

Minutes of Comprehensive Planning Committee
Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009, 7:30 pm
Copake Town Hall

Members Present: Charles Dodson, Frank Peteroy, Russ Davis, Marcia Becker, Roberta Roll, Dan Haas, Harvey Weber

Members Absent: Bill Kiernan, George Beneke, Fiona Hutchinson, Jeanne Mettler

Members of Small Focus Group on Conservation and Historical Resources:

Ellen Jouret Epstein, Columbia Land Conservancy; Ray Doherty, Taconic State Park; Jane Peck, Friends of Taconic State Park; Jean Peck, Roe Jan Historical Society; Grant Hermans, Bash Bish Bicycle; Elinor Mettler, Harlem Valley Rail Trail; Kent Kay, Harlem Valley Rail Trail; Caroline Stewart, Roe Jan Park.

Ms. J. Mettler was unable to attend and asked Charles Dodson to chair the meeting. He gave an overview of what the CPC has done thus far, and then turned the meeting over to Dan Haas, the coordinator of tonight's focus group.

Mr. Haas posed the question, What can the town of Copake do for your organization? He then asked each person to give a brief statement about their group, respond to the question and tell us any other thoughts they had on their goals and Copake's comprehensive planning process.

Kent Kay gave a brief overview of the HVRT and the plans for expansion of the trail up to Chatham. Mr. Peteroy asked about a spur to Copake from Copake Falls. Mr. Kay said they would need land or a right of way. Ms. Becker asked about parking. Mr. Kay said that Millerton was so crowded on weekends sometimes that local residents have a hard time finding a place to park. Ms. Stewart asked about a crossing of the trail from east to west on Rt. 22. The reply was that a crossing was planned at Orphan Farm Rd. near Black Grocery Bridge. The state owns land on both sides of the Roe Jan Kill. Mr. Doherty asked about building a spur between the new library and the Roe Jan Park and said that the Greenway might be a good source of funding for this. Ms. Mettler said that a spur from Wassaic village to the train station is desired by many residents there. Ms. Epstein said that other towns are thinking about this type of issue- of linking villages, facilities, etc. with trails and walkways. Her job is to encourage the county to unite around these kinds of issues and to get towns together to write grants. There is not a Columbia County network yet, but Kinderhook has a collaborative plan underway. The CCLC will assist and find funding for this kind of collaborations. Mettler said that we should let the state know of our interest in expanding the Rail Trail. It is not just a bike trail but serves a wide variety of recreational activities - walking, pushing strollers, rollerblading, birding, people in wheelchairs. Not all towns have sidewalks and the trail can provide a safe place for these activities. Mr. Haas said there are about 1000 members of the HVRT. He suggested that we emphasize our support to the state for two basic current needs: the extension to Chatham and the link between Millerton and Undermountain Rd. Mr. Weber asked what will happen when the trains are reintroduced north of Wassaic. Mr. Haas said that the HVRT (and the state) is preserving the corridor and that it was not likely that the trains would come back in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Hermans was here to represent recreation, cyclists in particular. He suggested we should make people aware of places to cycle, make roads safer with bike lanes, widen roads, improve problematic intersections, and have designated routes such as from town hall to the library. Scenic routes could be designated with markers as well. Mr. Weber asked about the cost of making bike routes - this would have to be answered at a later stage. Regarding problems that cyclists face, Mr. Hermans said that the bridge going toward West Copake is slippery when wet and there should be signage to that effect and perhaps an improvement to the surface, such as sand paint. Ms. Stewart said that signs saying "shared road" shift her awareness to watch out for cyclists and have patience for sharing the road. Ms. Roll said that there

