

Vestal Conservation Advisory Commission
Minutes of the November 20, 2014 Meeting

Present: Curt Pueschel, Steve Appel, Michael Restuccia, Victor Lamoureux, Cynthia Stephens/Westerman, Linda Green, and interns Megan Larson and Stephanie Craig

The October meeting was cancelled by general consent. The next regular meeting of the CAC is scheduled for December 18, 2014.

Cole Moore has indicated that he will not continue as a member and Shep Bennett has not been in contact for most of the year, and the Town has been informed. We will redouble our efforts to find new members who can help us advance our projects. Adam Flint is currently an alternate member and having served for a year would be a candidate to be switched to a full member seat if Shep's seat is vacated.

The files containing information about the hemlock and ash identification has been recovered from a computer crash and will be revised and circulated for review. Means of distributing the flyer were discussed. Public attention to the problems of tree pests will be at a low ebb until spring, so our goal will be to have the information ready for dissemination by March 1. We will move forward with seeking a Town e-mail address.

On October 30th, Victor and Curt met with Jeremy Waddell of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition and visited Vestal Center Park, Richards Avenue Park, and the Moore Park wetland to get his opinion on some of the ideas we have considered for our parks conservation management plan. He encouraged the establishment of a minimum 30 foot-wide scrub and tree revegetated buffer along the Choconut streambank in Vestal Center and Richards Avenue Parks. He also examined the berms that we had discovered on the Choconut tributary just north of Richards Avenue Park. Jeremy pointed out that the berms could serve as a dike restricting the flow of the Choconut in flood, greatly magnifying upstream flooding into the Town park and nearby private properties. The draft parks report will be revised to take into account his observations and suggestions. He also suggested approaches to obtain grants to provide funding for streambank stabilization and revegetation. He noted that volunteer labor is considered 'in-kind' cost sharing that could constitute the Town's contribution to resourcing a proposal. Knowing how to improve the Moore Park wetland depends on learning more about the history of the site. Options are constrained by the fact that slowing the water flow too much could cause upstream pooling that could reach Vestal Road. If funding for any of these projects is obtained, the USC can provide the required design services.

The veterinary practice on the corner of African Road and the Vestal Parkway has proposed to purchase a small corner of the northern end of African Road Park so their parking lot can be enlarged. This area that was greatly affected by flooding and a significant amount of work would be necessary to protect an enlarged parking lot from future high flow events.

Curt described a talk presented at the University by Dr. Rick Ostfeld of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. Dr. Ostfeld is an international authority on the ecological aspects of the spread of Lyme disease. One of the especially noteworthy points of his seminar was that when forest fragmentation occurs, diversity of the larger animals especially predators is reduced, and the numbers of white-footed mouse, chipmunks, and grey squirrels increase. These species are the most important hosts of black-legged (deer) ticks, the ticks that transmit Lyme disease, babesiosis, and anaplasmosis. Asked whether the landscape fragmentation associated with fracking roads and pipelines would likely result in an increase in Lyme disease, he commented

that it has not been studied, but fracking causes forest fragmentation and the known effects of forest fragmentation on increased tick abundance suggest that this is a likely outcome.

Also related to news about fracking, recent reports from Texas indicate that after many years of decline traffic fatalities rose by eight percent. Much of the reversal was attributed to a large increase in commercial vehicle crashes tied to the oil and gas industry. Energy-field workers often work 12-hour shifts and then drive long distances to their hotels.

Steve reported on two matters that came before the Planning Board. There was preliminary discussion of a proposal for another United Health Services building, which would be built just east of present UHS facility on the Vestal Parkway site, opposite the University. The lot was formerly the site of Van Atta Motors. The second topic was a discussion of the stormwater runoff from the Temple Israel site. The existing building with a collapsed roof will be replaced, which will trigger the new stormwater requirements. The new requirements will be met by reducing the amount impervious surface, replacing part of the parking lot with lawn.