

**COLUMBIA COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

**MEETING MINUTES
27 JULY 2009**

PRESENT:

Ed Simonsen, Chairman
Harvey Weber, Vice Chairman
Karen Mort, Ghent
Deirdre Henderson, Chatham
Karl Gabosh, Austerlitz
Robert Kessler, Hillsdale
Kate Cashen, Claverack
Dan Marcus, Stockport
Frances Szasz, Germantown
Dean Vander Schaaff, Livingston
John Dax, New Lebanon
Melissa Sorman, Gallatin
Mark Burch, Stuyvesant

REGRETS:

Ed Nabozny, Greenport
John Adams, Canaan
Theresa Mayhew, CCE
Ed Van Nostrand, CC DOH

STAFF:

Roland R. Vosburgh, Principal Planner

GUESTS:

Bob Green, reporter

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ed Simonsen called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm and noted that a quorum (13 out of 19 members) was present to conduct business. John Dax, the newly appointed member representing the Town of New Lebanon was introduced.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Simonson noted that the 6/1/09 minutes and the 6/22/09 unofficial meeting notes were awaiting approval. *A motion was made by Deirdre Henderson to approve the 6/1/09 minutes and the 6/22/09 unofficial meeting notes as presented and seconded by Robert Kessler. Vote: All in favor.*

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Simonsen reported on the following matters:

- 1) *Membership Update:* With the appointment of John Dax, representing New Lebanon, the EMC has only two member vacancies; Ancram and the City of Hudson. Matt de la

Houssaye's term representing the City of Hudson expired in June and the Mayor has been notified, but Chairman Simonsen has not been able to speak with the mayor. He has also been unsuccessful reaching Tom Dias, Ancram Supervisor about the town's membership on the EMC. There was brief discussion of how to encourage nominations.

- 2) *Outdoor Wood-Fired Boilers (OWB) Informational Meeting:* Chairman Simonsen reported that he, R. Vosburgh, and former EMC Chairman J. Pierre Gontier attended the 7/23/09 meeting held in Niverville. He reported that it was a great meeting with excellent handouts (copies of the Dept. of State material and the Attorney General report (Smoke Gets in Your Lungs were distributed to members). He further reported that NYS DEC is currently working on regulations to address smoke emissions from OWBs (federal US EPA does not currently regulate OWBs) and it is an important issue that the EMC should address.
- 3) *Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC)/EMC web link:* Chairman Simonsen reported that Ellen Epstein of CLC was a presenter at a recent meeting of the Town of Kinderhook Rt 9/9H Corridor Committee and she spoke to him later about having the EMC as a link on the CLC website. ***A motion was made by Mark Burch to approve of CLC having a link on their web site to the EMC and seconded by Bob Kessler.*** During the discussion, Frances Szasz expressed her intention to abstain due to a concern of hers that conservation easements might conflict with local government comprehensive planning goals. She would like to see municipal input on all conservation easements. Deirdre Henderson stated that CLC has led the way in land conservation. Mark Burch thought that the website link would bring visibility to both organizations. ***Vote: All in favor (12 votes) with Frances Szasz abstaining (1 vote).***

CORRESPONDENCE:

- 1) *Nancy Heaslip, NYS DEC Reg. 4 Wildlife Biologist:* R. Vosburgh reported a telephone call and subsequent email from Nancy Heaslip regarding the establishment of a Deer Management Task Force for southwestern Columbia County. Her email with more details was forwarded to EMC members by R. Vosburgh. Ms. Heaslip is looking for a convener/facilitator for the task force who is not a NYSDEC employee and is an objective third party and reached out the EMC after visiting the EMC website. After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the members present that the task force is a good idea but that the EMC has a full agenda at the present time and needs to conserve limited resources and focus on the EMC work plan and that the EMC would not be directly involved. R. Vosburgh to notify Ms. Heaslip of the EMC decision. Individual members with an interest in the topic would be free to express interest in the task force. R. Vosburgh reported that Ed Van Nostrand has already expressed interest and would like to serve on the task force and could keep the EMC updated. Karen Mort explained that the last time there was a deer management task force in the county (maybe 10-15 years ago), a Cornell Cooperative Extension agent was involved in facilitating. R. Vosburgh added that he encouraged Ms. Heaslip to reach out to CCE of Columbia County for assistance.

- 2) *Ancram Concerned Citizens (ACC)*: A letter dated 7/14/09 from John F. Lyons, attorney for the ACC alerting the EMC to the matter of the proposed Ancram town highway garage project. R. Vosburgh alerted Chairman Simonsen when the letter was received but it was not in an electronic format to forward, so the copies provided by Mr. Lyons were distributed at the meeting. R. Vosburgh read the cover letter. Chairman Simonsen explained that the EMC may want to take this matter up at a future meeting. The brief discussion included a goal to focus only on environmental matters that have county-wide implications and not become involved in issues with purely local impacts and the importance of having an Ancram representative on the EMC. Related to this discussion, several comments arose about the relationship between the CC Planning Board and the EMC and whether matters being reviewed by the CC Planning Board ever received input on environmental impacts from the EMC. R. Vosburgh explained that past practice did not include such coordination because the CC Planning Board offers a recommendation only and the majority of referrals are matters without county-wide or intercommunity impacts. Deirdre Henderson was concerned that should the EMC take a more active, involved role in SEQRA reviews, that the EMC could be overwhelmed with information similar to the ACC letter just received and that with limited resources, the EMC should be careful about moving in this direction. Chairman Simonsen noted that a SEQRA training session is scheduled for 7/29/09 (sponsored by CC Planning Board) and that knowledge of and implementing SEQRA is vital for local decision-makers, but that the EMC does not have the resources to undertake detailed SEQRA reviews and commenting.