are places, such as Valley View Rd. where safety could be increased by having signs cautioning bicyclists to stay to the right. Ms. Epstein said that we could follow through on this by developing an action plan to investigate the types and classes of roads in the area. Ms. Jean Peck said she sees numerous bikers in Copake. Mr. Doherty said that many of them bike to and from the Rail Trail. Mr. Haas suggested there be a dedicated bike lane between the Rail Trail head on Valley View and Copake. Ms. Jean Peck, president of the Roe Jan Historical Society, gave a brief overview of the org. It was started in 1974, meetings are one Tuesday per month, they have open houses for the holidays, and interact with other towns such as Ancram. There is not a lot of interaction with Copake, although Copake owns the building. Mr. Doherty said that the museum houses the archives of the town and there is limited space. Ms. Peck said that having the schoolhouse would have given them more room, which they need. Kinderhook is the home of the Columbia County Historical Society; perhaps they could be of help. Mr. Weber recounted how the Historical Society in Richmond added new buildings. Ms. Peck said that they had talked to the town about preserving the old railroad station, but there is too much deterioration, making it very costly. Ms. Epstein asked if there is an inventory of buildings for possible preservation - We will be making one. Mr. Weber suggested that we create plaques for historic homes and buildings as they have in Saratoga. Ms. Peck said they would like to do that in Copake Falls. Ms. Jane Peck said the cost is about \$400 per property owner. Mr. Doherty suggested a walking tour, and Ms. Jean Peck responded that the RJHS with the Copake Falls Day committee would like to develop a booklet about the historic buildings in CF. Ms. Becker asked if she would like to have the designation of historic properties be a priority in the comp plan. - Yes. Ms. Roll asked if there were any other projects that the RJHS would like to initiate. Ms. Peck said they are hoping to restore a Civil War uniform with the help of a group in Saratoga. Ms. Mettler asked if there are already designated historic places. Mr. Doherty said the Iron Works is one, and Ms. Peck said St. John in the Wilderness is another.

Mr. Doherty, director of the Taconic State Park in Copake Falls, said there are 178 State Parks in NYS with 35 historic sites. Copake Falls was the first park in the Taconic region, created in 1927. It comprises 16 miles along the Taconic Ridge, 7,000 acres, 2/3 of the land is in Copake and 1/3 in Ancram and Millerton. There are agricultural properties within the park - 500 acres of farmland. RJ Park and CCLC are partners. They get 200,000 visitors a year, with half being local residents. He expects the number of visitors to grow in the future and they will develop a master plan during the coming year - the last one was created in 1933. The activities in the park are guided by what visitors want and it takes considerable planning to create them. The park will oversee the construction of the Rail Trail north to Chatham. There are plans for a new office, nature center, improved roads and parking. The park developed around the Iron Works, which is deteriorating and needs to be restored very soon. They will get no money from the state for this project. Overall, the park gets money from the state and from the fed. for certain buildings and some of the Rail Trail. Personnel is funded by the state. The capital fund is not much and they don't always break even. They do expect help from certain groups that have specific uses, such as snowmobilers. Mountain biking is another possible use if there is a need.. Mr. Dodson asked what would Mr. Doherty like to see happen; the response was that it is up to the citizens and what they want. Ms. Roll suggested that perhaps there would be a small group in the upcoming visioning workshop that would want to focus on this. Mr. Haas asked what has been the interaction with the town government. Mr. Doherty said they have occasional meetings and that they interact with the highway dept., e.g. fallen trees, etc. Ms. Epstein asked if there is a summer park program and if it linked with TSP. Mr. Doherty replied that there is an environmental outreach education program that goes out to various locations, but he would love to have the children come to the park. The former environmental educator moved on, so they need to find someone to fill this position. Mr. Hermans said parking and traffic control are a problem. Mr. Doherty explained that the state took over the parking lot across from the Depot Deli, making it the Rail Trail lot. Rail Trail parking will be expanded on the former Odyssey Farm land, but people who use the ore bed for swimming are supposed to use the upper parking lot and pay the park fee.

Ms. Jane Peck said that Friends of Taconic State Park was formed in 2008 for the purpose of supporting and improving park programs and obtaining grants to this end. The restoration of the Iron Works is their first project; thus far, they have purchased an historic marker. They want to expand the museum at the Iron Works and obtain a cover for the blast furnace. NYS Parks Dept. has identified it as a key historic site, as there are many accompanying buildings still existing. One of the workers' houses is still in its original state. She said the town could help with bringing awareness to the area. They would like to set up some walking tours; Ms. Epstein said that the CCLC could probably help, as there is much interest in industrial archeology. We could also set up a virtual tour on the website. Mr. Doherty suggested that they could create an historic village type tour with people in historic dress, operate the old machinery, have crafters, blacksmiths, etc. They could also recreate the railroad trip from the mine to the iron works. Mr. Dodson asked about moving the schoolhouse and the old railroad station. Ms. Peck said that the rr station would make a good visitors center in its current location. The schoolhouse is not owned by the park. Ms. Peck said they were planning to have a joint tour with the historical society in East Canaan, NY where the Beckley Furnace is located.

Ms. Epstein from the CCLC said they work with communities to conserve land: scenic, farm, wildlife habitats, recreational, ecological. They use conservation easements, which are donated, and they work with the state in purchasing development rights for farmers. They create public conservation areas, e.g. Drowned Lands, Round Ball. They also provide environmental education, frequently working with schools. They are a main liaison with 23 municipalities on comp planning and open space plans. She said the CCLC "would like Copake to help them help Copake." We should prioritize what we want to preserve and develop. The IRS has requirements for the validity of easements, so they look at the comp plan to prove the benefit to the community. The CCLC will look at a comp plan to determine the value of a proposed easement by a land owner. She asked us to look at where we want open space and where we want development, and encouraged us to bring CCLC in early in any easement or conservation subdivision process to help us determine if the conservation values are appropriate. (For a land owner to get an easement, the land has to have conservation value). The CCLC would not take an easement if it contradicted town priorities. She said Kinderhook has very good language for their easement guidelines. Mr. Dodson asked if she would review a first draft of our comp plan - Absolutely. She also said the IRS puts scenic value as the top value for an easement. The CCLC has other criteria as well. Also the CCLC hopes to be able to provide mapping services soon.

Ms. Stewart of the Roe Jan Park, said that the state bought the 300 acres for the HVRT. The state bought the land from a developer but did not want to manage the land. They knew Hillsdale wanted a land for a town park and wanted Copake to be involved. The RJP committee sees it very much as a community park; it is managed by volunteers from Copake and Hillsdale, and they would like to see more Copake residents on the steering committee. They have established 3 miles of trails and they lease much of the land for agriculture. The state gives a 20 year renewable lease at \$1 per year. Rental income on the property is \$30,000 per year. There is a park and recreation fund that is fed by purchase and subdivision fees. There is no state funding for the park, but they hope for state monies for a planning process. The committee is interested in creating a more unified feeling, as well as economic development in the Roe Jan community. She noted the wealth of resources here; in Hillsdale there is a textile restorer, a graphic designer, fundraisers, etc. and we should pool and catalogue our resources. Mr. Doherty commented that a meeting like this one would be very helpful on a periodic basis. Ms. Stewart said the RJP hopes to expand services and establish new ones, such as extended equestrian trails and campgrounds, and a harvest festival. She asked Ms. Epstein if the CCLC would be involved in the development of the Rail Trail there - Yes. Mr. Doherty suggested agricultural education and preservation. Ms. Stewart replied that there already is a community garden with many participants - 3 or 4 are from Copake. Ms. Mettler suggested a "living museum" of agriculture.

To sum up, we saw that the key areas to address in the comp plan are awareness, communication and coordination. Ms. Stewart emphasized the fact that the Roe Jan area economic development will benefit

from the towns joining forces to write grants, prioritize and advocate for long term goals. Mr. Doherty asked if there was any other town owned land. Mr. Dodson replied that there were about 20-25 acres scattered around. NYS owns 11% of Copake - 27,000 acres. Audubon is the next largest owner. Ms. Roll commented that the Rail Trail spurs could be strong links for many of the ideas we have been discussing and that this physical unification of the area could help spur positive economic and community growth. Ms. Epstein said that there is someone in Hillsdale who is interested in developing trails and that Ms. Stewart could work with him.

The focus group portion of the meeting was concluded and the business portion of the meeting commenced.

The minutes from the Aug. 20th meeting were approved.

Ms. Becker asked that the following addition be made to the Aug. 11th minutes: at this meeting with the realtors, Mr. Weber asked the realtors if senior housing in the form of double wide trailers should be promoted. Several of the realtors said no, emphatically. This addition was approved.

Mr. Dodson gave an update on the survey - the demographics are good, all data is entered except for the 12 surveys he received today.

Thursday, Sept. 17 is the meeting for the safety organizations: police, EMS, fire dept.

We decided to keep the same format we used tonight.

Mr. Davis created a mailing list for business from the database, and asked us to check the list for any missing names. We will put COARC and Camphill Village in the community organizations focus group. He will send invitations out next week. We will discuss home-based businesses and churches at a later time.

Ms. Becker made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Haas seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll