

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee  
Sept. 17, 2009, 7:30pm  
Copake Town Hall

Members Present: Jeanne Mettler, Frank Peteroy, Charles Dodson, Harvey Weber, Bill Kiernan, Roberta Roll, George Beneke

Members Absent: Fiona Hutchinson, Russ Davis, Marcia Becker

Members of the Public Safety focus group: Jeff Nayer, police chief; Jeanie Scotti, administrator Community Rescue Squad; Henry (Hank) Lambert, assistant administrator Community Rescue Squad; Randi Shadic, Copake fire chief; Scott Hedges, first assistant fire chief.

Ms. Mettler gave overview of CPC. Mr. Dodson emphasized that we are in the "information mode," and that there would be two parts to our information gathering - 1. Who are you and what is your mission? 2. What is your vision for the future of your organization?

He asked Ms. Scotti of the Rescue Squad (CRS) to begin with such information as the number of calls received each year, people on staff, training, etc.

Ms. Scotti replied that there were 900 + calls in 2008 - close to 1000. 50% of the calls were in Copake, which is an increase. Other areas they cover are Ancram, Ancramdale, part of Tagkhanic, most of Hillsdale, Gallatin and a small part of Craryville. It is the largest area covered by a squad in Col. County - 167 sq. miles. (Chatham is the next largest). It is not the squad with the largest volume of calls. Calls come in sporadically ; Mr. Lambert said that sometimes they get two or three calls simultaneously.

Ms. Scotti stated their mission is to provide the highest level of advanced life support (ALS) - pre-hospital care. Usually this is done on the ground; occasionally by helicopter. They used to provide only trauma care; now they do medical care as well (e.g. stroke, heart attack). They have some 20-22 trained EMT's and paramedics, although this varies from year to year. Currently about 12 are paramedics. They hire some local drivers and sometimes get fire dept. members to drive. EMT training is 20 hrs. - they currently have 6 people in that course which is a "good" number. Paramedic training is EMT plus two more levels of training. The certification program is one year long at five days a week plus 2 years in the field. The Associates degree program is two years. There are continuing ed. and recertification requirements. The pay is low, so members are part-time and have other jobs.

The squad was started in 1946 as a volunteer org. and remained so until 1996. By that time, many people could not afford to volunteer and/or had jobs that were no longer local. Volunteers from other squads were often called in. (This happened with the other squads in the area as well).

As a result, members began to be paid and were on call 24/7. The CRS has been a 501C3 since 1996. A question was asked about the relationship with hospitals. The CRS goes to the hospital of the patient's choice if possible - usually Sharon, Fairview or Columbia. Trauma patients might go to Albany, St. Francis (Poughkeepsie) or BMC (for level 2 trauma). Mr. Peteroy asked if they get assistance from the county. Ms. Scotti said no, only from the towns. She calculates the amounts requested from the towns on the volume of calls received. Funding comes from billing for services, town contributions and individual donations.

Factors and needs for the future:

1. Have non-emergency transport, e.g. from nursing homes. This can be covered by insurance. Emergency ALS calls are often twice the cost of non-emergency transport calls. There needs to be a support system for the elderly.
2. Improved cell service would make an enormous difference. If they could send information about a patient on the way to the hospital - EKG, history, etc. - they would not have to go the ER every time; instead, they could get the patient to a doctor upon arrival. This would save costs.
3. There has been a 50% increase in the incidence of people not paying bills when they are covered by insurance. Insurance companies pay much less than the actual cost.

4. Medicaid patients are almost a total loss. Medicare is only slightly better. They pay 13-15%.

5. A special ambulance district would help pay for the squad, which is in financial difficulties now. Every property owner would pay a small tax to CRS. The towns of Coxsackie, Colonie and Kinderhook have this. It has to be passed by the state, but goes under resolution by the town first. All the towns covered would have to pass it. It would be about \$60-80 dollars per person per year. Then paying for billing costs could be done by 1. subtracting estimated billing costs from the budget, or 2. not billing individually for calls.

6. Federal law mandates changes in the radio frequencies by 2013. The county hasn't said they would help yet. About \$30,000 is needed to redo the towers and old base radio stations.

Mr. Dodson asked if there is any federal funding. Ms. Scotti replied no, not yet; there never has been much support from the state or the fed. Mr. Lambert said they need a new ambulance which is \$120,000. Ms. Scotti said she writes a grant application every year. Mr. Dodson noted the practice of mutual aid to towns in the area. There is an effort to have an extended mutual aid network throughout the county. Mr. Beneke asked what percentage of their expenses is bureaucratic, red tape, and what percentage is for direct aid. Mr. Lambert cited the example of a type of tool box that had to be ordered by a certain company, but that could be bought at a local store for half the price. Ms. Scotti mentioned certain drugs that they were compelled to discard after a certain date.

Fire Company: Mr. Shadic said they get about fifty calls a year in the 33 sq. miles area of Copake. The other areas are covered by Craryville and Hillsdale. The fire district is a municipality. The Copake Fire Co. # 1 was set up in 1925, as were Copake Falls and West Copake, as an independent not-for-profit. They owned their own equipment and buildings, but Copake Falls and Craryville were on leased land. In 1992 they created a master plan. With volunteerism dropping and equipment that was aging and insufficient, they predicted that without a change in the community, these trends would continue and they would be unable to function adequately. In 1992 they had 55-65 volunteers and 12 pieces of equipment for all companies. There was no emergency power, volunteers were aging and no young people were coming in. They were down to 2-3 people in both West Copake and Craryville. Since they all owned the same equipment, they decided to consolidate. Copake Co. #1 donated all buildings and grounds to the fire district. They expanded one building in Copake, centrally located, to house all the equipment at a cost of \$700,000. It was built with allowances for future needs, such as a bunkroom (which they do not use currently). They currently have about 35 members/volunteers, who are on call 24/7. They average 12 members in any one response. 75% of responses are adequate, but 25% are not, involving large structures, wildfires, etc. Until about 25-30 years ago, EMS did general and mountain rescue, extrication from cars, and drownings. But they became more specialized in medical responses, so the fire co. was left with these tasks. They also provide those services to other towns. They have some special equipment for water rescue and medical care - water crafts and fibrillation machines. CRS and Fire share some members which can lead to burnout. If staffed fully, they would need 5-6 people full-time; the cost is prohibitive. The cost of equipment, such as ladders, ropes and air systems, is increased by mandates for certified inspection and safety tests. They obtained a grant for making their own breathing air, so they don't have to buy it, but it costs \$650 to certify the equipment every year. If a rope is used once, it has to be thrown away. They built their own training tower.

Needs for the future:

1. Improved cell service - this would give them the ability to "acquire resources on the street." At the scene of a fire they could radio to get suitable help, depending on the materials involved in the fire.
2. Volunteer staffing is needed - a change in the demographics and economics of the town would facilitate this.
3. Resource management -there is a program that would allow members to be linked to the firehouse, so they could let the co. know if they are coming in on a call. (cell service needed for this).
4. Radio frequency base is obsolete (on a low band system, as is all of Col. County). Fire can't talk to EMS and police. They have shared radios, but communication is piecemeal. They have been budgeting

for years to fund the change; they currently have 50% of the \$50-60,000 needed. They expect it to happen in 2-3 years.

Budgets are stable, the building will be paid for in 10 years; then the bond will be able to pay for equipment - a truck can cost \$500,000.

Mr. Dodson asked about how they deal with hazardous materials. Mr. Shadic replied that every time something burns there is hazardous material. They could hire a specialist, but the low probability for extremely hazardous situations makes it not worthwhile, and there is a county resource for this.

