

Comprehensive Planning Committee Minutes
March 29, 2011 7:00 pm
Copake Town Hall

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

The March 8th and 17th minutes were corrected and approved.

Ms. Mettler said that Mr. Dodson reported that the grant application process was still in the data collecting stage, but he is close to beginning the writing process. He will send the completed first draft to Ms. Mettler, Ms. Becker and Ms. Roll [the grants subcommittee].

Correspondence: Regarding our letter to Supervisor Crowley, Ms. Mettler said she would reiterate our request that the rezoning committee not be appointed until sometime after the public meeting [June 4]. She reported that Councilman Tompkins had sent us a letter thanking us for our response on the West Copake firehouse. Councilman Sacks had written thanking the committee for its work.

We then addressed the Farmland Profile. Ms. Becker commented that the executive summary on p. 3 was very dated. Ms. Mettler said we should remember that this is Dodson Associates document, not ours. However, we could ask them to update it in light of events of the last two years. We discussed the various initiatives that have taken place, including the County farmland protection plan. We questioned whether to keep the 2011 date on it once it is corrected, or put it back to 2009 when it was originally written. Mr. Peteroy asked Mr. Kiernan what would be the best ways to help farmers preserve farmland. Mr. Kiernan suggested a real estate tax on homes over the median price, such as the 2% tax enacted in Warwick, NY. They preserved about 2,500 acres. Mr. Peteroy asked if that was for PDR and would that make sense in Copake. Mr. Kiernan replied that it does make sense; although a town could do it, it would probably have to be a County initiative. Everyone has to be supportive. Mr. Peteroy asked how the comp. plan would make recommendations that would influence the rezoning committee. Mr. Kiernan said we could be either general or specific. Mr. Davis asked if it would be the rezoning committee that would enact the tax. Ms. Becker said no, it's the Farmland Protection Plan that would initiate this. Dr. Beneke said that although there is not much development pressure now, if the tax was set up now, the money would trickle in and we'd be ready when we do have more development pressure and if land prices go up. Also, there would have to be a conservation area; some of the land would have to go back into farming. Mr. Kiernan commented that zoning is always unsuccessful as a tool to preserve farmland and farming. A town can zone an area exclusively farmland and when the next town board comes in, it can change the zoning. Ms. Becker said there are advanced planning tools that could keep land farmland. More discussion was had on the problem of zoning changes over time even with good planning tools. Ms. Mettler asked Mr. Kiernan and Dr. Beneke if they thought there was anything that should be eliminated in this Farmland Profile, or

anything that we could use in the comp. plan. Mr. Kiernan said maybe we should create our plan regardless of what the County has or has not done in relation to farmland protection. Ms. Becker said forage crops should be added to the diversification of products, as well as horses. Ms. Mettler said there was a good point in the Profile about municipalities needing to protect farmland when upgrading or doing new construction. We then went on to continue our review of Goals and Actions.

We discussed Goal VII - Attractive Community. Dr. Beneke commented that if the Town isn't going to enforce the codes we have, then improvements will not occur. Mr. Davis said perhaps we need to have a zoning enforcement officer from out of town, and that maybe code enforcement is the catalyst for this goal. Ms. Mettler asked if maybe we need to create a commission to investigate the failure of code enforcement. Mr. Peteroy brought up the issue of "junkyards" and allowable uses. We discussed illegal signage, such as that on the Jim's Autobody building. We generally agreed that the code is not the problem; it's the enforcement. Mr. Haas said that the Town Board is ultimately responsible. Mr. Weber said the citizens have to file a complaint about code violations and they have to address the Board as well. Ms. Mettler suggested that a bipartisan committee could be set up to monitor the code enforcement and report to the Town Board. Dr. Beneke asked how the Town Board is involved. Ms. Becker replied that when a complaint is filed, the violator is given 30 days to remediate. If they fail, they go to court, where they are ordered to fix it and pay a fine. Dr. Beneke asked where is the breakdown. Ms. Becker said one problem is permits that are given but violate the code. Also, the building department needs to work in cooperation with the planning board. Dr. Beneke asked if the building dept. issues permits for junkyards. Ms. Becker said the Town Board gives those permits. We discussed other catalysts being actions "b," "c," and "d." We will remove "e."

Goal VIII - Town Government. We will keep the original actions in addition to what we more recently created for this goal. We discussed implementation and whether we should make recommendations as to how to implement.

Goal IX - Housing. There is not much demand at the moment. Mr. Weber said we gained 381 new residents according to the census, we had 2 new homes built, and we are losing school population. It was acknowledged that Columbia County, as well as NY State, as a whole is losing population. We discussed the HR land and connecting the Town center to the Town park. Perhaps this is a catalyst. After more discussion, we decided to ask Margaret Irwin to help us figure out how to clarify and word these actions and how specific to make them. Should we include tax incentives?

Ms. Mettler said that Ms. Irwin has come up with a list of items that were on our agenda, but have fallen through the cracks. She will help us incorporate these as appropriate.

Ms. Roll made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Weber seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Roll