

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee
Oct. 29, 2009, 7:30 pm
Copake Town Hall

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

Members of Community Service Organizations: Richard Neal, director of development, Camphill Village; Jos Smeele, Camphill Village; Bob Charnin, pastor, West Copake Reformed Church; Ned Schneier, Library; Flora Berquist, Copake Methodist Church.

Ms. Mettler gave an overview of the comp. plan process and encouraged people to take a "long view" in our conversations tonight. She asked participants to give a brief history of their organizations and mission.

Mr. Neal said Camphill was started on Sept. 29, 1961. The first residents were from Great Britain, seeking a dignified life for their families. Today there are about 240 people, 103 with developmental disorders, about 15 elderly residents, and other workers. There are about 40 long-term co-workers. There are also about 40 young people who come from all over the world to spend one to three years fulfilling their community service work. There are 22 households; a typical house consists of co-workers and disabled residents. There is an emphasis on agriculture; the residential area covers about 100 acres; there is forest, which yields sap for maple syrup; a 2-acre vegetable garden; and a large herb garden. Fountain Hall is a community performance hall; they would like to have more interface with the town. Camphill is part of a large community; there are 12 in the U.S, 106 in the world. Mr. Smeele added that there are 26 employees: administrators, maintenance workers, therapists, a nurse and a doctor.

Mr. Charnin said that last year the Reformed Church celebrated its 250th anniversary. The present building is from 1891. These days, churches are struggling and last Sunday they had 69 adults and 15 children in attendance. The congregation is from Dutchess County, Ancram, Copake, and Hudson. Last year they sent a mission team to Haiti to work with handicapped children and set up a veterinary clinic. They also began a community garden for the Hillsdale community food pantry. This year they have sent the team back to Haiti and expanded the garden. Mr. Charnin said he was concerned about the culture, the spirituality, morality and humanity of this community. He said there are many people with addictions and very difficult home situations. He sees the church as a light for people in this area.

Mr. Schneier said the library is 90 years old and has been in the current Hillsdale location for 70 years. It is 1,500 sq. ft., has

3,000 card holders and is in the top 10 highest circulating libraries in the Mid-Hudson system. It has 19,000 volumes and 200,000 visitors a year. The tax rate is very low - \$6.50 per \$100,000. They receive \$65,000 a year from Copake, Hillsdale and Ancram (which contributes a very tiny amount), as well as a very small amount from the state. 55% of the budget comes from public funds, 45% from donations and bequests. The library runs on volunteers and there is a very active Friends group. They have outgrown the current space, it is not wheelchair accessible, the fire exit is not great and there is no public bathroom. The new library is currently under construction. They still need to raise funds.

Ms. Berquist said the Methodist Church is 155 years old and is comprised of the church, church house, bargain shop and the parsonage. Their mission is to provide a place of worship. They also procure funds to maintain a neat and pleasing presence on the street. They open their doors to the community through the bargain shop with low prices and free items, as well as the newly launched soup kitchen on the first and third Tues. of every month, with soup, bread, cookies and punch. They had 18 people last week and would like to expand. Ms. Mettler asked the group what issues they faced that perhaps the comp. plan could address to help them fulfill their missions. Mr. Schneier advocated consolidation of services in the towns. At least 3 or 4 towns should hire an administrator. He cited the example of when stimulus funds were first announced, the Town board knew very nothing about it. The library hired a fundraising consultant. They wrote to and visited Gillebrand, Schumer and Murphy. They will receive \$320,000 for the water project and green initiatives. They will receive \$500,000 in govt. grants, and \$300,000 in more local grants (e.g. Berkshire Taconic Foundation). They spent \$115,000 to pay for the fundraiser (Nina Mankin, 5-6 months full time), secretary and office. He emphasized that it is very hard to get grants; you need to know how to write the applications successfully. He said that we could probably hire a graduate student for about \$28-30,000. They also received a state council on the arts grant of \$25,000. He said many things come to the town govt. that the Board knows nothing about; a shared admin. would know what to do and communicate with all the towns. We could also consolidate such things as bids for sand and gravel.

