

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION

MEMORANDUM

To: Town Supervisor Egan
Members of the Town Board
Town Clerk Newkirk
Town Attorney Potter

From: John Smolinsky, CACC Chairman
George Leveille, Director of Economic Development and Planning

Subject: Quarterly Report of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC)

Administrative Activities

The CACC met during the months of March, April and May and has set a regular meeting schedule for 7:30 P.M. on the second Monday of each month. The first three meetings were spent on introductions of members and initial ideas, getting educated by experts invited to brief the committee and development of action plans.

Members were randomly assigned two- or three-year terms, as follows:

<u>Two-year term</u>	<u>Three-year term</u>
Mike DiPaolo	Jeff Freedman
Nancy Heinzen	Valerie Newell
Libby Liebschutz	Ted Putney
John Mead	John Smolinsky
Matt Watson	Mike Waldenmaier
	Caleb Wistar

The Committee adopted a work plan to guide its work; it is attached to this report. A notable addition to both tasks on the work plan is a commitment to produce and recommend educational materials for landowners, developers and the public.

CACC adopted a simple public comment policy, which allows for a 10-15 minute comment period after the committee's discussion of each of its two major tasks. This allows timely public comment without unnecessarily extending the meeting time. As CACC workload grows, the committee could revisit the comment procedures to optimize use of its meeting time.

The Bethlehem town website now includes CACC information including agendas, minutes, meeting dates and will eventually be a place for CACC work products as they are finalized.

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CACC Outside Activities

The Committee chairman and town staff attended a local workshop titled "What's Happening in the Hilltowns". Among other things, the workshop panel discussed protection of open space and rural character of their communities. These topics were pertinent to CACC tasks. In addition, various speakers identified the need to carefully plan hamlets and future development and to provide funding for land conservation.

The chairman attended a Funding for Conservation Lands Workshop in Dutchess County. It was sponsored by the Trust for Public Land and hosted by a Dutchess County farm owner. It was attended by elected and appointed town officials, interested landowners, conservation advocates and a few private planning consultants. There were about 40 attendees who provided lively discussion of conservation lands funding and related issues. Information brought back from this workshop will contribute to CACC examination of funding methods.

Task 1 – Assist in the development of an integrated trail network in the Slingerlands area

Mike DiPaolo, one of CACC's members, is also chair of the Tri-Village Greenway Committee (a committee of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy). The TVGC has initiated some preliminary work on a trail system that could link the land preserves owned by the MHL. Mike made a presentation of TVGC efforts to date and provided the CACC with information about the mission of the land conservancy and its committees.

CACC's efforts to date have resulted in the identification of natural, recreational and historic resources that could be connected by a trail system; identified new developments proposed in the study area that could support parts of the trail system and have begun to identify routing of connectors to resource areas and other trails, most notably the Rail Trail which Albany County would ultimately develop on the abandoned CP rail right of way.

Issues – Some of the major issues raised by CACC members that have come up relative to a trail system are:

- Cost of developing and maintaining a trail system
- Usage of new trails (e.g. pedestrian only? bicycles? horses?)
- Potential links with trails beyond Bethlehem
- Does Bethlehem need more recreation?
- Can we focus on an early and inexpensive success?

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Next Steps for the Trail Task:

1. Develop a vision statement and specific trail objectives.
2. Identify potential Routing based on existing portions of trail/sidewalks, links to existing resources and identification of landowners/developers who are willing to participate in trail system development.
3. Continue to develop acquisition, construction, management, and maintenance strategies for the potential trail system.
4. Informal discussion with the planning board regarding general vision and objectives for a Slingerlands trail system
5. Explore the potential for a 2007 SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) Transportation Enhancements Program grant to support the development of the trail system.

Task 2 - Identify Funding for Open Space Protection Program

CACC's discussion of open space funding has focused on three broad areas: types of properties to consider; criteria for property selection and prioritization; and municipal funding options.

A CACC subcommittee is preparing a report on municipal funding options including a "no-action" option. The report will include the pros and cons of each option, as well as identify any prerequisites and the processes necessary to secure different funding options. Along with this report will be a discussion of ways to leverage municipal funds and discussion of potential partnerships with other government entities, private developers and non-profit organizations.

Developing an open space plan is likely to be an essential in securing funding and leveraging municipal funds. CACC's initial investigation of the types of properties to be acquired and the selection and prioritization criteria will also be essential components of an open space plan.

Issues raised by CACC members related to the Funding Task:

- How can we help the town evaluate open space opportunities that arise before CACC completes its recommendation?
- What are the fiscal implications of preserving open space in an undeveloped rather than developed state?

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- Can the town afford to acquire open space in light of current fiscal conditions/?
- Why does the Town need to acquire more open space?
- Should CACC get involved with Colonial Acres Golf Course opportunity?

Next Steps for Funding Task

1. Complete the funding options and leveraging analysis.
2. Refine definitions of properties to be acquired and the criteria to be used to compare and prioritize acquisitions.
3. Evaluate various acquisition methods (e.g. easements, purchase development rights, fee purchase. etc.)

Public Comments expressed at CACC meetings – this is by no means an exhaustive list but addresses some of the major points raised by the public; not all are within CACCs tasks but several will be addressed as CACC evaluation continues.

- Opposition to public funding for open space; it penalizes large landowners by additional Town taxes.
- The Town should seek donations for funding open space; the Town could also consider using “recreation fee” for open space purchases.
- CACC should advocate for Colonial Acres golf course preservation.
- CACC and the Town Board should consider temporary purchase of development right for open space.
- CACC should consider trails in other parts of town.

cc: CACC members
Janine Saatman
Debbie Kitchen