

February 23, 2011

Attending: Trina Porte (Chair), David Cullen, Craig Westcott (Secretary)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:04pm

David Cullen moved to approve the Dec. 1 minutes, Craig Westcott seconded, all were in favor

Trina Porte presented the idea of the Pittsfield State Forest BioBlitz as a possible model to have the CAC use as part of its education program. This type of event could possibly initiate an Open Space Inventory (OSI)/Habitat Assessment process.

The CAC considered the question: "How could the CAC initiate and complete the OSI/Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)? David Cullen has started to do research about recruiting interns to get the assessment done. He has begun to develop an environmental studies internship recruitment form and has researched some schools that have environmental studies programs. The CAC will review his form and email David any suggestions regarding duties, responsibilities and time table.

The CAC considered the Town of Milan, NY Habitat Assessment (HA) Guidelines. Trina Porte suggested that the Milan HA could be a format for an OSI/NRI for New Lebanon. David Cullen suggested that this document is too cumbersome to be effective. Craig Westcott suggested that the way forward for NLCAC would be to simplify it toward the goal of stimulating "smart" development in the Town, not creating an environment where no development is possible (Trina Porte gave the example of the Town of Nassau, NY).

The CAC considered the question, "Where do we start"? Craig Westcott suggested that a possible "triage" system could be considered for approaching the HA: 1st identify any natural, undisturbed pristine areas to be closed to any significant development (e.g. The Knob, the Shaker Swamp), secondly identify the "already developed corridor" and ways to "do it better" as time moves on ("downtown", e.g. supermarket project), and thirdly identify the areas of concern for environmental degradation (e.g. West Lebanon mine site, hazardous waste areas). It was suggested by Craig (and later supported by guest John Dax) that starting here can reduce the volume of work to be done by taking some areas "off of the table" from any development as well as to make sure that work is not duplicated.

Once some of these areas are assessed, the BioBlitz-type format presented by Trina Porte could be used to both engage the Town residents in their environment and also potentially create more data for the HA/NRI.

The CAC considered the joint SEQR application for the proposed of supermarket site(s). Trina Porte stated that the Hannaford engineer(s) seems to be do everything possible to study the proposed new site, but that the condition of the existing "mall" owned by Callahan remains unknown. The CAC considered the question, "What role does the CAC have in assessing the health of human habitat in the Town"? Trina Porte offered examples of historic pollution events (e.g. rt. 20 PCBs, fuel oil spill at State Police barracks, Windswept Farms, continuous minor spills at gas stations, etc.). The CAC considered the question, "are these issues not more important to the Town than "how many owl nests are there on The Knob," and "Is it appropriate to include the assessment of the human habitats in an NRI/HA?". Craig Westcott suggested that the CAC needs to generate the questions to be asked and answered and then create the format in which the information should be it's completed. Trina Porte suggested that Intern #1 (2011) could help the CAC with this work and than Intern #2 (2012) could initiate HA based on answers to these questions.

The CAC considered the CAC attendance at Town Board meetings. Trina Porte asserted that some CACs assign rotating attendance. David Cullen asked "What would CAC members do at Town meetings?"

John Dax arrived at 5:00pm. Trina Porte asked him to enumerate what the Columbia County EMC does. Mr. Dax said that the CCEMC acts as an advisory committee to town boards. The CCEMC encourages town supervisors to communicate with other supervisors so that solution sharing becomes more efficient. Mr. Dax stated that in his 2 years as the NL appointee to the CCEMC, the County has not referred any matters of concern to the CCEMC.

Mr. Dax stated that the CCEMC decided to look into matters of concern on their own, and as such prepared a "white paper" on outdoor wood-burning boilers, which are now [partially?] regulated by NYS [?-clarify]. They are also generating generic guidelines for town ordinances, and have been co-arranging* speakers for town boards and planning & zoning personnel on topics such as CACs, e.g biodiversity workshop, the Stockport Creek watershed, etc. *[in conjunction with CLC, Hudsonia, etc.]. Mr. Dax left a binder from the recent speaker series sponsored by Columbia Land Conservancy on what CAC groups are doing (David Cullen took for review).

Mr. Dax stated that the CCEMC has also looked at all the Columbia County town comprehensive plans and has assessed their validity, omissions, etc., in order to cross-compare which seem the most effective, clear, useful, etc. Mr. Dax also supports the CCEMC becoming a resource for towns on cross-town issues such as traffic concerns when development is proposed that impacts it, issues common to many towns such as scenic / visual impacts and preservation thereof and their relationship to economic development, and helping towns to develop plans for common use of resources. Many CCEMC members also sit on their local CACs.

Mr. Dax mentioned the NL committee developing overlays for the newly amended town zoning ordinance, and a desire to have a NLCAC representative on that committee, which all members of the NLCAC immediately highly endorsed, so as to further both of our missions without duplicating work, and in order to buttress support and gather current data for environmental concerns within New Lebanon.

Chair Trina Porte adjourned the meeting at 5:30 pm.

The CAC set the next meeting for Wednesday April 6, 4-530pm.