

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

April 28, 2008 Meeting Record

Members Present:

Libby Liebschutz, Chair; Mike DiPaolo, Jeff Freedman, Nancy Heinzen, John Mead; Valerie Newell, Ted Putney, David Van Luven, Mike Waldenmaier, Caleb Wistar

Staff Members Present:

Jeff Lipnicky, Rob Leslie, Debbie Kitchen

Chair Report:

- A. **Approval of March 24, 2008 Meeting Record:** Ms. Liebschutz asked the members if they had any comments or corrections on the draft March 24, 2008 meeting record that was circulated. Ms. Newell requested that the minutes be corrected to reflect her and Mr. Mead's comment that the "landowner only" meeting precede the interviews with the individual landowners (i.e., American Farmland Trust's interviews). Following this discussion, the members voted to approve the meeting record. Mr. Leslie indicated the change would be made to the meeting record, which would be posted on the Town's web site.
- B. **Town Board reappointment of CACC Member:** Ms. Liebschutz informed the committee that the five (5) members who's terms were scheduled to expire (Libby Liebschutz, John Mead, David Van Luven, Nancy Heinzen, and Mike DiPaolo) were reappointed by the Town Board at its April 9, 2008 meeting. She indicated the reappointments are for a term of two years expiring April 30, 2010.
- C. **Other**
No discussion items to report.

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

A. Review revised planning process outline

Mr. Leslie introduced John Behan and Melissa Barry from Behan Planning Associates who would review the planning process flow chart and facilitate the trial brainstorming session with the CACC that is planned for the May 15, 2008 public meeting. Mr. Behan reviewed the process flow chart with the committee and indicated that the one main adjustment as a result of the March CACC meeting was placing the focus groups and agricultural landowner interviews at the second stage in the process. Mr. Putney asked how an agricultural focus group would be selected. Mr. Leslie stated that when the Town conducted the Comprehensive Plan rural landowners survey they identified lands of 7 or more acres, which resulted in approximately 300 parcels. This method could be conducted again. Mr. Behan stated in his experience a typical large landowner is usually represented by 30-40 acres of land. However, he indicated each Town is different and Bethlehem should identify its own cut-off acreage size.

Mr. Mead suggested we should bring large landowners together first before interviews or focus groups. Ms. Newell suggested placing a "meeting with large landowner or principals" bubble under the Town wide orientation meeting. Ms. Newell explained that she felt principals are the owners of space that the Town is looking to protect.

Mr. Freedman expressed concern regarding the effectiveness of a meeting with the potential to have 300 people in attendance. The meeting would have to be carefully structured to be

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effective. Mr. Waldenmaier stated that willing landowners is the driving process for the plan and that we shouldn't limit the size of the landowners acreage.

There was discussion regarding the potential for other focus groups in addition to the large landowners meeting. Ms. Heinzen suggested the development community could be labeled as a group. Mr. Leslie stated focus groups haven't been identified and had indicated that responses received from the public meeting would guide the identification of groups.

Additionally, there was discussion regarding what types of data could be collected. Mr. Leslie again stated that the results of the public meeting would drive the identification of data collection. For example, if pathways and connections were identified then an existing sidewalks/pathways layer could be developed. Ms. Heinzen asked if habitat layers would be included in the data collection. Mr. Behan suggested it would be best to use data that is already available from the Town or other State and Federal agencies.

B. Review May 15 public meeting logistics and agenda:

The Committee reviewed the agenda and logistics of the May 15 public meeting. Mr. Leslie indicated that the Town Hall Auditorium had been reserved for the meeting, scheduled to begin at 7PM. There was concern amongst the committee that the meeting was in conflict with the Corporate Challenge 5K Run scheduled for the same evening in Albany. Members indicated this could result in an incomplete picture of Town interests. It was determined that there would be other opportunities to capture input through focus groups and public meetings. Mr. Leslie stated space availability is an issue in Town Hall and it would be difficult to change the date. Members agreed to keep the date and time as scheduled.

Mr. Leslie informed the CACC that the Town will prepare fliers to be submitted to all of the elementary schools with the idea that the students would bring the fliers home to their parents. Several members indicated all three school districts should be included in this outreach effort. Mr. Leslie stated the elementary schools in the Guilderland, Bethlehem, and Ravena-Coeymans districts would receive the fliers. Mr. Leslie stated the CACC's website has been updated to announce the public meeting date and time. Ms. Liebschutz asked if the CACC's website is interactive so visitors can email the CACC directly. Mr. Leslie stated the website has an email address under cacc@townofbethlehem.org which sends messages to either himself or Ms. Kitchen. Ms. Newell suggested televising the meeting on the local Channel 18. Mr. Leslie indicated he would contact the Bethlehem library to check on their availability. Additionally, the public meeting announcements would be placed in the Spotlight and Ravena News Herald a week before the meeting.

C. Identify volunteer recorders for May 15 public meeting:

Mr. Behan and Ms. Barry summarized the Town's and Behan's presentation components of the public meeting and then introduced the group brainstorming session that would be utilized. Ms. Barry stated the attendees would be separated into 6 groups of which each would have a facilitator and recorder. Facilitators would include staff from Behan Planning Associates, American Farmland Trust, and the Town's Planning Department. Recorders from the CACC were then identified and included the following members: Nancy Heinzen, Caleb Wistar, Val Newell, Libby Liebschutz, David VanLuven, and Debbie Kitchen.

D. Conduct public meeting brainstorming session:

Ms. Barry stated the public meeting brainstorming session would include a review of the Open Space Planning Process Guiding Principles, which would also be distributed at the meeting. Mr.

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Behan and Ms. Barry conducted the trial brainstorming session with the CACC. The results are as follows:

What defines open space?

- Undeveloped (public, private)
- No Pavement
- Unmanicured
- Open to the sky
- No specific purpose
- Institutional (parks, cemetery)
- Publicly allowable
- Forested
- Potential for recreation
- Lands without buildings or pavement
- Land that should be preserved for some reason
- Green Space
- Agricultural Land
- Multiple purpose – passive/active

- Undeveloped Land (as a subset of Open Space)
- Open Space
 - Green Space

What are the major opportunities and needs for Bethlehem in regards to open space preservation?

<u>Needs</u>		<u>Opportunities</u>
• Protect wetlands		• Keep it that way "Little Town"
•	↔	• Preserve Natural Character
• Safety/Property Protection	↔	•
• Respect for private property/envi. concerns	↔	•
• Town assistance with encroachment & adverse possession in developments		• Keeping taxes low by not developing (keeps property values high/willing to pay)
• Secure integrated trail system		• Ongoing facilitation of existing resources, parks etc.
• Know where Town boundary is		• State funding
• Hudson River habitat	↔	•
• Ecosystem inventory – prioritization		• Working open space into good development, connectivity
• Wetland habitat/riparian streams to prevent fragmentation		
• Mix of land uses, keep some open lands around development		

What do you want the Town to look like in 30 years for Open Space?

- Integrated
- Willing – to keep open
- Economically viable to keep land open
- Conserved
- Natural Areas
- Preserve beautiful land
- Mixed (economic, land use)
- Protected agricultural soils (for food)
- Look like it does now (farmland, open land)
- Useful for its natural resources and people
- Clean, no fossil fuel vehicles

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Public Comment:

Ken Neff indicated that facilitators are not trained to find the truth. He has seen incredible bias in the recording of comments in the past.

Jeff Vadney stated that the identification of property owners of 7 acres or greater would yield 300 people, which represents one-tenth of the Town's population. He suggested that during the focus group meeting participants could be divided into subgroups based on how many acres they own. Mr. Vadney also stated the time for public comment should be better defined on the agenda.

Linda Jasinski stated that economic development opportunities for future generations need to be kept open.

Debbie Kitchen suggested the vision statement could be based on a 20 year and a 50 year horizon.

Nancy Neff stated the size or the property owner's land should be considered in context with the location in Town. For example, 2 acres of land in Delmar is significant compared to 2 acres in Selkirk, which is less significant. She expressed concern that we are trying to freeze frame the Town so that future generations do not have economic development opportunity.

Mr. Leslie indicated that the Town does not desire to take away development rights.

Other Business:

No discussion items to report.

Adjournment:

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

Next Meeting:

May 15, 2008 at 7:00 PM Open Space Town-wide Public Orientation Meeting

June 9, 2008 at 7:00 PM