

## MEETING NOTES

### Columbia County CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCILS Roundtable

September 25, 2012, Trinity United Methodist Church, Greenport

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Convener: Columbia Land Conservancy

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- Introductions. Guest speakers: Emily Svenson, Hyde Park Town Board, former CAC member and coordinator, Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts; and Michael Dupree, Hyde Park Planning Board Chair.
  - The City of Hudson is considering formation of a CAC. Karen Strong and Ellen Jouret-Epstein presented information at an Economic Development Committee meeting. The next step will be to bring it to their Legal Committee. The waterfront and tidal wetlands are central concerns.
  - Emily Svenson (ES) joined the Hyde Park CAC seven years ago, which had been formed previously but was inactive. Subsequently, with political changes in the town, some member appointments were made with personal agendas and who did not understand the purpose and functions of a CAC. After another election, expired terms created opportunities for new members, and the CAC has functioned effectively.
    - In addition to supporting planning board reviews, the CAC does a lot of education in the community. ES notes that towns can establish their own list of duties for a CAC, meeting their particular needs.
  - Michael Dupree (MD) explained that Hyde Park (town population 22,000) still has some large lot landowners. But many large undeveloped areas are constrained by topography and other existing conditions. There is more pressure now to engineer development in these areas to make it possible. The CAC plays an important role in working with applicants to make these constraints clear and to show that alternative designs will actually be more cost-effective to build.
    - One strategy has been for the CAC to identify Critical Environmental Areas (CEA's). This shows applicants where there are constrained lands and helps them see more favorable areas for development.
  - Hyde Park passed a detailed wetlands and watercourse law developed by the CAC, which has since been repealed. On reflection, the law did not emphasize enough the controls needed on large developments and included too many provisions that affected smaller landowners. If they take this up in the future they'll tailor the law to their primary objectives. They note that the new NYSDEC stormwater regulations help underscore the reason to have such a law.

- It would be good to meet with stakeholders who are interested in development to explain laws like this, and how they can expedite the review process by identifying areas of concern to a town, and presumably, NYSDEC, well in advance.
- The Hyde Park planning board makes good use of consultants when needed – they have their own attorney as well as a planner who is on staff with the town’s engineering consultant. The town has also used Hudsonia where needed to provide information that challenged what applicants’ consultants have claimed, and to perform peer review of submitted material.
- Their CAC spent a great deal of time in the early years just assembling information on the town. Having this establishes an objective threshold, needed for SEQR, for understanding areas of concern, by both the planning board and applicants.
- Their CAC’s identification of Critical Environmental Areas was not controversial. It came in during a poor economy. But it was also understood that establishing CEA’s assists the SEQR review – creates a new threshold. NYSDEC has criteria for how to identify CEA’s [C. Critical Environmental Areas \(CEAs\) - NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation](#). Four CEA’s were created, one of them a quite large multiple square mile area. Others are smaller, e.g. a stream corridor, and Hudson River inlet. There was no landowner opposition or concern either, probably because these large holders are mostly LLC’s banking land for future development, rather than individual landowners.
- Their CAC has also been active in the community, with families and kids – Trees for Tribes, working with schools, nature walks. That also has given them a community contact list. So when the wetlands law was up for adoption, there was a receptive constituency that they could easily identify and contact to show support for it.
- CAC members should be objective and understand that their job is to gather and present data, not to make land use decisions.
- Their planning board makes a motion to refer projects to the CAC, and they recommend that planning boards do this to formalize that they will do so.
- Hyde Park has not been concerned about the CAC delaying a review, it’s understood to be helpful not an oppositional part of the process.
- The group recommends the workshop held previously at the Biodiversity Roundtable, “Water Words that Work,” which gave excellent information on how to tailor messages on environmental issues to the general public by avoiding jargon and letting them know that “you’ll make a difference” and you’ll be part of something. [Water Words That Work, A Blog about Environmental Awareness](#)