake Fun Day was packed. Mr. Weber wondered what it would take to put an art gallery into the general store. Ms. Rutter said that insurance would be an issue. Mr. Weber asked if we could get grants. Mr. Rosegarten said you don’t need money to put on an art exhibit; Copake Falls Day had over 180 people turn out in the rain for the art show. Dr. Beneke said that we need direction and vision, and with the group’s input, we will create a blueprint of what Copake should look like in the future.

Ms. Mettler asked if there should be an industrial park. Mr. Davis asked if the town should be acquiring land for various uses and/or should the town buy the general store. Mr. Flood said the town shouldn’t be going into business. He also told about his business which was zoned for expansion, but the town didn’t want a big building, so he moved to a new location. He also spoke about the Amish county and how they have industry and small shops all next to each other; he wondered how they survive. Ms. Shadic said that the SCOZ is in the way and that there is no place to go, no way to create new businesses. Ms. Peteroy countered that Copake is a big area

(includes Copake Falls, Craryville, etc.) and there is plenty of space. Ms. Roll asked Ms. Shadic what types of business she would like to see and where, but she again stated that there were too many restrictions. Mr. Rosegarten said we need a partnership with the town govt. and a philosophy. Mr. Davis asked if the town should create a water/sewage system and make shovel-ready sites. Mr. Flood said that the area around the flats could be developed. He also advocated a new entrance into town, creating a service road along the same pathway as the current road, but closer to Rt. 22. Ms. Mettler asked what type of businesses should we have. Ms. Rutter said any kind of service business - accounting, bakery, dentist; she cited the restaurant Local 111 in Philmont, in a converted auto body shop. Philmont is not easily accessible, but the restaurant draws people. Ms. Wood said there are a couple of businesses in Copake Falls that are internet-dependent; they create such a huge volume of business that two postmasters are needed. She also said she would like to see the general store as a coop, and that industry comes with "too much baggage." Mr. Flood agreed, saying that he would rather see ten businesses with ten employees than one business with one hundred employees. Mr. Simms said we need to develop a sense of community; we are split - weekenders, fulltimers, old timers, etc. The arts are important because they unite people; what are other ways we can come together? He cautioned us to think about how zoning and planning function, and thought people tended to exaggerate the problems. He also said the town has the ability to set up building districts. (Ms. Becker said these are called PCID's - planned commercial and industrial districts). Mr. Simms asked are we going to ship products out or bring them in. What do we want for housing? Mr. Flood said that a PCID is a floating zone. Ms. Peteroy asked, if someone came in and wanted to buy property, how long would it take to put a shovel in the ground - a year? Ms. Becker said not that long. Ms. Zellely asked that we not limit our thinking because of current conditions or ideas and was encouraged by the ideas and visions put forth thus far. Ms. Mettler made a list of the ideas - Art and agriculture as destination, town govt. support - philosophical and material (infrastructure), small professional businesses, tax incentives, streamline approval for business, general store as an anchor. Ms. Jamieson said the town should support business, not industry. Mr. Simms said that High Voltage is a great business. It was noted that it is environmentally friendly as well. Mr. Rosegarten felt that the county needs to do the roadwork on 7A before anything else can happen as far as lighting, benches, etc. Ms. Peteroy agreed that we need a "band-aid" approach for now - art in the windows, painting, etc.

The group was thanked and the business portion of the meeting was commenced.

Approval of the minutes from Sept. 29 was put off until next time.

Ms. Irwin has rescheduled her meeting with us - it will take place Oct. 26 at 6:30 pm. She will email the synopsis of the survey about six days before that date. The vision workshop will be from 9:30-11:30 am. Ms. Roll suggested we have refreshments at 9 instead

of 9:30 as initially planned. Mr. Davis has posters for the workshop

and we can pick them up at the pharmacy. Dr. Beneke will do something with the old signs for the survey. Ms. Mettler and Ms. Roll will do publicity for the event; articles will be sent to the papers. Ms. Irwin sent out emails to those who gave them on the survey. It was suggested that we have a focus group for families; Dr. Beneke suggested Little League and soccer groups. Mr. Haas and Ms. Roll suggested that weekenders would be an important group. However, we are running out of time for scheduling more groups. Ms. Mettler received an email from a weekender asking why the vision workshop was being held in Nov. when most weekenders are not here much. Ms. Roll asked about grant deadlines. The Sept. and Oct. deadlines are not available yet. Ag & Markets is due in Jan. Ms. Mettler reported that at the budget workshop on Sept. 29 she let the board know that we would need \$15,000 this coming year.

We discussed tonight's group, noting that the focus was greatly on the hamlet of Copake. Dr. Beneke reminded us of Amenia's discussion of whether to move the hamlet. We discussed "hidden" businesses of one or two people, the question of do stores follow people or vice-versa, the need for internet and cell service, and the role of service businesses. Dr. Beneke said his business serves 12,000 cats and dogs. We discussed the question of which is more effective - the role of government or the people. Some thought that the govt. needs to act more decisively to support the town and make things happen. How can we enable both the citizens and the govt. to act? Town planning is complicated and the town planning board works hard. Mr. Davis cited an example of town incompetence when a junior building inspector made him stop work on an extension and creasote the lumber in contact with the ground (a DEC violation). Ms. Becker said that was a case of poor training. Dr. Beneke said we should be thinking about how we can have guidelines that are opportunities to get things done. Be proactive, not reactive.

The next meetings will be with Ms. Irwin on Oct. 26, Arts and Culture on Oct. 27, and community service orgs. on Oct. 29

Ms. Becker made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Roll seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll