

Minutes of Comprehensive Planning Committee
Thursday, August 20, 2009
Copake Town Hall

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

Town Government Members Present: Daniel Tompkin, Town Council; Larry Proper, Highway Dept.; Gray Davis, Planning Board; Gloria Lyons, Town Historian; Chris Quinby, Economic Advisory Board; Linda Gabaccia, Town Council; Bob Sacks, Town Council; Krista Goodacre, Park Commission; Ralph Platt, Park Commission; Mac Simms, former member of Zoning Board; Marcia Peteroy, Economic Advisory Board; Karen Hallenback, Ombudsman; Reggie Crowley, Supervisor/Town Council.

The bulk of this meeting was given over to a focus group meeting with all elected and appointed officials of town boards, committees, commissions and inspectors.

Margaret Irwin of River Street conducted the meeting. She explained that we were here to have a conversation. The comp. plan committee is here to listen and understand what issues the town government faces. The "smarter you can make us," the better off we will be and the better the plan will be. She had prepared a list of questions which had been distributed to all participants prior to the meeting. (see attached)

Question 1 regarding what works in other towns. Mr. Sacks said that some towns have a better record of obtaining grants. Copake should be more business-friendly to try to revitalize downtown. Mr. Weber concurred, citing Chatham and Valatie. Ms. Peteroy commented that Copake Falls community day received very good publicity and that we need good PR to make people aware of our resources. Mr. Tompkins wondered how we might get the county involved in setting up downtown revitalization. Also, our aging population is a factor. Ms. Peteroy said that we are losing our seniors because they cannot afford to live here anymore. A comment was made about high taxes in Copake but no services offered. Mr. Sacks said that the bulk of the taxes are county and state, and therefore, out of our control. Mr. Crowley said that 42% of county taxes are mandated by the state. Ms. Hallenback noted that in Dutchess County they use tax incentives for business very effectively - a 50% tax break for the first 10 years and 10% in the next 5 years. A comment was made that then a business might pull up and leave, and that revenue has been lost. Ms. Irwin commented that tax incentives and infrastructure were two successful ways to attract business and population. Mr. Crowley said that we have to find ways to make living here more affordable, as well as provide jobs; it is too expensive to commute now. Ms. Hallenback said that her whole family commutes a long distance to work, as they want to live in Copake. Ms. Irwin asked what are things we don't want here.

Ms. Hallenback said, too many of one type of thing, i.e. drug stores. Mr. Sacks noted that Greenport has too many stores overall; the aura of success attracts more businesses. Mr. Weber said we need transportation - bring Metro North up past Wassaic. There used to be a bus that made connections between Wassaic and Copake. Also, we should have bike lanes. It was noted that the train will not go past Wassaic because of the Rail Trail. Mr. Crowley said we need to give a little to get a little. If we increase tourism/business, we will have more traffic. Ms. Peteroy noted that she has guests at her B&B who are interested in biking; they come up from Wassaic on their bikes. Also, she has guests who notice and are somewhat put off by the Housing Resources signs. Ms. Hallenback said we need a farmers market. Mr. Tompkins suggested that the school be used more. Mr. Crowley said that people have come to the county with ideas for the old Roe Jan school. Ken Flood has been approached; his job is to go out and find funds for projects with potential. Ms. Hallenback thought that the scenic overlay was not business friendly, not "wind friendly." Mr. Crowley said that a woman who wanted to open a "Curves" felt

that the zoning was too restrictive in Copake and went elsewhere. Mr. G. Davis said that the planning board made it possible for High Voltage to grow. It is possible to keep the town looking nice while encouraging business growth. Ms. Irwin said that we should talk to High Voltage and find out what has made them successful. Mr. Sacks said that we have to know what we want to protect. Dairy farmers are not getting paid well. He likes the hops initiative. Ms. Irwin explained that we will be doing a detailed plan for farming, for which we will obtain grant funds. Other communities that have not nearly as much farming as we do have received monies.

Mr. Beneke noted that illegal workers are driving the cost of milk down; instead of farmers receiving \$30 per hundredweight, they are getting \$11. There are dairy farms now in other parts of the country with 65,000 cows, all tended by illegal immigrants. He predicted that in two years the local dairy farms will be gone. Mr. G. Davis cited an article in Hudson Valley Magazine that highlighted the growth of microfarms and organic farms. This model is growing and thriving. Ms. Peteroy noted that in many areas farms are converting to grass-fed animals. Columbia County Bounty and Berkshire Grown promote these farms. Mr. G. Davis said that local restaurants, such as Local 11 and Copake Country Club, are purchasing local products. There were several comments about the Shagbark tree farm, which owns about 1000 acres to date. Mr. Beneke affirmed that we do like open space and farming - what can we do to encourage it? Mr. Sacks said that there is a farm outside Wash. DC which is an agritourism destination. There are also places which are destinations for bike tours. Mr. Crowley noted that we are in a "good" geographical location; we are a "hub" - close to Saratoga, West Stockbridge, etc. Copake is affordable and has access to many places of interest.

Question 4 about what do departments need.