Mr. Neal had several ideas. 1. The villagers would like to go to town but there is very little there, so revitalizing the center of Copake would help them. 2. He would like to see a public access area to Copake Lake for swimming, boating, etc. 3. He sees protecting the landscape and farming as a big issue for Copake, as well as the whole Northeast. 4. He would like to see the road through to Camphill remain unpaved, and would also like to see a 15 mph speed limit. 5. Camphill is working with an architect in Millbrook on a master plan. Many buildings need renovation. The plan will be finished at the end of Jan. and they will need to come before the town for approval. 6. He would like to bring more people into the village through the

bakery, cafe and shop. 7. Major concerns are protecting the ecology and agriculture of the area. 8. Healthy energy sources is also a priority. They have renovated two houses from the foundation up; they put in solar, which powers 70% of the electricity. Mr. Schneier agrees that green is a good way to go, but says it is complex and that we should learn from each other. The library will spend much less on utility costs and will pay for the solar in 6 years, the geothermal in 8 years. Mr. Smeele concurred about sharing ideas. He spoke about outside infrastructure being less than ideal, specifically citing Fairpoint Communications. Camphill has installed their own wireless, but it is not ideal. They get T1 out of Albany; it is cheaper than Fairpoint, but still way too expensive. Mr. Schneier said that T3 is the fastest they could get, but it is still very slow. There is a fiberoptic cable running along Rt. 22, but it is dead (black). He has been told that there is no market. He has talked with Richard Harrington, a consultant, about this problem. He mentioned TH which is also on the T3 system. The library will have 20 computers. Mr. Neal said he spends 70% of his time on the computer and needs an infrastructure that functions well. Currently, there is not enough bandwidth. There is no internet in the village except in the office. Mr. Schneier mentioned the fact that the computers at the library are a tourism draw. There were several more comments about the poor service from Fairpoint.

Mr. Charnin said that although this is a beautiful area, there are many disintegrating families. He sees widespread cocaine and heroin use; he knows people who grow it and people who use it, shooting heroin between their toes to hide their usage. His two boys went to public high school where there were 1-11 National Merit scholars in each class. The school made education a priority and challenged the students, who rated in the top percentiles in testing. The administration and teachers were invested in all the students excelling academically. He doesn't see that focus at TH. We need to push all the students, as well as the gifted ones. Sports are often pushed at the peril of education. He feels this is a hard community to work with. Ms. Mettler suggested that education is not something we, as a committee, can change, and asked him to talk about the community, morality, etc. One idea Mr. Charnin had was to have a "heritage morning," which would focus on our cultural and historical heritage. He sees the focus on athletics all weekend as being misguided. He questioned what good is building and improving infrastructure if the family life is decaying. Ms. Mettler commented that others have also talked about young people not having constructive things to do and places to gather.

Mr. Schneier said that he had to leave the meeting, but made a last comment about wanting interface with theatre and other groups. Mr. Neal agreed, saying there is a young villager who knows computers very well; she wanted to work in the office but there was no opening. Perhaps she could work at the library. Also, he volunteered to donate cookies to the soup kitchen. Mr. Schneier said the library

will have a space to show movies and have theatre and other cultural events. We need to interface and find volunteers. He concluded with some final financial figures, saying they needed \$400,000 to finish the library completely, \$200,000 to finish the building. \$1.6 million has been spent and there are \$400,000 in pledges. The only institutions who lent them money were Key Bank and Salisbury Bank and Trust. First Niagara is focusing on buying up banks, not on lending, he said. They have people from all three towns [Ancram, Copake, Hillsdale] on the board, which has worked well, and they are happy to give tours anytime.

Ms. Mettler said we hoped the comp. plan would bring people together. Mr. Schneier left the meeting.

Mr. Charnin remembered another important activity of the church - last year they had a community Thanksgiving dinner for 35 people; this year they will host 75. He felt that for a tiny church, they accomplish a lot. He said if he had money, he would start an "Academy of Excellence" to augment regular school. He feels strongly that we have "dumbed down" education. He has no answers, but thinks the peripheral things "won't do it." He asked why are kids moving away? Why are farms used for growing trees? The people have lost their rootedness and the feeling of belonging. We have "bifurcation in our minds." He said he gets emails which raise fear and produce reactivity instead of proactivity.

