

Vestal Conservation Advisory Commission  
Minutes of the November 15, 2012 Meeting

Present: Curt Pueschel, Steve Appel, Michael Restuccia, Cole Moore, Victor Lamoureux, Linda Green, Cynthia Stephens-Westerman, Shep Bennett

Excused: Dick Pastore

Guest: Town Supervisor John Schaffer

Minutes of the October 18 meeting were approved by e-mail vote. The next regular meeting of the CAC will be on December 20.

After introductions, we began discussion of natural gas drilling. Supervisor Schaffer has not yet come to a firm position and has concerns about possible adverse health effects. He continues to seek unslanted information and independent points of view. He found the CAC's report on hydrofracking to be informative and unbiased. Town Board member Patty Fitzgerald is trying to arrange a trip to a Pennsylvania fracking site and the CAC will be invited to participate. The Supervisor would like the CAC to learn as much as possible about gas drilling so that we can advise him and the Board. He was involved in the building of the Millenium Pipeline, so he has construction knowledge but not scientific knowledge.

The Supervisor does feel that hydrofracking is the most serious issue facing Vestal, but the Town has little authority to regulate the industry. The Town Board will study what the county government decides regarding road-use regulations. He does not believe that a local hydrofracking moratorium is advisable because municipalities that have done so will spend considerable funds on legal expenses only to ultimately lose in the courts.

One of the topics that the CAC has been trying to understand is the extent of the pipeline network between the wellheads and the truck lines. Supervisor Schaffer explained that the drilling companies are separate from those that build the collector pipelines, so there will be little duplication of collector pipelines. He also noted that an old IBM chemical treatment facility in Endicott was being examined to determine if it could be used to purify gas drilling wastewater. The Supervisor knows of a former IBM chemist who is very knowledgeable about fracking chemicals, and perhaps she would be willing to attend a CAC meeting. A wastewater treatment plant is being planned for Waverly.

The discussion then turned to the prospect of logging in Jones Park, which was included as a revenue item in the Town budget. When polled, none of the CAC members supported logging in Jones Park. Some members felt that the forest inventory contracted by Supervisor Andreasen was lacking in detail and the CAC could have produced a more comprehensive report with little cost to the Town. Supervisor Schaffer stated that logging in Jones Park is not a sure thing. He believes there is a more detailed forestry report than the one posted on the Town website and he will get us a copy. The revenue figures used in the Town budget were based on an estimate he got from a personal contact and discussions within the Town Board.

Members of the CAC questioned the logic of using logging as a management tool when the Town does not have a management plan for the parks. The present forestry report is written

for managing a woodlot for yield and not for a public park, which has a very different mission. CAC is aware of past legal opinions from New York State that have been clear in stating that local governments can not carry out the kind of logging proposed for Jones Park, and letters to the previous Supervisor and to the county were explicit in saying so. Supervisor Schaffer shared a recent opinion from the Attorney General's Office that appeared to take a somewhat different position. If the logging does occur, the money raised would go into the Parks Department's budget and the the normal budgetary allocations to the department would to be reduced, which would free funds for other purposes.

The Supervisor invited the CAC to develop a parks management plan, perhaps in consultation with Parks Supervisor Jim Bukowski. He is also interested in developing an overall conservation management plan for Vestal and would appreciate the CAC's involvement in putting that together, as well. CAC members noted that our 2008 stream corridor report could be a step in that direction, and it was recommended that the Town Board should take another look at it.

Supervisor Schaffer expressed a willingness to work with the CAC and discuss any recommendations we make. He will come to our meetings when we request it, and he will read everything we send to him. He provided a phone number and asked us to call him anytime we need him. Because he draws up the agenda for the Town Board, he can put us on the agenda for Town Board meetings whenever we feel it is necessary.