

**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION (CACC)**

March 24, 2008 Meeting Record

Members Present:

Libby Liebschutz, Chair; Katherine Daniels, Jeff Freedman, Nancy Heinzen, John Mead; Valerie Newell, Mike Waldenmaier, Caleb Wistar

Staff Members Present:

Jeff Lipnicky, Rob Leslie, Debbie Kitchen

Chair Report:

- A. **Approval of February 11, 2008 Meeting Record:** Ms. Liebschutz asked the members if they had any comments or corrections on the draft February 11, 2008 meeting record that was circulated. Hearing none, the members voted to approve the meeting record. Two members abstained from voting since they were not present at the February meeting. Mr. Leslie indicated the approved meeting record would be posted on the Town's web site.
- B. **Announcement of New CACC Member:** Ms. Liebschutz welcomed Katherine Daniels to the CACC. Katherine Daniels will fill a member position left vacant following the resignation of Paul Sieloff. Each CACC member introduced himself or herself and provided a brief summary of their interests as a member of the CACC.
- C. **CACC members term expiration:** Ms. Liebschutz stated that the terms of five (5) members will be expiring in April. She indicated that letters from the Town Supervisor soliciting interest or non-interest of continued membership on the CACC were mailed to the five (5) members. Ms. Liebschutz stated that reappoint will be for an additional 2-year term, and she hopes that the five (5) members will stay on board since the existing committee is working well together. Supervisor Cunningham requests a response to his letter by April 3, with the intention of reappointing members at the April 9, 2008 Town Board meeting.
- D. **Other**
Mr. Leslie stated that three members, Mike DiPaolo, Ted Putney, and David Van Luven informed him they are unable to attend the night's meeting.

Farm and Open Space Protection Program (Open Space Plan):

- A. **Discussion of Outline/Schedule of Planning Process:**
Ms. Liebschutz informed the committee that this meeting will start the Open Space planning process, and tonight's goal is to get consensus on the planning process for Phase 1 Issues Identification. She introduced John Behan from Behan Planning Associates and David Haight from American Farmland Trust who will be working with the Town on the Plan.

John Behan introduced himself and stated that his role is to work with the community (Town) to develop the Plan. He indicated that with the assistance of the DEDP a tentative planning process flow chart was developed and submitted to all members prior to the meeting. He desired to receive feedback from the Committee on the process, which represents an issues and identification assessment. Ms. Liebschutz asked Mr. Behan to discuss the roles of the consultant, CACC, and DEDP staff as he discussed the planning process.

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Town-wide Orientation Meeting

The planning process would begin with a Town-wide Orientation meeting in May to understand the priorities of the community regarding open space. Mr. Behan indicated they would use various brainstorming and ranking exercises to gather input from the public. The consultants role would be to facilitate discussion to solicit community ideas/goals and objectives; develop meeting materials (agenda, presentation) with DEDP staff. The DEDP could discuss Open Space as it is addressed in the Comprehensive Plan; develop publicity materials (press release, invitations, secure meeting location) and provide maps from the Comprehensive Plan. The CACC would participate in trial orientation meeting, help to publicize the meeting, and review the outcome of Town-wide meeting.

Ms. Newell noted that the format at the last Bethlehem 20/20 Committee meeting included asking a question and having each person come in with an answer from their perspective. This could be used with the initial town-wide orientation meeting to include a "ballot box" approach for people to put their answer to the question: "What issue would you like to see our Town's Open Space Plan address?" Mr. Behan stated that the idea could be extended further to include what are the issues/concerns of the community (our needs).

Data Collection

Following the Town-wide meeting, Behan Planning and the DEDP would engage in a data collection stage to inventory existing data, and gather data that is needed based on the community's priorities. Behan's role would be to identify maps to be prepared (provide guidance in map preparation), while the DEDP staff would prepare maps (collection of data identified from the orientation meeting). The CACC could identify maps to be prepared and assist with data collection, where applicable.

Neighborhood/Organization Workshops and Focus Groups

The Neighborhood/Organization Workshops would occur following the data collection stage. Mr. Leslie asked if the CACC preferred setting up these meetings on topics or locality in the Town (i.e. Slingerlands, Glenmont, Selkirk, etc.). The discussion from the CACC indicated the topical workshops would be beneficial. Potentially the topical workshops could be held in different areas of the Town. Mr. Behan stated the consultant's role would be to develop materials (agenda, presentation) with DEDP staff and facilitate some of the meetings. The DEDP's role would be to facilitate; publicize meetings; and secure meeting location(s). The CACC's role could be to help facilitate and help to publicize meetings.

Ms. Liebshutz indicated there was previous discussion regarding dividing the topics into recreation, culture and historic resources, etc. and we should organize focus groups along these lines. Mr. Behan indicated that he would prefer to start focus groups ideally in May or June, following the public meeting.

Ms. Newell stated we should keep in mind that we are working in the context of the willing landowner. In response, Mr. Behan indicated that willing landowners are an important component. The Town should allow people to think openly, while respecting willing landowners.

Ms. Heinzen indicated that the town wide meeting should cover the fundamentals of Open Space (i.e. soils, agriculture, species). Speakers should educate committee members on the topical areas at upcoming CACC meetings and there is a need to get more into the substance of the topics. She

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provided the examples of an individual from the Soils Conservation Service or NYSDEC to speak to the CACC on soil properties and biodiversity.