OLD BUSINESS

- 1) *EMC Reporting Process*: Chairman Simonsen asked for input from a couple volunteers to work with him on improving the process by which the EMC presents recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.
- 2) *Outdoor Wood-Fired Boilers*: Discussed above under Chairman's Report.
- 3) *Speaker Presentations*: Continued discussion on the proposal for a series of quarterly EMC sponsored speakers at rotating locations throughout the county. Deirdre Henderson reported that she did not receive any response or ideas from members since the last discussion. Chairman Simonsen again suggested Fran Martino with the Kinderhook Watershed Alliance. Harvey Weber recommended John Reynolds with USGS in Troy. Bob Kessler said that Gretchen Stevens with Hudsonia could speak on county wildlife habitat. Deirdre Henderson mentioned Conrad Vispo or Ward Stone as speakers related to wildlife habitat. Frances Szasz suggested Eric Kiviat of Hudsonia. Kate Cashen noted that some speakers would be desirable to speak to the EMC at a regular meeting while others would be for the county-wide sessions.

- 4) *Plastics Recycling*: Chairman Simonsen asked if this is an issue to pursue or not, since it was discussed at the 6/22/09 unofficial meeting. Dan Marcus saw no immediate need to work on this matter as the county has a contract for recyclables which runs until 2012 or 2013.
- 5) *Cover Letter*: Kate Cashen had volunteered to develop a model cover letter which each town EMC member could use when distributing EMC recommendations to their town board (and also City of Hudson). Copies were distributed to members to review. There was a brief discussion on the pros and cons of the EMC handling the distribution directly or relying on individual members to make contact. There were points made on both sides. She will email the model cover letter to all EMC members for their use as they see fit. ***Bob Kessler made a motion to approve the model letter and seconded by Harvey Weber. Vote: All in favor.***
- 6) *NYSDEC Air Monitoring Station*: Mark Burch reported that the station is up and running.

NEW BUSINESS

- 1) *Climate Smart Communities*: Chairman Simonsen said that this topic was introduced at the last meeting and asked if anyone had looked into the issue further. There is a wealth of information available at the NYSDEC website. He thinks the program is great, but the big hurdle is to get communities to move on it. He asked whether the members would like it placed on the agenda for August to take action. Deirdre Henderson noted that NYSDEC is promoting this program and probably the only thing the EMC would need to do is pass a resolution to agree to the Climate Smart program (parts of which the EMC has already addressed in the EMC Energy Recommendations). She also understands that NYSDEC is moving in the direction of conditioning approval of grants on Smart Growth principles. John Dax noted that NYSDEC recently released guidance on incorporating green house gas emissions in the SEQRA process. It was suggested that someone from NYSDEC could be invited to speak to the EMC. Members were encouraged to visit the NYSDEC website for more information on the Climate Smart Communities program.
- 2) *What Is Green?*: Chairman Simonsen introduced the topic as of interest as there does not appear to be any good definition of the term which would guide the public in making decisions. John Dax suggested that LEED standards provide some guidance on the kinds of issues to take into account in a determination of whether a choice or project is “green.”
- 3) *Future Projects*: Chairman Simonsen asked for ideas on future EMC projects. He noted that energy and water were currently EMC priorities, but he added that ECL Article 47 (EMC powers and duties) holds a lot of issues, any of which we could carve out while also addressing water and energy. He stressed the importance of the EMC not becoming static and encouraged members to ask their local town/city officials for ideas about issues. Deirdre Henderson recommended a project on wildlife habitat which would explain how to promote and undertake a wildlife and habitat inventory to provide more information for local decision-makers. Another topic she suggested was low-impact development (designed to address stormwater management). Chairman Simonsen agreed that information and

education was needed to get the public to share the EMC's concerns about the environment and placed greatest potential with children's environmental education, as they are more receptive than their parents. There was some discussion about the importance of Board of Supervisors support for EMC initiatives. R. Vosburgh recommended that for any major new initiative, the EMC develop a proposal for review and approval of the Planning, Economic Development, and Tourism Committee of the Board of Supervisors. Frances Szasz reminded the members that in 1979, the Board of Supervisors nearly abolished the EMC because of actions that lacked Board of Supervisors support. Deirdre Henderson suggested that Chairman Simonsen contact Chairman Rick Keaveney to discuss the outlines of a wildlife and habitat initiative. Kate Cashen preferred an approach to inform the committee that the EMC would proceed unless we heard from the committee. Chairman Simonsen called on all members to speak to their town supervisors and he will discuss it with Chairman Keaveney. Deirdre Henderson wondered if anyone knew what other county EMCs in NYS were doing. She reported that John Adams had contacted NYSDEC about this and learned that there is a NYS Association of EMCs. Consensus was for John Adams to continue to find out more about the work of EMCs. Frances Szasz put in a plug for archiving important environmental data found in draft environmental impact statements and recounted how the EMC's natural resources inventory from the 1970s was misplaced at all levels including NYSDEC where it was thrown away due to lack of storage space. R. Vosburgh explained that the CC EMC has an archive stored in the Planning Department office. Finally, Bob Kessler wondered how many other towns have local environmental groups advising the town government. He explained that Hillsdale has a "green resources group." Harvey Weber reported that Copake has an active local environmental committee within town government. Chairman Simonsen reported that the Kinderhook Conservation Advisory Council is inactive.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Minutes prepared by:

Roland R. Vosburgh, Principal Planner