

TOWN OF POUGHKEEPSIE
Conservation
Advisory Commission



Monday, January 24, 2022, at 7:00 PM
MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES (held via Zoom link)

Present: CAC Members: Susan Karnes Hecht, Pam Kingsley, Margaret Slomin, Maribeth Rubenstein, Lorraine Mirabella. Online meeting facilitator: Michael Welti, Town of Poughkeepsie Director of Municipal Development. Guests: Anne Burger, Town Board-Ward 3; Ilona Vinklerova, Ward 2.

Agenda

Meeting called to order: 7:02pm.

Minutes from 11/22/2021 approved. Maribeth abstained as she did not yet have permission to access.

Guest speaker Jim Challey of Friends of Peach Hill spoke about the history, current activities and opportunities at Peach Hill in the Town of Poughkeepsie. It began in the 1930s as a farm stand selling peaches off Van Wagner Rd on Peach Road, owned by the Beck family. In the 1950s and 1960s, a virus killed the peach trees. The family sold property to a Mr. Palladino who devoted the entire 140 acres to a commercial cider apple orchard. Trees were sprayed. Migrant workers were employed. It grew larger in the following decades. In 1999, prices dropped and he went bankrupt. Key Bank foreclosed. A group of private citizens did not want to lose the open space. Dutchess County and NYS gave open space protection grants. One million dollars was raised to purchase it. There is a conservation easement by NYS. A small group of volunteers owned the property originally but in 2004/2005 gave it to the Town of Poughkeepsie as a public park. The Town did not have the funds to maintain or develop it so The Friends of Peach Hill was formed as a 501c3 nonprofit organization and raised funds to open it as a park. The park is inspected yearly by Scenic Hudson. All Town park rules apply—no motor vehicles, firearms, hunting, alcohol, dogs must be on leashes. The difference is that the Friends of Peach Hill are responsible for development of the park and most of the maintenance, including the trail system. The Friends decided to keep some of the orchard, focusing on the portion with younger and healthier trees. No pesticides have been used since 1999. As part of a formal framework with the Town, Friends who work on the property are considered Town employees when volunteering for liability insurance purposes. The Town's Director of Recreation is an ex-officio member of the Friends. The former director, Tom Myering, was very active with the Friends until he retired. The new director, Janet McHugh, is supportive. The recreation director is crucial as a liaison in this partnership between the Town and the Friends. The Town's Highway Department is improving signage, and helps with ongoing maintenance such as tree removal in the parking lot. There is a constant battle with invasive plants such as bittersweet. Friends of Peach Hill have about 30 volunteers who work in groups. They hired a landscape architect to develop a long-range plan regarding replacing dead trees in the parking lot and aging apple trees. The group is speaking to Vassar biologists regarding the viability of chestnut trees. Activities on the property include 5 km runs and cider festivals. Park is handicapped accessible, to an extent,

but not to the top of the hill. They have a few hundred people on a mailing list. There is a list of about 80 people who make annual contributions. There is an occasional newsletter. The organization's board has 12 members but they could have up to 15. They would like more events. In the past, there were birding tours, guided hikes, evening hikes for moonrises and meteor showers. There have been problems with people foraging for ramps, mushrooms, etc. By the kiosk, there is a notice that foraging on the property is not permitted, though it is okay to pick up apples off the ground. They have a few pollinator gardens. The one by Catskill Point was donated by Cypress Creek Solar Farms. He said they would like more events. They are happy to host groups. If the CAC wants to host a group, he is the Board secretary of the Friends, and would inform Janet McHugh.

There was discussion about the difficulties in the CAC having an online presence on social media. It seems the Town is supposed to host the Facebook page and they need to establish a policy first. It's not supposed to be hosted on someone's personal page. It seems not to be a priority at this time. Tim handles this alone. For Climate Smart, with town supervisor, Jay Baisley's approval, Susan created a CSTF Facebook page off her personal account for which she is the administrator. This raised the question of setting up a Facebook page under a CAC member's name and making Tim co-administrator. If the person leaves, Tim could take it over and delete the administration rights of that person.

Discussion of Earth Day. It falls on Friday, 4/22. We should do clean-up activities on Saturday, 4/23. Pam will email Town Council members for suggestions of sites in their wards in need of clean-up. The Recreation and Transportation Departments need to be informed.

Discussion of Pollinator Pathways. Susan and Ilona are editing a brochure to give to local nurseries to encourage the availability of native plants. Susan wants to reach out to each Ward representative to pick one park to focus on pollinator plantings and to designate a "point person" for the project. Jen Rubbo could help with sourcing seeds. Arlington Schools, which are already involved, could recruit some of their students to help. Susan spoke at the Dutchess County Youth Council, a group of H.S. students countywide who choose a few projects to work on each year. This year they want to focus on the environment.

Discussion of Climate Smart and recycling. Susan spoke to Kerri Russell, Dutchess County Recycling Coordinator, about how people are handling deposit bottles and cans. Could bins (and plastic bags) be set up at Town Hall and have Boy Scouts or other group pick them up for the proceeds?

Discussion of CAC-EMC Roundtable on 3/31/2022. Susan is filing and will speak on our behalf.

Meeting adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

Next meeting Monday, 2/28/2022 at 7:00 via Zoom.