Regarding community growth, if there were industrial operations, it might change the fire hazard. A question was asked about their involvement with the planning board. - They are very involved subdivision processes. Mr. Weber asked if Housing Resources contacted the dept. about fire provisions. - Yes, they had initial input, but not since then. Mr. Dodson asked about roads. Mr. Shadic replied that the roads need to be wide enough and properly maintained in order for the trucks to reach a building. Some properties are difficult to cover because of the large size - 2-3,000 sq. ft. and 2-3 stories high. Also, some areas, e.g. Empire Rd. have no water supply.

Mr. Shadic said that a proactive fire protection plan would include 1. Residential sprinklers for new construction. They are less costly now and there are insurance benefits. He has suggested this to the planning board. 2. Code enforcement through education, rather than a "fire marshall approach," on proper exits, cooking procedures, lighting, etc. There are many old wooden structures in town that could benefit. Mr. Weber asked if the fire dept. had talked to the Grange. Mr. Shadic replied that it is not the fire co. job or expertise. These directives should be built into the town building code to avoid tragedies. Mr. Dodson asked about cooperation with other towns. - It is very good; they rely on it routinely now, whereas it used to be only for large fires. There is an agreement between Ancram and Copake that during the day, there will be an automatic response from both towns.

Ms. Mettler asked about what he saw for the future of the fire co. - Mr. Shadic said staffing. Mr. Beneke suggested that the town will have to think about ways to help cover the cost, perhaps through a retirement fund, health insurance, lower taxes for members, depending on the amount of training. Mr. Shadic said the time for volunteering is minimal for many, and supplementing would make it more worthwhile. In Maine, a paid-on-call system is used, with a certain level of training required for various calls. As a result, they don't have staffing issues, because the pay they receive per call is covering the amount they need for extra income. NYS law does not allow this system. Also, if you staff more than five firefighters (with pay), the training requirements go up.

Up to five, you can create your own standards. Mr. Dodson asked about how our year-round/part-time owners ratio affects their work. Mr. Shadic said the types of calls are the same. (Hillsdale doesn't have the ropes and water calls). Mr. Hedges said that the insurance companies want owners to put in alarms. Although there are false trips, many fires would be handled much sooner in homes that are unoccupied much of the time. Also in Copake, tree maintenance along long driveways is often inadequate. Mr. Haas asked if there were any other things that could be dealt with in town law. Mr. Shadic said that you have to look at town and municipal law closely. There is no local law that would give more flexibility in staffing.

Mr. Nayer said the amount of training for fire is great. Mr. Shadic said it used to be 36 hours, now it is 100 hours and that doesn't cover specialty training - water, ropes, car extrication. Mr. Nayer said that often sons became members after their fathers, but employment and housing need to be geared toward affordability if this is to continue. Mr. Weber said a tax rebate would help. Mr. Beneke said that first time home owners get about a 30% rebate for 5 years, which helps.

Police - Mr. Nayer said that he could not give an in-depth report, as he has only been commissioner for a short time. He suggested we talk with Rob Lopez and Jan Near at some point. We agreed to do this.

The focus group members were thanked, and the business portion of our meeting commenced.

We approved the minutes of Sept. 8, 2009 with the correction on the fourth page - 2,700 acres, instead of 27,000 acres. Mr. Dodson gave a report on the survey. We have 692 returns, giving us a 26.8% return rate. Mr. Peteroy has been contacting the building trade people. There was a discussion of combining

police and trades in the next meeting, but it was concluded that we need the full hour and a half for the building trades. We will do police later in the year. Ms. Mettler noted that we need someone to facilitate community organizations. Ms. Roll offered to do that, and accepted the offers of Mr. Beneke and Ms. Mettler to share the responsibility. There is a budget meeting on Sept. 29 which Ms. Mettler will attend. She will also email Ms. Irwin about grant deadlines and when she can meet with us next. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting, it was seconded, and the meeting was concluded at 10:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll