

**Columbia County
Environmental Management Council
Meeting Minutes
28 March 2011**

Present

Ed Simonsen, Chairman, Kinderhook
Jamie Purinton, Ancram (prepared minutes)
John Adams, Canaan
Kate Cashen, Claverack
Harvey Weber, Copake
John Dax, New Lebanon
Deirdre Henderson, Chatham
Scott Stackpole, Taghkanic
Guy Winig, Hillsdale (appointment pending)
Kathy Schneider, Stuyvesant
Ed Van Nostrand, CCDOH

Absent/Regrets

Melissa Sorman, Gallatin
Dan Marcus, Stockport
Louise Bliss-Kenneally, Greenport
Frances Szasz, Germantown
Karen Mort, Ghent
Dean Vander Schaaff, Livingston
Mike O'Hara, Hudson
Theresa Mayhew, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Guests

Ellen Jouret-Epstein, Columbia Land Conservancy

Call to Order

Chairman Ed Simonsen called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and noted that we did not have a quorum to conduct official business. He also said that because his re-appointment is in process at the Board of Supervisors (it has cleared the committee and is awaiting full BoS approval at their April meeting) he was acting in an "unofficial" capacity as chair.

Chairman's Report

Ed thanked Katy for doing the February minutes.

Ed said that he was still awaiting a final solution to having someone be identified (and re-imbursed by the County) to do the minutes. In the meantime, EMC members have volunteered to take turns in taking the minutes.

Correspondence

A letter supporting rural water association was both completed and both were sent to Commissioner Flood for transmittal to the Board of Supervisors.

Katy collected all of the supervisors' emails so the EMC's Year-End Report for 2010 can be transmitted directly to the Board of Supervisors. There was some discussion about the reporting structure for the EMC and whether all correspondence to the Board of Supervisors needed to go through Commissioner Flood. One of the concerns that was raised was that since the EMC no longer has staff support from the County (since the retirement of Roland Vosburgh), that information was not being shared on a timely basis. Ed said he would discuss this with Commissioner Flood.

Old Business

The Council discussed the County Agriculture Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) forums and the outcomes of these forums. Ellen Epstein reported that the summary notes from each of the forums are available on CLC's website. Scott asked the EMC members if they had attended the forums, and if so, what did they think of them. Ellen Epstein said all of the forums were given the same three questions to discuss, but that each of the sessions focused on the issues raised by the attendees. In general, however, the need for public education and county opportunities to support added value businesses for farmers was raised as an important issue at all sessions. In Hudson much of the discussion focused on the relationship between farmers and landowners. Katy said that there were compliments from farmers in her town about the way that farmers were brought into the process during the forums.

The Council discussed the summary list that John Adams assembled for potential speaker topics. Ellen was asked to review the topics in relationship to CLC's public education history and plans. Ellen said that CLC has a history of doing thematic programs and they are also thinking about offering basic curriculum/training courses for town planning and zoning board members. One concern is that many towns are not enforcing the training requirements for the local boards. Requirements are 4 hrs per year. Jamie and others agreed that EMC would likely want to co-sponsor public education events with CLC so it makes sense to work together to focus on potential upcoming programs.

EMC vice chairperson- Ed has asked considered a number of council members for vice chair and he feels that there are many good candidates. He was happy to report that Katy Cashen is willing to be vice chair. John Adams said that Article 47 does not require this position to be appointed by BoS so the conclusion was that the EMC can elect their own vice chair. Once we have an officially appointed chair, we will elect our vice chair.

Regarding the work that John Dax and Jamie Purinton started on gathering local information from towns about environmental regulations, Jamie presented these draft questions that each EMC member would use in their individual towns to gather and share information re environmental regulations. In this example stream buffers is the proposed topic:

1. Does your town have local stream protection or stream buffer requirements? Please give us the source and regulations as stated in either your zoning regulations or comp plan?
2. Are local stream protection or stream buffer regulations being developed in your in-progress zoning revisions or in your in-progress comprehensive plan?
3. Would your CAC, Planning or Zoning Revisions Board be interested in receiving sample or model language from other towns?

John Dax is working on a similar template. John and Jamie will share their work and come up with a draft template to review at our April meeting.

John Adams questioned EMC's authority to get involved in local environmental regulations. Diedre responded that she felt that Article 47 clearly states that this falls under the purview of the EMC . John Dax concurred based upon his knowledge of Article 47. Kathy and Jamie stated that doing this work is essential to their interest in serving on the EMC. Others agreed that sharing information about specific environmental regulations between towns would be valued and useful.

Based upon the EMC's previous discussion of GIS, Ellen said that she has been working at CLC on the topic; "How can we empower towns to use GIS?" Ellen talked to Neil from Cooperative Extension in Dutchess County. They want to explore ways that the County could apply for funding to provide GIS to local towns. One model would be installing simple system of GIS on town computer systems and a few people could be trained so that GIS can be used. Another way would be to have a web base data source that does not require as much training. The web base approach requires a host- which CLC could theoretically take on. Each town could access all the data layers through the host. This web based approach is less powerful than knowing how to use software but more accessible. CLC is putting together a meeting with Neil to discuss options. Larry Brody from the county planning board would be an important person to include in these discussions. Kathy is willing to be our EMC representative and other EMC would be welcome to join.

There was a proposal in an earlier meeting for EMC to write a letter to encourage town supervisors to create and support CAC's. Deidre noted that Item 4 of Article 47 empowers us to advise and assist CAC's and to foster interchange amongst CACs within the County. Regarding the creation of CAC's, each town has their own situation. For example, Katy is supportive of CACs but does not think there is the volunteer power to get a CAC started at this time in Claverack. Other towns may simply not be receptive to our letter. It was agreed that a letter could do no harm and could help. Ed will draft one for our review. The letter could include a point that CAC's can lend a helping hand to over-stretched volunteer planning and zoning boards.

Ed said that one of the EMC members sent an email proposing that we have fewer meetings and have work done by subcommittees. He said that EMC tried that and in his opinion we did not accomplish as much when we met only 4 times per year.

NYSEG plans to install new power lines in part of the county. Ellen said that by the end of April they will publicly submit their preferred route and alternative routes to each town that is affected.

We talked about the Earth Day letter. John Adams is concerned that it is too “preachy”. Harvey thought it was perfect for the purpose. Kathy said it is important for EMC to support Earth Day, “if we can’t write a letter supporting Earth Day who are we?” Others said that they approved of the letter. Guy thought it could be stronger. It was generally agreed that the existing letter strikes a good balance. John Adams to follow up meeting with suggestions for Earth Day letter.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Minutes prepared by:
Jamie Purinton, Ancram