

**COLUMBIA COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
15 NOVEMBER 2010**

PRESENT:

Ed Simonsen, Chairman, Kinderhook
Kate Cashen, Claverack
John Adams, Canaan
Harvey Weber, Copake
Dean Vander Schaaff, Livingston
Frances Szasz, Germantown
Kathy Schneider, Stuyvesant
Robert Kessler, Hillsdale
Louise Bliss-Keneally, Greenport
Scott Stackpole, Taghkanic
Melissa Sorman, Gallatin
Jamie Purinton, Ancram
Karen Mort, Ghent
Michael O'Hara, City of Hudson
Deirdre Henderson, Chatham

REGRETS:

Dan Marcus, Stockport
Theresa Mayhew, CCE

ABSENT:

John Dax, New Lebanon
Ed Van Nostrand, CCDOH

VACANCIES:

Town of Austerlitz
Town of Clermont

STAFF:

Roland R. Vosburgh, Principal Planner

GUESTS:

Kenneth J. Flood, Commissioner
Patrice Perry, Senior Planner
Tim Stalker, Chairman, CC Planning Board

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ed Simonsen called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and noted that a quorum to conduct official business was present (15 out of 19 voting members).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

John Adams made a motion to approve the draft October EMC meeting minutes as written and seconded by Bob Kessler. Vote: All in favor.

CORRESPONDENCE

None

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER

Chairman Simonsen introduced Kenneth J. Flood, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Economic Development. EMC members introduced themselves as well as Patrice Perry and Tim Stalker.

Commissioner Flood thanked the EMC for the invitation. He explained that he has several responsibilities including the Commissioner of the Department of Planning & Economic Development and the Executive Director of the Columbia Economic Development Corporation and the CRC?? He acknowledged that the planning services in the county were spread very thin but also invited EMC input on how the staff and the EMC might work together to further the work of the EMC. In responding to the questions the EMC submitted on the relationship between the department and the county Planning Board, he outlined the functions of the Planning Board as a review body pursuant to state law. The major Planning Board responsibilities are to review local planning and zoning referrals pursuant to General Municipal Law Section 239 l&m and to sponsor educational training sessions for local planning board and zoning board of appeals members. To clear up any misconceptions about roles and responsibilities, he stressed that the staff of the department assist the Planning Board in these limited areas of responsibility while policy and departmental direction are set by the Board of Supervisors in consultation with the Commissioner.

Commissioner Flood welcomed the reinvigorated spirit of the EMC over the last few years but the powers and duties of the EMC must be fit within a reality of limited resources. While he was open to ideas on how the EMC and the Planning Board might cooperate more in the future, he explained that the logistics of offering an opportunity for the EMC to provide comment on Planning Board referrals would be logistically difficult. That is because there is only a 30 day window in which the Planning Board can respond to local governments and the staff have a week or less to review and prepare a report and recommendation to the Planning Board. He thought that the EMC review of town comprehensive plans was a good project and he suggested that the EMC could focus on identifying where comprehensive plans might conflict with sensitive environments. On the matter of a natural resources inventory, he pointed out that there is a lot of information out there but the problem is that it is not in one convenient place. Towns in the county have been very active in developing comprehensive plans and so there are natural resources inventories on the local level. He explained that the county is not in a position to fund county wide inventories because of a lack of funding and the reality that NYS is a home rule state. Lastly he expressed that a geographic information system (GIS) is one of his priorities. Some county departments have elements of GIS, but there is no comprehensive system currently. Again, funding is the limiting factor and the county hired a new information technology director earlier this year.

During the discussion that followed the following points were made:

- There have been several GIS studies done for the county in the past (the latest was in 2000) which have made the usual efficiency and cost savings arguments.
- Suggestion made that perhaps GIS and property assessment is a way to move ahead with establishing GIS with towns helping to fund a county wide system.
- College interns could be used to help get GIS underway.
- The CC Planning Board appears to be a reactive agency but instituting GIS is a productive initiative. Is the goal of the department regional planning or not? (Commissioner Flood responded that the county Planning Board does not drive the program of the department, the Board of Supervisors does.)
- The BOS in the 1970s did not support major regional planning in the county and the EMC NRI produced in mid 1970s was misplaced or lost and no copy is retrievable.
- EMC could assist GIS effort by offering strong recommendations to Commissioner Flood and the Board of Supervisors.
- Frustration expressed that elected officials do not appreciate the value of GIS and miss out on opportunities.
- Suggestion that each EMC member speak to their supervisor about the value of GIS.
- For GIS to be successful, you need to know where you are going and what standards you want to achieve, e.g. a county comprehensive plan. Is there a prejudice against county planning; is the goal to get to county planning from the bottom up? (Commissioner Flood responded that if GIS and staff resources were available now, the department could benefit the towns more, but it just does not exist currently. He also stressed the importance of defining exactly what constitutes “county planning” and that currently, there is no support to do comprehensive county land use planning. He added, however, that there is support for county transportation planning and water resources may be another area of consensus.)
- How best to achieve the support for county planning; do we need a crisis? Sometimes “progress comes in a hearse.” (Commissioner Flood answered that the best way is to secure small victories and then document the results; it is a slow process).
- One argument for GIS will be its value in facilitating consolidation and sharing of municipal services.
- Is there a way to integrate or “stitch together” the results of town plans and studies (e.g. town source water protection plans prepared by the NY Rural Water Association) at the county level?
- It is difficult to get elected officials to read informational material, so it would be more successful to get 10 minutes at a board meeting to “tell a story.” Towns are reluctant to move ahead with new initiatives unless they know it has been done before. Perhaps the county could serve as a clearinghouse for information.

- County should take the lead on biodiversity protection, water resources, and transportation.
- How best can we educate the Board of Supervisors to secure support for EMC program and recommendations? (Commissioner Flood encouraged the EMC to go to the Board or the committee of the Board and make your voice heard, but it needs to be one position/clear message. And the best approach would be to offer county services to the towns, not to proceed with county-wide planning).
- Suggestion that a two track approach is needed: first approach your town supervisors and secure their support and then go to the full Board of Supervisors.
- Suggestion that the EMC send periodic memos to individual supervisors.

Commissioner Flood concluded that his goal is to improve the department's contact with town planning boards and zoning boards of appeal. He asked if the EMC had a top priority to get before the Board of Supervisors. Chairman Simonsen said the EMC cannot answer that yet until Nan Stolzenburg speaks in January on her experience with town comprehensive plans. Commissioner Flood listed water, housing, transportation, and land use planning that need to be addressed in his reorganization plans for the department in the new year.

Roland R. Vosburgh announced that he would be retiring from county service in December 2010 after nearly 31 years. He praised the level of energy and commitment by all the members of the EMC. In the last few years the members have demonstrated their capacity and willingness to work on multiple issues and produce recommendations and develop a public education program. He further expressed confidence that, even with limited support resources, the EMC would continue to be successful. Commissioner Flood recognized Mr. Vosburgh's professionalism in the two years he has worked with him. Chairman Simonsen thanked Mr. Vosburgh for his exceptional service to the EMC. Former Chairman Frances Szasz cited Mr. Vosburgh's attention to detail and the excellent connections to state agencies he developed over the years that assisted both the EMC and Columbia County.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Simonsen reminded members of upcoming meeting and conference opportunities.

Chairman Simonsen reported that he will draft a 2010 summary of EMC activities to circulate to all members for comment and revision.

OLD BUSINESS

The potential future topics/speakers list was briefly discussed. Several members submitted ideas and these were compiled, as submitted, by John Adams. It was decided that all EMC members

should review the list and come up with their top ten topics and submit those to John Adams for compilation to be discussed at a future meeting.

Kate Cashen confirmed that Nan Stolzenburg would be attending the January EMC meeting to discuss her observations about environmental issues addressed in town comprehensive plans. Bob Kessler shared that he thought having speakers at monthly EMC meetings was great, but it means less time for regular EMC work. Chairman Simonsen suggested that the EMC could consider holding two meetings per month.

Deirdre Henderson confirmed that Mark Lowery, with NYSDEC's Climate Smart Community program would be the next public speaker for the EMC's speakers series. Kathy Schneider said that the tentative date for this event would be 2/17/11 at the Stuyvesant Town Hall.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:01 pm.

Minutes prepared by:

Roland R. Vosburgh, Principal Planner