



Town of Wallkill

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Commission for Conservation of the Environment

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ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Introduction

The Town of Wallkill Commission for Conservation of the Environment, commonly referred to as the “Conservation Commission”, is required to submit an annual report to the Town Board no later than April 1st of every year. This report covers the commission’s activity from April 1, 2006 to April 1, 2007.

Current Membership

At this time there are two open positions on the commission and we are always seeking new members and volunteers. Our meeting schedule is generally the second and fourth Monday of every month, at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Hall. We meet only once in December because of the holidays and typically only once in August because of summer vacations. Residents who are unable to commit to becoming full time members are always welcome at our meetings and we encourage the public to attend.

Activities of the Commission

The commission is currently accepting applications from farmers in the town who are interested in participating in the ongoing Purchase of Development Rights program. This program pays farmland owners for permanently protecting their land from development. The properties are placed under a permanent deed restriction, known as a conservation easement.



When New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets announces funding opportunities for farmland protection, the commission will evaluate and select the best applications to develop and submit a proposal for funding from the state. In May the commission learned that our application for the Smiley farm on Stage Road was successful and we were awarded more than \$2 million for the purchase of development rights on the 230-acre farm. We currently have two more land owners who have submitted applications and we are waiting for the next round of grants to be announced.

The commission has continued working towards the completion of our inter-municipal Natural Resources Inventory with the Town of Montgomery. A Natural Resources Inventory is a detailed accounting of all rivers, streams, wetlands, ponds, lakes, forests, wildlife habitats, aquifers, steep slopes, farmland, open space and other environmental areas. By identifying these areas and compiling them in an accessible format, officials will have access to a very valuable tool for improving planning and development.

The conservation commission is also committed to making our town more pedestrian friendly. During site plan reviews with the Planning Board we frequently recommend that projects in some areas of the town incorporate sidewalks and other pedestrian amenities into their proposals. We are particularly interested in the commercial corridor along New York State Route 211 often referred to as the “Miracle Mile” and the neighborhood hamlet of Circleville along Route 302. These areas have been identified in our newly-adopted Master Plan as areas in need of sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements.

The neighborhood of Circleville is one of the few remaining areas of the town which resembles a traditional village development pattern. Circleville has a post office, a bank, the town park, a firehouse, a church, three schools, a historic home, a future rail trail, and many small businesses within a short walking distance of each other. However there are no sidewalks in Circleville at this time. We believe the residents and businesses of this hamlet would benefit from the installation of sidewalks and safe crossings.

The commercial corridor of Route 211 already sees a large volume of pedestrian traffic despite the limited infrastructure available – very few crosswalks and hardly any sidewalks. The amount of foot traffic at these locations has worn footpaths at a number of



locations. According to accident reports obtained from the Town of Wallkill Police Department, between Jan. 1, 2002 and October 1, 2006 there were five reports of pedestrians attempting to cross Route 211 that were struck by vehicles. In addition to these accidents, a woman was killed on Jan. 17, 2002 when she attempted to cross Route 211 in front of the “Mobile on the Run” gas station. In this same time period, a man was struck and seriously injured near the intersection of Route 211 and Ebert Road as he was walking back from the train station.

The lack of pedestrian infrastructure in the town’s major retail center has also had a detrimental effect on the use of public transportation resources such as the train station. The “Middletown” station of the Metro-North Railroad line is located on North Galleria Drive, but it is not linked to the surrounding shopping centers by sidewalks or crosswalks. The town should be encouraging residential and commercial development that plays off the transit infrastructure rather than off the streets and highways.

GOALS FOR A WALKABLE WALLKILL

IDENTIFY areas of the town that would benefit the most from improved pedestrian access.

RESEARCH the most effective way to install pedestrian improvements by working with the New York State Department of Transportation, local business leaders and residents.

INVESTIGATE grant opportunities to help fund these projects.

CONSTRUCT the pedestrian infrastructure needed to ensure the safety of existing pedestrian traffic.

ENFORCE vehicle and traffic laws aggressively to improve the safety of pedestrians.

PROMOTE the use of pedestrian infrastructure and public transportation as an alternative to traditional auto-oriented travel.

Working with the Planning Board

When reviewing projects before the Planning Board, the commission has found that the most common problem areas involve wetlands, stormwater runoff, and the newly adopted Conservation Subdivision regulation. We would like to take a few moments to briefly describe how we have responded to these issues as they have come up.

Because of the ecological danger associated with the disturbance of wetlands and their associated buffer areas, the commission has persistently recommended that the Town Board establish a wetland and watercourse protection law. Recently the Town Board has begun to develop a plan for implementing this legislation and the commission has met with the town's planning consultant to discuss the best way to proceed.

On more than a handful of projects, the commission has suggested that applicants include low impact development approaches into their site designs. Additional treatment of stormwater runoff, particularly on major commercial projects with a large amount of impervious surface in the form of parking areas, can go a long way to protecting the water quality of our streams and rivers. With that in mind, we are currently developing a generic document to give to applicants before the planning board to describe some of the simple and inexpensive ways to incorporate low impact development into their site design.



Getting stormwater off of paved surfaces and on to grass/soil areas is an important element of Low Impact Development.

A number of applicants have submitted site plans to the Planning Board which attempt to utilize the "Conservation subdivision" law established as part of the town's recent Master Plan update. Although there have been a few decent uses of the conservation subdivision, it seems there have been a large number of proposals that do not meet the intent of the law, and in some cases are more harmful than beneficial in terms of good planning practices and environmental protection. Furthermore, the language of the law does not explicitly state that the Planning Board has the authority to deny Conservation Subdivision status to projects that do not meet the intent of the law, and/or represent poor planning and development. The law does require the applicant to provide a traditional subdivision plan along with any application for a conservation subdivision, so it seems the intent was to give this power to the board. The board can still deny the application just like any other proposal, however it would be more practical to allow the board to tell applicants not to pursue a conservation subdivision when it clearly does not fit the site in question. Discussions with members of the town board and the town's planning consultant have shown an interest in "revisiting" the legislation. We hope the board is committed to making any changes necessary to ensure that future development of conservation subdivisions meets with the satisfaction of all parties.

Additional Recommendation for the Town Board

Solar power for the Town Hall: The Conservation Commission would like to take this opportunity to strongly encourage the Town Board to act on the proposal to install a solar electric system for the town hall. We believe the town has a unique opportunity to invest in an environmentally friendly form of energy and in the long run save the taxpayers of the Town of Wallkill.

The commission would like to add the following solar-related links to the Conservation Commission's page on the town Web site. These documents describe the benefits available for the installation of solar systems for homes, businesses, farms and other buildings:

Solar Electric System Introductory Brochure

<http://www.powernaturally.org/publications/pvbasicsbrochure.pdf>

A Detailed Guide to Installing a Solar Electric System

<http://www.powernaturally.org/publications/consumermanual2-final.pdf>

An Introduction to Solar Energy Applications for Agriculture

<http://www.powernaturally.org/publications/agguide.pdf>

New York State Income Tax Claim for Solar Electric Generating Equipment Credits

http://www.tax.state.ny.us/pdf/2003/inc/it255_2003.pdf

Local Sales and Use Tax Rates for Residential Solar Energy Equipment

http://www.tax.state.ny.us/pdf/publications/sales/pub718s_806.pdf