Ms. Newell reminded the CACC that they should not disregard the financial aspects and the funding sources. She indicated it was important to present to the focus groups information on what is available to fund programs. Mr. Leslie stated that the funding tools discussion will be covered in Phase 2 of the Plan and that currently we are trying to identify the issues/priorities of the community.

CACC members agreed that the Open Space Funding and Toolbox Report is an important educational piece of the Open Space Plan.

Ms. Newell stated that we need to reach out to get people to participate, however, we need to be able to tell people what we are asking them to participate in. If we don't have people who want to participate we will need to change our focus. We could then change our priorities of what the Plan will focus on. Ms. Newell and Mr. Mead suggested that the "landowner only" meeting precede the interviews with the individual landowners (i.e. American Farmland Trust's interviews).

Mr. Mead stated that the landowner interviews/focus groups should occur at the same stage of data collection. He felt that the Town should see if there is anyone who is interested in participating during the interviews or focus group meetings. Ms. Daniels suggested a workshop early on in the process to identify and describe tools and techniques would be beneficial.

Mr. Waldenmaier stated a workshop discussing tools and techniques should be held only with the large landowners. He felt these individuals may not understand what the tools are (advantages/disadvantages) and experts on these tools should be invited to talk to the large landowners.

Mr. Leslie expressed concern that discussion of the tools may be entering too early in the planning process. He indicated the Town should identify the topics that are important through the public meeting, then develop criteria to establish priorities, and then use this information to discuss with landowners.

Mr. Behan stated that following the neighborhood/organization workshop stage, the consultant, DEDP, and CACC would synthesize the public input from the previous stages and develop a strategic report that identifies the Town's priorities and establishes a strategy for moving forward. A public meeting would be held in December that presents the report.

Public Comment on this part of the agenda included:

Dave Hillman applauded the idea of meeting with people who will be effected the most. He is concerned that the outcome of this is people telling him what he can do with his land. He feels that meetings should be scheduled at times outside the farming season.

Ron Selkirk indicated the he owns 40 acres along Maple Avenue and questioned whether the Town's insurance would cover people if a trail was located on his property.

Ken Neff expressed concern that there is one side attacking and one side defending. He stated that the Town is very diverse and that advantages and disadvantages of all tools and methods should be discussed. He also felt that the "willing landowner" must stay in the conversation.

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Linda Jasinski stated that landowners should be involved upfront, since they are the stakeholders. She indicated the since the areas of Town are different (Selkirk compared to Delmar) the neighborhood workshops would work better.

B. Discussion of Agriculture and Farmland Protection Grant:

Mr. Leslie informed the CACC that the Town has accepted the grant from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to fund the development of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. The Town will establish an Agriculture and Farmland Study Advisory Committee for the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. The Town is looking to schedule the SAC meetings at 6pm prior to the CACC meetings to maximize the resources and minimize the travel expenses of the consultants. Mr. Leslie informed the CACC and audience that the individuals who are interested in participating on the SAC should submit letters of interest to the Supervisor by April 10. Tom Gallagher from Cornell Cooperative Extension will be asked to be a part of the SAC. Mr. Gallagher stated that agriculture/farming in Town is different now than it was several years ago. Agritourism is an increasingly popular sector of agriculture/farming. Mr. Gallager stated that from his experience working with farmers in the Town, there are many opportunities in the Town and that the Town still has areas of productive soils for farming.

Mr. Leslie informed the CACC that as part of the agreement with Behan Planning Associates, American Farmland Trust (AFT) was hired as a subconsultant to work on the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. David Haight was introduced as the representative from AFT who will be working with the Town.

Mr. Haight provided a summary of the agriculture and farming industry in New York State. He stated that of the 30 million acres comprising the State, approximately 7.5 million acres are farmed, indicating a strong agricultural sector in New York. He informed the CACC that 50 counties across the State have Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plans and that two years ago municipalities were made eligible for grants to develop their own local plan. The plans should document why agriculture is important to the Town, locate the lands in Town currently in agriculture, and develop strategies to encourage farming to remain a viable industry in the Town.

Mr. Haight stated that a landowner driven process is very important, and landowners need to understand tools that are available. He indicated that AFT will conduct interviews to include discussion of tools that are available. The Open Space Plan and Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan will be developed concurrently.

Public Comment on this part of the agenda included:

Mr. Haight, in response to a question, identified several tools that are applicable to the Town, including Agricultural Districts, right to farm laws, purchase of development rights, property tax relief, term conservation easements, and zoning codes.

A member of the community asked how much money is available. He indicated that funding is the only way the Town is going to generate interest from landowners.

Other Business:

Mr. Leslie stated that DEDP would review the comments from the meeting and update the planning process flow chart accordingly.

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Mr. Leslie stated that the next step in the process was to conduct a trial orientation meeting with the CACC at the April meeting to test the format of the Town-wide orientation meeting. In order to prepare for the April meeting, Mr. Leslie informed the committee that the April meeting has been rescheduled to April 28. Mr. Leslie indicated the CACC webpage will be updated to reflect the date change.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Next Meeting:

April 28, 2008 at 7:00 PM