

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee
Feb. 17, 2011 7:00pm
Copake Town Hall

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

Members Absent: Dan Haas

River Street: Margaret Irwin

The minutes of Feb. 8 were approved.

Ms. Mettler said that she sent Supervisor Crowley an email indicating that we would be applying for the CDBG. He replied, giving complete support.

In reviewing our draft of Recommendations for Town Government, Ms. Becker said she thought we should include under consolidation the following: a regional fire district, review EMS needs and funding, and building inspectors. She asked how specific we want to get in this document. Ms. Irwin responded first of all by saying that the comp. plan is meant to direct the Town. Therefore, the language should reflect this, i.e. we should say "the Town will" rather than "the Town should." Ms. Mettler asked if we should be telling the fire dept. what to do. Ms. Becker said the state is looking at this, and commented that there is a line in the Town budget for the fire dept. Mr. Dodson said no, it's state money, the Town only collects and distributes it. Ms. Irwin said yes, the state is the one who directs it. We decided that since we do have jurisdiction over EMS, we will add it to our consolidation section. The building inspector is covered under the building code. We reviewed the rest of the govt. document and approved the 2/10/11 draft.

We went on to discuss Commercial Growth and Development. Ms. Becker also had some comments and additions which we incorporated. Ms. Irwin remarked that although we cannot predict growth exactly, we should try to anticipate what will happen. In regard to the floating zone, Mr. Dodson said he would like to have a generic floating zone. Ms. Irwin said that would be unusual in a hamlet, and when you apply a floating zone, it has to be a land use change. At any rate, she said that was too much detail for the comp. plan. It should be addressed in the zoning revision. We should, however, bring up the idea of expanding the hamlets and what zoning tools would be appropriate. Mr. Peteroy asked if the floating zone was legal. Yes. He asked if we are encouraging spot zoning in advocating floating zones. Ms. Irwin said no; usually they are used for industry when you don't know exactly what kind of industry will come in. Although floating zones are uncommon in hamlets, you could have an industry come in that wouldn't be appropriate for the designated zone. She said there are many choices in zoning when creating or expanding a hamlet, and you can always update the zoning. We continued, with Ms. Becker commenting that septic systems should comply with current standards. Ms. Irwin said that is county-mandated. Ms. Becker said the town has rules as well. Mr. Davis said that adds another layer of regulations and asked who gives the okay for septic systems. Mr. Peteroy replied, the county, but the Town is involved, as it has an inherent responsibility. Mr. Weber said a DEC permit is required also. Ms. Irwin asked if we need to include a statement about compliance - do we need to "say it again?" Ms. Becker said yes because the Town isn't upholding standards.

She said it has been recommended by engineers that a threshold be established. Ms. Irwin suggested we say “increase local protections.” She said in order for changes in the code to occur, the Town will have to establish a threshold of cost and size. Mr. Davis asked what cost had to do with septic standards. It is assumed that a costlier system is relative to size. Ms. Mettler suggested we say the Town will establish a threshold, the standards of which will be established, and under which, an improved septic will be required. We approved the Commercial Growth and Development document.

We then turned our attention to the Farmland Strategies Report. Dr. Beneke suggested that the best way to preserve farmland is to develop and revitalize the hamlet, to make it an attractive place to live and work. We discussed the fact that the report is not a plan and will not be a part of the comp. plan. We have a grant application to fund the creation of a farmland protection plan. We will state in the comp. plan that we need farmland protection plan.

Ms. Irwin then lead the discussion of our Goals and Actions. She said we need to go through the goals and decide what actions we want in the plan. We want it to be specific to Copake , but there are things that should be in the plan to guide zoning, e.g. scenic views. Most towns have these kinds of things. We will have observations, rationales, big actions and smaller actions. The # 1 priority actions are those we want to emphasize. As we go through the goals, we may decide to combine some of them. Ms. Mettler said we should prioritize the actions, as there are too many right now.

- I. Close and lively community. We decided actions b,e,f are the most important. C and d should go under catalyst projects. We also discussed senior needs. Ms. Irwin said as we increase revitalization with sidewalks, etc. we will be taking care of senior needs. Mr. Davis asked about the 20-30 year olds. We won't lose the seniors, but we do lose young people. Dr. Beneke said there are many services provided to seniors by CC. Economic viability is the way to keep the young people here.
- II. Attractive community with character. We liked this one as is and talked about prioritizing the goals.
- III. Farming. We talked about the large percentage of farming on leased lands and the vulnerability of farmers with that practice. Dr. Beneke said 50-70% of farmland is rented. Many times, the farmstead is not on prime farmland. Mr. Dodson said most vacant land is not owned locally. Dr. Beneke said the economics is different from, say, Connecticut, where farmers charge a fee to use land. Here, they can't afford to buy land; 50% or less is owned by farmers. Ms. Irwin asked if there was anything the Town could do. Dr. Beneke said tax deductions are a step. Ms. Becker said land use tools could help. Ms. Irwin said we could add a sentence to our introduction about the vulnerability of having a high percentage of leased land. We can also tailor the farmland protection plan to assist with this situation. We need to have a balance of protecting the land but having farmers keep the value of their land. Mr. Kiernan said we could add an item to make sure exemptions are only given where acceptable farming practices are occurring.

Ms. Irwin said the Goals and Actions will be the essence of the comp. plan. We will have a narrative introduction. The summary of the community profile will be bound separately.

We decided on May 21 for the Town meeting on the plan draft.

Our next meetings will be March 8 and 17, in which we will finish our editing of the Goals and Actions. On April 12 we will meet with Ms. Irwin again.

Mr. Dodson made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Davis seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll