

Conservation Advisory Commission
Minutes of February 17, 2011 Meeting

Present: Steve Appel, Curt Pueschel, Linda Green, Shepard Bennett, Richard Pastore, Michael Restuccia, Cynthia Stephens/Westerman

Also attending: David Marnicki of the Vestal Town Board

David Marnicki attended as the CAC's contact on the Town Board. Introductions were made and the activities and concerns of the CAC members were shared. In particular, CAC members were concerned that products of our past activities, such as the stream report and well-water study, received little response from the Town. It was also reiterated that, in the interest of more effective operation of the CAC, we would like to return to two-year staggered terms and to have alternate members.

David's suggestion that the CAC might pursue DEC grants, which could fund a tree inventory and tree plantings in the Town was discussed. He clarified that the focus of such a program in Vestal would be the trees within the Town right-of-way in residents' front yards. Although the deadline for 2011 has already passed, there was consensus that this effort would be an appropriate undertaking for the CAC should the grant program survive the current financial crisis.

The need to develop a management plan for each of the Town's parks was raised. The CAC would like to see clear, detailed goals articulated for managing each park. David described the circumstances that led to the acquisition of the land north of Middendorf Park. Discussion then turned to Jones Park and the goals of possible timber harvesting in Jones Park were discussed. David explained that forest health, not revenue, will be more important in any decision to log. Curt raised the point that there are deed restrictions on the Jones Park property because New York State conservation funds were used to acquire the land. Legal opinions have held that the use of funds derived from a park established using such state funds can only be spent to enhance that same park. The CAC believes that such restrictions would apply to Jones Park for revenues from either timber cutting or natural gas extraction. David also addressed a question about why the slope near the entry of Jones Park had been mowed, rather than letting it revert to forest.

Mr. Marnicki was thanked for the information he shared and the meeting continued with the normal agenda and reports after his departure. The minutes of the January 20, 2011 meeting were approved. The next meeting is scheduled for March 17.

The Freedom of Information request for communications relevant to the proposed logging in Jones Park was again discussed. All communications involving the CAC that were covered by the FOIL request have been provided to the Clerk's Office by Dick and Curt.

The contract between the Town and the forester, previously circulated by e-mail, was discussed. It was noted that the contract specifies that the forester is to work in conjunction with the Vestal CAC and Town residents.

Curt reported on a focus-group session for the Broome County Waterfront Revitalization Plan held earlier that day. Many ideas were discussed for attracting people to the water; among those identified were an increase in the number of access points, amenities, and sites of interest near the water's edge. Maps, signs, and web information showing access points and facilities are essential. Large events, such as Pops on the River, also draw people to the rivers. There is a great deal of lake boating in the area, and perhaps an effort should be made to attract some of that activity to the rivers. The eastern part of the county has significant weekend traffic from big cities, and leisure activities include going to farmers' markets, shops, and entertainment events. Scenic river settings add to the appeal for these visitors.

Curt suggested that in the coming months members of the CAC become more familiar with the Rock Road Glen and the tract of land added to the north end of Middendorf Park. Both areas have natural features that should be protected and the CAC should work to that end. Cindy offered to lead tours of both of these properties since they are near her home and she is familiar with them.

Cindy reported that a group of residents were talking about asking the Town Board to draw up its own enhanced road ordinances for Vestal that could provide some protection against the damage expected from the heavy truck traffic associated with natural gas drilling. This group feels the road ordinance developed by the County is inadequate for that purpose.

Cindy also reported that the EMC was still functioning despite the loss of the Senior Planner. One of the first tasks for the new EMC is to complete the Open Space Plan which has been in development for a few years. The title and focus of this plan may be changed due to the current political climate and may need to have the final draft approved. However, there is valuable material in the draft which should not be lost. Julian Shepherd of Binghamton University has nearly finished his inventory of special environmental areas in the County and has a graduate student who might help with the completion of the Open Space Plan or Guide. The EMC is planning to sponsor speakers, such as the coming talk on the emerald ash borer, that will be of general interest to county residents.