Mr. Proper said that he couldn't afford to resurface roads. The highway dept. used to resurface all the roads in a 4-5 year period. Now the cost of asphalt is too high. Also there are no gravel banks active now; we get it all from Greenport, which drives up the price. This year only 1 mile has been resurfaced. Ancram has completed 7 miles; they increased their highway budget dramatically this year from a previously low figure. Copake, Ancram and Hillsdale consolidate their equipment use and expenditures. Last year there was \$100,000 in equipment repairs. The towns also work with Taconic Hills and BOCES; the latter has obtained grants for equipment which is shared by the school and the towns. Mr. G. Davis asked how grant writers function. The reply was that they get paid, and Mr. Weber commented that help is available from the county and the state. Mr. Dodson asked how could we consolidate non-governmental services. He said that there are over 4,000 municipalities in NYS, of which the school system is one. Mr. Proper said that Taconic Hills shared equipment and manpower with the town. Ms. Irwin said that part of her work with us is to set up a narrative and boiler plate for grant writing. We may have someone local who is a writer, someone retired or wanting to volunteer. There are many state and local programs to which we can apply. Having a plan and cooperation with the surrounding towns and the school makes us competitive, as does community support. Mr. Simms mentioned sustainable communities and wondered how we might develop this idea here. What kinds of consolidation would be appropriate? Are there organizations which could provide us with information? Ms. Irwin replied that the American Farmland Trust, a national network with an office in Saratoga, is a good resource. Also, land trusts are helpful. Mr. Tompkins said that there is a young woman who has been a resident of Copake for 2-3 years and will write a grant for the Park. Also, Robert Lopez has written successful grants for the police dept. Mr. Sacks noted that one of the court clerks has written many successful grants for the court. Ms. Irwin suggested that we might want to contact these people and find others, and perhaps give them grant writing training. Mr. Tompkins said that the owner of the former JJ's Pizza wants a grant of \$500,000 to restore the building. Ms. Irwin suggested contacting the Office of Parks and Recreation. Ms. Hallenback said there is not much we can do about people in town who don't want to sell a decrepit building, but we should encourage people who want to do something positive. Ms. Irwin said that these small focus group meetings can spark 6 or 7 good ideas. One or two will be enough to get things started - that will feed other initiatives. Mr. Crowley noted that the county does have grant money. They are

starting to do drainage work and the county highway dept. will be restoring sidewalks and other aspects of downtown in 2012. They will consult the townspeople on the design. Ms. Irwin said that she would like to talk to the county highway dept. to see what she should consider in terms of our comp. plan.

Mr. Dodson asked what types of people and trainings would be useful for the town.

Mr. Crowley said that there is a spectometry program that towns will get for free, which will enable towns to access any land parcel. Currently the parcels are from 2006; the county will spend \$195,000 for another flyover to update it.

Question 9 about trends.

Ms. Peteroy said the Columbia County Land Conservancy should be brought in more. Ms. Hallenback said that we need a newspaper.

Ms. Irwin asked if there were any other ways to deal with bringing in more revenue.

Mr. Sacks suggested a flip tax; a certain percentage, e.g. 1/2 to 1% of purchase sales go to a specific program, e.g. to buy up land for conservation or to revitalize downtown. Mr. Crowley said that when a land conservancy take land, it usually takes it off the tax rolls. Ms. Irwin said she had suggested land trusts for their expertise in sustainability. The National Farm Trust also helps negotiate purchases. In some places, farms have been allowed to subdivide. Mr. Crowley said we need to find a way to keep seniors and young people here; we need smaller parcel sizes. Mr. Davis said he advocated using existing buildings for housing use before creating new housing. Mr. Crowley said that seniors want senior parks - double-wide trailers. Ms. Irwin said we can set design standards. Maintenance is free in these parks. Also, elder cottages - small units/micro-houses - are very popular. You can develop communities bungalow-style. Ms. Mettler asked about whether people were in favor of wind turbines. Many people said they were in favor of them, but the location was important. Ms. Irwin said that wind companies with do wind studies to find optimum locations. The turbines are getting lower and quieter. Wind farms and commercial uses are probably not the way to go.

It was noted that business people will want to know about cell service. Mr. Crowley said that ATT has approved sites in Ancram and Copake and are still looking in Taghkanic.

The subject of outdoor wood-burning furnaces was raised. Ms. Irwin said that she has models for codes; they need to be located in safe places. This is an issue that is growing in many communities. Mr. Weber said that the residue they create is not safe.

Ms. Mettler said that our committee is committed to the plan and that this is truly the way that Copake can move forward. She thanked everyone for coming, the focus group portion of the meeting was concluded, and the gov't participants departed.

The meeting continued with the business portion.

The minutes from Aug. 11th were approved (with a few changes to be made by Ms. Roll).

Ms. Mettler noted that, from the discussion at the town budget meeting on Aug. 19th, the town board is unanimously behind us 100%. The latest update in our budget figures for July-Dec. 2009 is \$23,000.

Mr. Dodson reported that we have 637 surveys entered out of 643 received. Demographics are pretty much the same, but Craryville has improved. Our renter percentage has been based on incorrect data, so the revised response rate is 10-15%. (The correct data uses renters and owners=occupied housing).

Ms. Mettler made up another batch of flyers reminding people to fill out the survey by Labor Day.

We discussed the future small focus groups and added some names and groups to our list. Mr. Peteroy will coordinate the building trades group. Ms. Roll will coordinate the arts and culture. Mr. Beneke and Mr. Kiernan will make a list of things that would be helpful to Harry Dodson for the ag. portion of the plan. (Ms. Irwin will facilitate this).

We agreed that the focus group meeting had been helpful. Ms. Irwin stated that her part of the job was to show how we can improve the tax base in different ways - not just through growth. She also said that we have to get the community to move beyond Housing Resources; the issue is bigger. We need to explain what affordability is in Copake. There are different models for providing affordability: 1. a "project"(development) 2. Subsidies for loans 3. Adaptive use (of existing buildings). The planning board

should request an updated marketing model for Housing Resources.

Our next meeting will be on Sept. 8 with the Recreation and Conservation groups, coordinated by Mr. Haas. This group will include the HV Rail Trail, Historical Society, Taconic State Park, Roe Jan Park, Friends of Taconic State Park, Columbia County Land Conservancy, Friends of Copake, Conservation Resources Committee and the Environment Committee.

Mr. Weber made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Haas seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll