

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee
March 18, 2010
Copake Town Hall

Members Present: George Beneke, Bill Kiernan, Rus Davis, Marcia Becker, Frank Peteroy, Harvey Weber, Jeanne Mettler, Roberta Roll, Charles Dodson
Members of the CEAB: Arthur Rubenstein, Milbrey Zelle, Leslie Wood, Nancy Schultz, Noah Elkin, Marcia Peteroy

From 7-7:30 pm we conducted a general meeting. The minutes from March 9th were approved with the following corrections: leave out the sentence that says Susan Winchell is taking GIS courses.

Mr. Dodson gave a report on the grants subcommittee, saying we had concluded that we ought to apply for grants for reviewing zoning and for future planning expenses. There was a discussion about our budget. Ms. Mettler will talk to Supervisor Crowley to confirm future budget amounts.

Re: Farmland Protection Strategies report. We agreed that we like the tone of the current, revised report.

Ms. Mettler said that Margaret Irwin could meet with us on April 13th. We agreed to have an extra meeting on March 29th, 30th or 31st. Ms. Mettler will get back to us with the exact date.

Our second meeting in April will be on the 29th. Ms. Mettler suggested that before we meet again, we should send corrections, editorial and otherwise, to the Farmland report to her and she will forward them to Ms. Irwin. The application to Ag. & Markets has to have Town Board approval in the form of a resolution. By our next meeting, we should approve the application and the strategies report, as well as review the vision statements Ms. Irwin sent to us, and the focus group reports. Mr. Dodson questioned whether we have absorbed all the information from the survey, water study and CRC information enough to tackle a vision statement. Ms. Mettler said that most towns do the vision statement first. Mr. Davis said the vision statement is based on the survey; water study and other information need not be considered. There was some discussion of this and then it was decided that we would proceed later with starting to look at the vision statements.

Ms. Mettler said she had received an email from Danny Thomkins asking us if we had any recommendation to the Town Board on the future use of the West Copake firehouse. We discussed the fact that we will want to review all the town property so that can make appropriate recommendations based on the comp. plan. Mr. Peteroy said we shouldn't make a decision now, as we don't know how growth will be. We decided that we would tell the town board that it would be premature for this committee to give an opinion on this or any other property at this time, because we will be reviewing all town holdings as part of our comp. plan process.

At 7:30 members of the CEAB joined us. Ms. Mettler welcomed them and acknowledged their desire to communicate with our committee. Ms. Wood said they are looking for a dialogue. They are looking at today, but having the future vision is critical

to guiding the present. Maybe we could offer each other insights and sharing of information. They don't have an "agenda."

The CEAB members introduced themselves. Nancy Schultz said they had spent time studying the survey results, looking at the strongest agreements in regard to economic development. They did a SWOT for each hamlet and then consolidated themes to prepare the document they brought to us tonight, "Vision for Economic Development." Ms. Zellely said that in going over the analysis of the hamlets, the beauty of the valley was foremost in the comments. People wrote about driving up and down Rt. 22, the mountain ranges and the lakes. These are all recreational, cultural and historic resources. Mr. Elkin spoke about the SWOT, saying there were common weakness: small population, limited economic base. There were four pillars of strength: parks and recreation, cultural and historic, scenic, and agricultural. These can attract jobs, including sustainable energy jobs, as well as visitors. He suggested thinking about a Copake-wide historic district, not just individual homes and buildings. This will also bring communities together toward a common vision for Copake. He suggested also thinking about how people will access information, e.g. the website. Use the web to create historic and scenic itineraries. Ms. Schultz said that every com. plan in Col. County has tourism, but we have many strong assets: Catamount, TSP, Rail Trail, multiple lakes, etc. She cited some strategies listed on page 4 of their report: biking; encouraging off-season use of seasonal assets, such as the summer camps. Ms. Peteroy asked what camps she was speaking of - Ms. Wood said Camp Anne and Pontiac. Mr. Weber said that in the Catskills, camps have snowmobiling, horseback riding and singles dances. Ms. Schultz continued with the list: encourage local ag. endeavors; make info. about Copake more accessible; enrich Copake's economic health through cooperation with other towns and complementary businesses; housing - we need population to support the economy and housing for current residents and children, but we want to grow slowly so as not to change the character of Copake; provide more overnight/tourism accommodations; grow the tax base gradually, emphasizing clean businesses; enforce zoning, especially around the maintenance of properties, and have construction projects completed in a timely way. Mr. Weber mentioned the idea of designating historic homes. Ms. Zellely said they are starting on this in Copake Falls. She noted a town in NJ that made a map of the historic homes, which is something they want to do here.

The CEAB created a vision statement for each hamlet, listed on p. 7 of the report. Mr. Elkin read the Copake hamlet vision. Ms. Wood said there needs to be an anchor business. Ms. Schultz noted that many people say the town suffered when the state highway 22 was rerouted, but that made it possible for people to walk easily around town now. Ms. Peteroy said that years ago, the vital businesses were here even after the new highway was constructed. Mr. Weber said we need bike routes and walking trails. Ms. Wood read the Taconic Shores vision statement, adding that the residents are mixed and there is a good synergy. Mr. Weber said the many of them are full-time and are involved in sports and skiing. Ms. Zellely read the Copake Falls vision and said they hope to enlarge the historic district. Ms. Schultz read the West Copake vision (developed by Neil Klein), adding that it is a summer camps area and emphasized the interconnectedness of the area to other hamlets. She then read the Copake Lake vision, saying that currently many residents are part-time, but that this will change

significantly very soon. Ms. Peteroy read the Craryville vision, adding that its strengths are the intersection of 7A and 23, being on the roadways to TSP and the Berkshires, Sir William Farm, and the old train bed. The weaknesses are the junkyard and looking derelict in general. There is an opportunity for a clean business park. Ms. Wood read the Copake North vision, adding that it has a business district, the old school, beautiful views, tree farm, new library, TSP, and it is on a state highway which is good for business. She thought we ought to give that area a name. She said Catamount is a part of Copake and we need to make them feel a part of it; many people think of it as being in Hillsdale.

Ms. Mettler asked if they were representing ATC as well. Ms. Wood said that she and Mr. Elkin are part of ATC. Ms. Schultz said that ATC has the “low-hanging fruit” focus. The CEAB is waiting for the comp. plan so they can proceed. Ms. Mettler asked if they had some view of “what happened” in Copake. Ms. Wood responded that there are different variables/stories for each business. Generally, economically, they are fine. The owner of the Copake Inn hasn’t opened it because he doesn’t need the money or the hassle. The same is true for the General Store; Lucky (the owner) has turned down 2 offers, and will not make needed repairs. Therefore, one can’t approach them with a rational economic view. The Copake Inn will probably reopen in the spring, run by people the owner has picked. The town has had a slow deterioration. Ms. Mettler wondered if lax code enforcement was an issue. Ms. Wood responded by saying it’s sad when businesses and homes are derelict, but we don’t have a mechanism for dealing with that. She also spoke about a healthy community having an eclectic mix. In Copake, young adults won’t be a big part, as there are not enough social outlets. It’s a good place for young families and seniors; we are an old community (age wise). Ms. Mettler said the CPC has been thinking about grant opportunities and asked if grant applications were a part of the CEAB’s next steps. Mr. Elkin replied that they wanted to coordinate with us. Ms. Wood said they are a small board and there is only so much they can do. The center of Copake hamlet is their focus. The big issue now is the downtown planning with DOT. They are on schedule, and she said it’s good that it’s later than originally planned. If DOT had come in earlier, we wouldn’t have had bike lanes or sidewalks. Mr. Rubenstein brought up the issue of transportation - that it would bring people into town. Ms. Becker said that bus service is being planned with a private bus owner. Mr. Rubenstein thought that Copake ought to develop a way to connect the hamlets through trails, pathways and plantings. The DOT plan is only for the hamlet of Copake; for the other hamlets, we will need grant money. Ms. Wood commented that getting businesses going is not a question of money so much as finding out what they need and coordinating them with other boards e.g. the planning board for signage. It’s not the Town Board holding things up with J.J.’s; it’s a sewage issue. Regarding the south entrance to town, they are hoping to create a plan for landscaping with trees donated by Shagbark. They will work with the auto body shops, getting sweat equity, a work day for planting, etc. It’s all about consensus building and getting people inspired. Ms. Roll asked about grant possibilities for beautification. Ms. Wood said this will develop once people are involved and invested in the process. They could fix up the town, but then there still would not be any new viable businesses. Ms. Peteroy brought up the Copake Theater Company, saying the Grange is a beautiful building, all set up for theater, but they kicked out the CTC. The theater had done a lot

for the town, e.g. block parties, bringing people into town. This is something the ATC should look into. Ms. Wood said the ATC can't make anybody operate a business. Their biggest arsenal is hope, vision and a desire to live in a beautiful place. The Town finally did give them \$300. Ms. Becker asked if it was ATC's idea to make a plan for downtown. Mr. Rubenstein said they want to create consensus with everyone - the town, CPC, etc. Ms. Wood said it would be great to bury the electric cables and plant trees. DOT says it will not allow front-in parking, so we will need more off-street parking. We don't want one big parking lot, so there will be small areas with paths connecting them. Mr. Weber commented that we will need to have a water and sewer system, so this should be put in as the DOT plan goes forward. Ms. Wood said that is why we need cooperation. DOT will pay for whatever needs to be done. She also said there were problems when DOT came into Chatham. Mr. Beneke said NYS put a lot of money into that project. Ms. Wood noted that we should put electricity cables in as well. NYS will pay for whatever we need as long as it is in the comp. plan. Ms. Schultz said that if CEAB applies for grants it would be more viable if they say the CPC wants the same thing. Mr. Beneke said there is nothing in the CEAB plan that we would argue with, and he offered that he knows a planner who could help with the hamlet. Ms. Zellely said that the Friends of TSP are actively seeking grants to preserve the furnace. The Friends have already received several grants for signage and to grow membership. Ms. Wood said NYS was shocked at how fast Friends is growing. It helps keep the park viable. She asked Mr. Kiernan about how a lasting path could be built from the end of Weed Mine Rd. to the Hub. There is a section that is not farmed. Mr. Kiernan said you have to tame the brook. Ms. Wood said maybe grant money could be obtained, and that the brook needs to be able to flood and recede to the same bed. Mr. Beneke said the CEAB and CPC should meet now and then. When we get to a more visual form, then people will get excited about what can happen. Ms. Roll commented that in the vision for Copake hamlet, the focus seems to be on visitors for recreational, cultural and historic activities, and there is no mention of amenities for everyday living. Ms. Wood said it's there, but they would take a look at it. Ms. Zellely talked about how they walked through the town, seeing where pathways, stores, mini-malls, etc. might be. There is a big parking lot behind the old Taconic Telephone office building. They also looked at connecting the Grange to the hamlet center via the pond behind the bank. They are looking not at what is, but what can be. Ms. Wood said not everyone will agree on everything, e.g. someone will not want a tree on their property. Mr. Beneke said there was a big change in North Chatham when one or two people fixed up a house; that caused the whole community to change. Mr. Rubenstein said one has to start from a vision and work from the general to the specific. Mr. Beneke said that we have to deal with our elephant in the room which is the piece of land that Housing Resources owns. Ms. Wood said that if they could keep to the original 24 homes, it would be wonderful. She didn't know if it would be possible to talk Kevin [O'Neil] into the original plan. Ms. Peteroy said we have to create more pride of place in order to clean up the junkyards on 7A. Ms. Mettler noted that the enforcement of town code and ordinances was an issue there. She asked if the CEAB would recommend to the Town Board that they pursue enforcement, saying that the CEAB doesn't need to wait for us on that - they are ahead of us in some ways. Ms. Wood said absolutely, they would speak to the Town Board. They have made many recommendations to the T.B., and all

have been agreed to (except the budgeting of money for CEAB for this year). Ms. Mettler wondered if, having built consensus with businesses, they might alienate business owners in going to the town for enforcement. Ms. Wood responded that it is important to let people know that CEAB support their businesses, but they also need to be responsible. The businesses need to engage in activities that support the town. She cited Gary Singh and Mike Peschel, saying safety and viability need to go together. Mr. Weber said there are two sections of SRO in town. Ms. Wood said there are more. Mr. Weber said we have no human outreach. Ms. Wood said we do - churches, neighbors, soup kitchen. Mr. Weber said we do not have resources for special needs. Ms. Zelle said that CAM, the organization of churches, is doing a lot, but word has not got out yet. Ms. Becker asked if the CEAB was going to make a recommendation about code enforcement. Ms. Schultz said they are working on it. She also commented that they have learned tonight that they are on the right track and will proceed with their initiatives, working with us as they develop their road map. Ms. Wood said the CPC was their beacon. Ms. Mettler said the CEAB was the tugboat. She thanked the CEAB members, and the business portion of the meeting resumed. We made a few corrections to the focus group reports and approved them. We then began to work on a vision statement. We looked at the ones Ms. Irwin had sent to us for Copake and other towns. We liked aspects of many of them. After some discussion, we began to come up with phrases and words that would express a vision for Copake's comp. plan.

Vibrant, active, communicative, cohesive, community.

Community that cares about all its citizens and its natural resources.

Rural character

Beautiful town, attractive town

Outstanding scenic beauty and rural character

Community spirit

Diverse community

Clean energy, water and air

Safe, friendly

We will continue this discussion next time.

A motion was made to adjourn, seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll