

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee  
Dec. 17, 2009, 7:00 pm  
Copake Town Hall

Members Present: Marcia Becker, Jeanne Mettler, Roberta Roll, Dan Haas, Rus Davis, Charles Dodson, Harvey Weber, Bill Kiernan, Frank Peteroy

Members Absent: Dr. George Beneke

River Street Member: Margaret Irwin

Ms. Irwin said that CC is coming closer to having mapping; she was told it would be ready in Jan. Then we will be able to create digital maps of parcel data/tax lots. Right now the boundaries are not clear. There are some maps available - soil, wetlands, but we can't use the information in GIS; we can't overlay it onto land data, e.g. ag. lots. Mr. Dodson said right now the parcel maps are not accurate. Ms. Becker asked if the information goes to the assessors office. Ms. Irwin said yes. She also said Harry Dodson has DEC maps of soil and wetlands. If the county has the GIS maps when we need them, we will use them; otherwise we could do them by hand. Ms. Mettler said it would cost \$1,000 to do that. Mr. Dodson thought we should put a paragraph in the comp. plan saying that the purchase of GIS software to update maps as needed is required. It is also a good tool to have for other matters. Ms. Irwin concurred, citing planning and zoning needs. Mr. Dodson mentioned that GIS allows one to control the size of the maps. Ms. Irwin said some counties will print maps for the towns, and she brought up the idea of combining assessment functions of area towns. She said that in the contract with River Street is \$5,000 for data gathering and interaction with CPC to prepare a summary of findings for an ag. profile. It will follow the outline of the ag. and farmland protection plan and grant application. There is no money available now at Ag. & Markets, but we can submit the application. Ms. Mettler agreed, saying this is very important. Ms. Irwin said the information they compile will determine the action plan. The the farmland protection plan will get into more detail. Ms. Mettler wanted to clarify that H. Dodson was helping her with this data collecting for Ag. & Markets. Ms. Irwin said yes, and the \$25,000 grant will take us to the next level of detail. Mr. Dodson said the plan might state that we want to support crop development. The farmland protection plan, funded by the \$25,000, will identify ways to do this. He gave a hypothetical example of the comp. plan supporting yogurt-making; the detail is finding out how much money each farm would need. (e.g. Coach Farms got a lot of money when farmers said they would return to farming goats). It was brought up that we need to look at purchase of development right, tax relief and the issue of land use - a lot of acreage is in ag. and residential and open space, none in commercial.

Ms. Mettler asked Ms. Irwin to speak about their conversation about the last meeting, with Harry Dodson. Ms. Irwin said that Ms. Mettler told her that we were not happy with that ag. meeting. Ms. Becker said she was struck by the fact that farms were increasing in western MA. Ms. Irwin said they have state funding. Ms. Roll said that the meeting had seemed in some ways theoretical and somewhat superficial, not addressing the needs of farmers here or practical solutions. Ms. Mettler asked Mr. Beneke if he thought farmers were not "getting it." Ms. Irwin said that most farmers are well informed about land use issues. Mr. Weber asked how many farms are left. Ms. Irwin said that we will know how many when the data collecting is completed; in addition, we will even know how many cows there are. Ms. Becker said she thought the farmers might not have understood what Harry Dodson was trying to convey. Mr.

Davis commented that he did ask questions, but not much detailed information emerged. Ms. Irwin asked if that was true even about information concerning the business end. She noted that milk prices have not been this low in 45 years, and an emergency aid bill was just passed. Mr. Dodson offered that the disconnect we felt was the difference between our long-term goals and the farmers' short-term goals. Ms. Irwin suggested that we could come back together with the farmers or go to some Farm Bureau meetings with concrete suggestions based on the data, e.g. marketing, products. Ms. Mettler said maybe she should ask Mr. Beneke and Mr. Keirnan to talk to Harry Dodson about this idea. Ms. Irwin said that Harry Dodson had told her he learned a lot from the "gripping," e.g. the perceptions about the Scenic Overlay Zone. Mr. Haas commented that it seems that the farmers are against gov't. in general. Ms. Irwin replied that when Ag. & Markets doesn't uphold farmers rights but allows someone to do something clearly not in line with farming, such as the Cascino property, then there is a lack of confidence. Farmers are the caretakers of the land and they don't want to have to sort through a lot of regulations. Farming is under attack. Ms. Becker said yes, and they feel vulnerable. Mr. Weber reminded us of the idea to tax the cows for methane production.

Before we went onto other matters, we approved the minutes of the Nov. 10 meeting, Ms. Becker abstaining. Ms. Mettler said that Art Bassin, Ancram and Tom Carty, Hillsdale will be meeting with us; they are the ones making sure that their comp. plans are being implemented. Mr. Carty suggested having an agenda and Ms. Mettler suggested the consolidation of town services. She said this could be a very important meeting and she asked Mr. Carty if there were other issues he could suggest. Ms. Roll said we ought to think about what we want to find out from them. Ms. Haas suggested that we ask about their comp. plan and approval process. Ms. Mettler said we already did this at our initial meetings. Ms. Irwin suggested we might want to find out about water quality, housing and other regional issues. Mr. Weber asked what areas we could work on together. Ms. Irwin suggested alternative energy. Mr. Dodson suggested communications. Ms. Mettler suggested the court systems, each town having their own at present. Ms. Irwin said the comp. plan focuses on what we can effect, e.g. affordable housing, what development projects are out there now, agriculture. Mr. Dodson asked how we can avoid duplication. Mr. Weber mentioned transportation, wind power and the aquifer. Ms. Irwin mentioned wind maps and distribution through a larger area, and the watershed. Mr. Haas mentioned recreational resources e.g. Rail Trail and TSP. Mr. Dodson brought up a central grants office, saying the state received 2 1/2 million dollars from Rural Electrification to study broadband in rural areas - 1/2 million is for planning for communities with the poorest situation. If we combined forces with Ancram and Hillsdale we would be in a stronger position.

We then discussed the upcoming meetings - Jan. 12 with the Hillsdale and Ancram comp. plan people, and Jan. 21 with young people. Mr. Dodson said we have one contact for the latter. Mr. Weber said there are support groups -e.g. arts groups - for young people that we could contact. Mr. Dodson said he had been talking with the business office at TH. He also asked about the age 25 and above group who work here - e.g. at the country club. Ms. Becker mentioned Jamie Walton.

Mr. Kiernan arrived. The issue of second home owners was brought up. Ms. Becker said we have emails from them which are important. Ms. Irwin asked if we thought we would get other letters. Ms. Mettler said that Ms. Becker says they should be part of our record. Are we addressing their needs and should we have a focus group for them? Ms. Becker asked what if we progress with the comp. plan and then they say it doesn't represent them. Mr. Davis said he thought this was not a problem; we will represent them, we are representing the town and we

have put all the information out there. We have been considering their needs. Mr. Dodson offered that we can analyze the assessment rolls. Ms. Irwin said they need to be reassured that we hear them. Mr. Weber referred to the email complaining that the transfer station is only open on Saturday, so weekenders have to take their garbage home on Sun. - a valid point. He said he was on a Dem. committee when he lived on Staten Island and had to deal with political issues. Ms. Irwin asked us to consider our taxes - \$.80 on \$1.00 comes from residential and 56% comes from second home owners. Mr. Davis said it is a PR issue and we have considered them. Ms. Mettler said the survey went to everyone and the vision workshop had a 50/50 full-time and second home owner attendance. Our next public meeting will be in May. We have an email list (which we need to clean up with Leila at River Street), and we could send out another email oriented toward second home owners. Ms. Roll suggested that we send out a monthly email with a summary of what we have accomplished and discussed thus far. Mr. Peteroy suggested that we let them take the ball and ask them if they would like the minutes sent to them. Ms. Mettler said they are on the website already. The next email that will be going out is a summary of the vision workshop. She asked again about having a focus group. Mr. Dodson said there is a large variety in the second home owners group. We concluded by acknowledging the importance of this group, but thought we did not need to have a separate focus group; we will make their emails a part of our record.

Ms. Irwin asked if we had any comments on the summary of the vision workshop. Mr. Weber said that the school children population has decreased 25%, not 18%. Ms. Irwin asked what was the source of his data. Mr. Weber said the enrollment records. Ms. Irwin said that Claritas uses birth rates and housing records. Mr. Dodson said the summary is 95% the same as a previous report we had that is on the website. Ms. Irwin said this one has just a few changes. We approved the summary. Mr. Dodson said he is compiling all the open-ended questions and will put them on the website. He asked about items that shouldn't go out and Ms. Irwin said it was all corrected. He also said that there was a potential problem with the dimensions of the Excel files and the fact that over 50% of people have dial-up internet service, which is too slow to download all the questions. Therefore, he has broken the information into 5 groups and consolidated the 5,000 responses. He asked if that was satisfactory - answer was yes.

Ms. Irwin then handed out the community profile, saying she finally got information from the police dept. This bound copy is complete, whereas the email she had sent us previously was not. Ms. Becker commented that it is still a draft, and Ms. Irwin said yes it is not complete [finalized].

She would like us to review it and make comments on it. Mr. Davis commented that on p. 11 it talks about the median value of owner occupied units, but we haven't accounted for the housing collapse. Ms. Irwin said yes, Claritas does. He then asked if it was her conclusion that there are fewer renters than home owners who are cost-burdened. She said yes. He cited the listing of residential uses on p. 23, saying that is why the town is in trouble. Mr. Haas asked where the information for the summary of focus group meetings came from. Ms. Irwin said from our notes. Ms. Mettler said that in the summary it was hard to know who said what. Ms. Irwin said we could leave them out. Ms. Mettler said no, we should give a gist of what the consensus was in the focus groups. Mr. Davis noted that information from the 2000 census is used and asked how we can update the information, e.g. for vacant homes. Mr. Dodson said we could use the assessment rolls. Ms. Irwin said that Claritas has projections and estimates but not for all categories; then they will use 2000 info. Mr. Davis commented that then we have data that is way out of date. He cited p. 11 again with the median value home, saying the data doesn't fit

what is happening in the town. Ms. Irwin said the census gives data per capita and per household. Mr. Weber asked about SRO. We had a discussion of what constitutes a household; the question was raised -can a homeless person can be a household? Ms. Irwin said that it is the person(s) living under "one roof" that constitute a household. Mr. Davis asked how we account for the differences. Ms. Irwin replied that affordability is based on median income and median home value, with a ratio of 3:1. Some of it may be driven by the economy. Of the listings in Copake, only 7 are under 160,000 - they are cottages with 2 bedrooms. Prices may be coming down but wages are not going up. Assessments were driven up and they are not coming down now. Our tax rate is \$.80 on \$1.00, and a re-evaluation would give us much higher taxes. Ms. Becker said we need a re-eval. but it is expensive. Mr. Weber said it doesn't have to be; give people cameras and have them take pictures of all the properties. Ms. Irwin said we would be sued.

Ms. Mettler had some questions about the demographics on p. 3. Mr. Dodson thought that the categories of "agree" and "strongly agree" should be combined. He also said we ought to have workshops on town code if we refer to it (p. 21). Ms. Irwin said those workshops typically take place when zoning is redone. Ms. Mettler brought up the issue of the focus group summaries again. Ms. Irwin said that perhaps if they are not part of the profile, then we will avoid needless controversy. The community profile is supposed to be an objective document; perhaps the summaries are too subjective. The final profile will remain bound and will be an appendix to the comp. plan; it is a technical document. Then perhaps the survey results and comments should be separate also. Ms. Mettler said she felt we shouldn't make suggestions or conclusions in this document. Ms. Irwin said she would pull out the survey and focus group info. Ms. Becker said the focus group comments are opinions. Ms. Dodson asked if we could include the census definitions as part of the data. Ms. Mettler suggested that we add a paragraph about the fact that the new census data was not available.

Ms. Irwin then reviewed the data on land use for Copake. 27% is residential, 28% ag., 25 % vacant (residential). 14% is wild, forested (no taxes), 2.2% community, 1% recreational. Ag. and open space is assessed at a lower rate for taxes. 80% of taxes are on residential, 10% from vacant land, 3.5% from commercial. We would have to build an enormous amount to get a significant amount of commercial taxes; doubling it would give us only 7%. Ms. Mettler asked us to think about what services are provided by the town - highway, roads, EMS and fire (small amount), police, park. We pay \$25 per \$1,000, and \$13 of that is for school taxes. Ms. Becker commented that if we give tax breaks then we will not be getting that revenue. Ms. Irwin said that we don't have enough tax breaks to have a huge influx of business. The main factor in opening a business is not the tax break, but how well they think they will do. The question is how to attract business. How many sq. ft. of new comm. business would there need to be to make up 15%? Our tax base analysis is not good news and a re-eval. will be difficult. Growing our way out will not really work - it requires too much building. Residential use will drive our revenue. 50% comes from second home owners; our relationship with them is crucial. Mr. Dodson noted that the second home owner pop. % is larger in Hillsdale. Ms. Irwin said they also have more commercial sq. footage. In Copake 27% is residential land, and second home owners own 60%. The assessed values of second home owners is higher than those of full-time residents. Taxes are \$.56 on \$1.00 for second home owners, \$.47 on \$1.00 for full-timers. We agreed that there was much more to discuss in the comm. profile, so we would email each other about our comments and suggestions, cc'ing Ms. Irwin. She will compile a master list of comments; she would like us to have all comments in by Jan. 11.

We decided to meet in Feb. on the 9th and the 18th.

Mr. Weber said that the groundwater study is on the town website and wanted that to be added to the profile.

We decided to meet with the young people on Jan 21 from 7-8 pm and then have an hour to discuss the profile.

A motion was made to adjourn by Mr. Weber, seconded by Ms. Becker and the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll

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