Mr. Neal supported the idea of a town administrator, saying if he/she knew of a soup kitchen, she could call people to ask for donations of bread, help, etc. Life is complex and we need someone to help make connections, something Camphill is very aware of with its mission of helping people with many needs. Ms. Mettler brought up Mr. Neal's point about wanting more interaction between the village and the town. She also wanted to know more about the soup kitchen. Ms. Berquist said that the idea came from a senior at TH. Her mother goes to South America every year on a help mission. She commented that so much of what Mr. Charnin said is what was said by her generation about their children. Mr. Smeele said that Copake center as a destination is not even an option for the co-workers; they drive half an hour to Hudson to go to Walmart, etc. When the bar in Copake was open, the young people would meet there. Ms. Berquist thought that the town govt. had to make beautifying the town center a priority. She said the church tries to be a place where people gather - at the bargain shop people visit, talk and there is a friendly atmosphere. Yoga classes are also held there. Mr. Neal said he is grateful for the services that the town provides: roadwork, police help - e.g. searching for a lost villager all night long last winter. They have a vulnerable population and are dependent on these services. He appreciates the "high quality of humanity at work." Ms. Berquist thought that a fitness center would be a good addition to the town. Mr. Smeele said there are customers, but how do you get a business started. Mr. Charnin thanked us for giving them the opportunity to voice their opinions and needs. Ms. Mettler encouraged everyone to come to the

Nov. 7 meeting. Mr. Neal said Camphill was having an ecological weekend at that time (Fri - Sun) - examining best ecological practices for all Camphill communities. He also commented that Camphill loved the Copake Theatre and was sorry to see it go. Mr. Peteroy asked if the planning, zoning and building processes had been reasonable. Mr. Smeele said it had been reasonable and flexible. Ms. Mettler asked if people at Camphill would be willing to serve on committees. Mr. Neal said yes, there are some talented individuals. He spoke of John Stebbins and one of the farmers who had served in the Fire Dept. for years. They have a CSA and would love to participate in the town more. Ms. Roll asked if they would be willing to contribute to the farmers market next summer. - Yes. Ms. Mettler asked if they would sell products in town. Mr. Smeele said their focus is mainly on serving their community. Mr. Neal said they are too busy to run a store - they already run two houses in Hudson and an elder center in Chatham. The participants were thanked and the business portion of the meeting commenced. We talked about how moved we were by this group's dedication and vision. We discussed the interrelationship of economics and connectedness. Mr. Davis spoke about the school district - how Ockawamick and Roe Jan became one building/school, eliminating the old rivalry and bringing unity and a sense of community. Ms. Mettler said she sent an email to Ms. Irwin about our feeling that any comments in the survey that are slanderous should not be released. She will go through the comments with Ms. Irwin and will err on the side of "taking it out." Mr. Peteroy talked about the letter he wrote to the town board about the autobody shops, saying the town wants to endorse the idea of a junkyard. He said no one is licensed to be a junkyard. He also commented that Mr. Cascino has invested a lot of money in his property and the place looks good; people say things but they don't have the facts. Ms. Mettler said that Congressman Murphy, or a representative, will come to do a flag ceremony after, instead of at the end of, our meeting on Nov. 7. Also, Harry Dodson is supposed to run the upcoming Ag. meeting but Mr. Kiernan has not heard from him. She will send out a letter to potential participants for the Tourism focus group. We discussed the compilation of survey results and agreed that there were still some questions about the data. We also agreed that the upcoming vision meeting will be critical to our assessment of River Street's performance. A few additional comments were made about tonight's focus group. We acknowledged that Camphill villagers are a wonderful addition to events in town, but that some people may find their behavior difficult or strange, and that extra care sometimes needs to be taken with them. Strong themes were communications, communication, infrastructure and community, as well as downtown revitalization. There were some comments made about the lack of community here, and a feeling that many people don't care. Building inspections are sometimes not carried out, and codes are not enforced well enough. Mr. Peteroy told how he built his B&B, although it was not a listed use in 1996.

However, the state regs. allowed it. When he applied for a sign, he received a letter saying he had to apply for a variance to get the building approved. We talked about the idea of meeting with the building inspectors, but decided that we had already given that invitation with the govt. group previously.

Ms. Roll made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Davis seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll