

2015 Master Plan Committee Meeting

The **Master Plan Committee** Meeting of the Town of Cortlandt was conducted on **October 1, 2014** in the Vincent F. Nyberg Meeting Room of the Cortlandt Town Hall located at 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567 with the following committee members and appointed staff in attendance:

Master Plan Committee:

James Creighton	Barbara Halecki
David Douglas	Adrian C. Hunte
Michael Fleming	Michael Huvane
Seth Freach, Town Councilman	Maria Slippen

Absent:

Dani Glaser
Theresa Knickerbocker

Staff Advisors:

Edward Vergano, P.E., DOTS Director
Rosemary Boyle-Lasher, Assistant to Director of DOTS
Chris Kehoe, Deputy Director of Planning

Also in Attendance:

Michelle Robbins, AKRF
Anthony Russo, AKRF

Anthony Russo opened the meeting with a general statement: The Master Plan is a forward thinking process and endeavor and we are going to try, where we can, to limit rehashing older issues and problems. We can talk about older items, up-front when we discuss each policy and talk about the partially implemented and not -yet implemented policies. This is where we can bring the past into it but other than that, please try to keep it forward thinking and not go back and litigate things from the past.

Michelle Robbins reviewed the Draft Open Space Policies. She gathered the comments from the last meeting and from the Open Space/CAC Committee, which were great but will most likely fit better in the Sustainability chapter, which will be discussed further at next month's meeting.

Another change in the Open Space Policy section was a policy from the 2004 Master Plan which talked about the creation of a cemetery district. After research it was found that cemeteries are zoned residential. Chris Kehoe noted that an added layer of protection would be to re-zone them.

We will recommend, rather than creating a new cemetery preservation district, to put them in the Conservation, Recreation and Open Space District that already exists. That will be the MPC's

recommendation to the Town Board.

Michelle passed around an article of what some other communities are doing with cemeteries, (for example some places are using them for Shakespeare in the Park), which was noted from the Trust for Public Land. For more information on this topic please go to Google Groups. Adrian mentioned that concerts are also held at Woodlawn Cemetery. Michelle commented that cemeteries do have beautiful spaces.

Maria mentioned that a cemetery in Ossining was to hold an event recently and some people that had family members buried there were up in arms about it. They viewed it as sacred ground where things like that should not be held.

Michelle stated that in the article, many of the cemeteries were historic and may not have been as recently used; so that issue may not exist at some of these locations.

Michael Huvane asked about the 2004 partially implemented policy to - *seek the right of first refusal for parcels of land as identified in the Open Space Plan*. He asked if the Open Space Plan was still active and the inventory still current. David Douglas explained that *one of the new policies is to update the Open Space Plan (#14)*.

David asked for an opportunity to review the Draft Open Space Policies handout because he had just received it. Michelle agreed and mentioned that the next topic will be Recreation and many policies may cross over. She asked everyone to please read it over with an eye as to if it belongs as an Open Space or Recreation policy and how some policies should be organized.

David will go back to the policies of the last Master Plan and make sure that he agrees that the partially implemented or not yet implemented policies list is accurate. Michelle fully supports that review.

Chris Kehoe spoke about policy #19 *Encourage property owners to replace trees that are removed or destroyed by natural forces or through private development or by private homeowners for reasons other than danger, threat of damage, sickness, etc.* He stated that the CAC is required by Code Enforcement to review requests to remove trees (tree permits) on undeveloped land for subdivisions and site plans, there are requirements for the re-planting of trees; but on developed land, there is no requirement. He explained that this is where that potential policy came from.

Ed Vergano asked for examples of #6 - *Promote agricultural activity that supports sustainability*.

Michelle stated that it refers to the discussion of community gardens, beekeeping, etc. that we are currently seeing in zoning. This is very broad but whatever zoning policy that may come from it will be more specific. Chris suggested it be worded to promote agriculture in appropriate locations or in any zoning above R40. Rosemary noted that the largest established bee business is in the RG zone. However Chris was not sure we wanted to encourage more in RG zones (which would be preexisting). Rosemary added that if you restrict in R40 or less that is a significant amount of the town that is restricted. Seth felt insects, animals and agriculture be looked at separately.

Michelle will meet with Martin Rogers (Director of Code Enforcement) and ask him what type of issues he is noticing in that Department. Seth suggested that animal and plants be separated. Rosemary explained that in our zoning code there are established limits for these type of things.

Adrian asked how many of these policies do we expect to have when we are done. Chris Kehoe answered that the last Master Plan had 150 policies. Currently we have 11 chapters with approximately 20 policies per chapter, but that will be reduced as we continue the review.

Michael Huvane questioned #5 *Preserve land for passive recreational use, such as hiking photography or nature studies and if specifically designated, bicycling, horseback riding, or fishing* - he asked what was considered passive recreation use. Michelle explained it would be hiking but where the landscape would not be altered for a walking path. Seth believes it to be something that does not require you to clear existing vegetation. Active recreation policies will be in the Recreation category. David Douglas stated that in the 2004 Open Space Report, it was noted which parcels would be appropriate for active recreation.

Michael Huvane mentioned that he would like to see some of the open space inventory to show both active and passive recreation. We should clearly indicate where the potential is for active recreation.

David explained that the open space report does accomplish this. If you look at each of the properties on the list, it will note which is valuable and why. The majority are passive. Rosemary showed the map that notes the Town's existing parks and recreation sites, which was created with the assistance of the Recreation Department. It shows any sites where we conduct active recreation, including the schools (this map can be found on the back of the Recreation brochure).

Rosemary suggested that passive and active recreation be defined.

Ed Vergano suggested eliminating policy #10 *Support education and outreach to improve water quality of the Hudson River and its tributaries*. This is already being done as part of the MS4.

Michelle encouraged everyone to review the Draft Recreation Policies (partially Implemented or Not Yet Implemented).

Chris mentioned the Parks, Recreation Conservation (PRC's) long-range plan for recreation issues, which was updated January 2012, is the most current report. This is basically the PRC's own Master Plan.

Michelle noted that any of the partially implemented or not yet implemented policies, which begin "*continued*" means it is ongoing and therefore, she included them on the list. Seth asked if this Master Plan should not include progressive verbiage. Should it be something more that can be accomplished and checked off? Rosemary explained that some items are ongoing, for example *continue to fund recreation facilities through the Town's Capital Improvement Program, the money in lieu of land fund and leverage funds through grants*

obtained from NYS and other organizations and the CDBG Program. This is how money is received to fund future parks, which is continual.

Seth believes that since the structure is there for this, it can be checked off as accomplished. We can state to not reverse this policy.

Jim Creighton added that it is a state law that there is a recreation mitigation and we set the fee but we still need a strong statement from the town that we want to make sure this happens every time. Maybe the language can be more specific. Rosemary asked Jim to come up with this language at the next meeting. He added that perhaps every 5 years the town reviews the fees that are being charged.

Michael suggested that because there is only a small amount of development going on, we ask for a specific percentage in the budget for when the fees don't cover the money needed in this fund.

Seth spoke again that one of the stated goals of this Master Plan would be for the Town to pass a resolution that certifies its continued intent on this. Something that is an action that has taken place and can be definitively checked off, that in its completion signifies it's ongoing.

Jim Creighton will try to steer the language for this to include the Sustainability component.

Chris stated that sometimes when the policies are listed as "continued" it is because we want them to be somewhat broad and that you do not want them to stop.

Jim spoke that all parks need to be maintained and if money is not spent on them, they will degrade. Seth asked how the funds can be guaranteed for Parks.

Jim noted that "resting fields" is important but that does not happen in the town because we don't have enough fields to be able to do this. This could be a suggested policy, but it will be difficult to accomplish. A turf field was mentioned but Jim noted it is a large capital layout and should be researched further.

Maria noted that in Croton, they have been conducting Fields Meetings, and the turf topic has been explored. They have been meeting with officials from the Village, School, Booster Club, and all the other sports organizations. Croton has very little field space. Everyone wants a turf field and it is comparably, environmentally sound. They are looking for a location for a community field. Several issues have arisen in this discussion: will the Senior Citizens want this, are the fields accessible to everyone, sponsorship, lights. There is no space for this in the Village, so they are exploring areas outside the Village. They have discussed the 33 acres across from Camp Discovery.

Michelle spoke about an 8 acre dome that is proposed in East Fishkill because in the North East, it is believed that the kids are losing out on scholarships from not being able to play sports year round. Turf is becoming more and more important. This is a private facility being proposed at the former IBM campus. The private company approached that Town with this proposal. Michelle noted there is very little opposition to the project.

Seth asked, in terms of the Master Plan, do we want to suggest solutions regarding turf or ask the PRC to review this issue. Would the PRC want the charge to look at different recreational

technologies or facilities? Michael and Jim stated that the PRC is advisory only and they do not act as staff. They can make a recommendation but this is not their role.

Chris Kehoe noted that in past Master Plans, the topic of resting fields or getting turf fields has not been mentioned. He thought it in this Master Plan it could be tied to sustainability or private/public partnership.

Seth is against suggesting turf fields as a policy in the Master Plan. Anthony thought the wording could be to investigate new technologies, making it a bit broader.

Michael Huvane asked for the census data to be reviewed in terms of the amount of children living in the town and the trends. Michelle noted a trend that she has noticed is the enrollment in the schools is dropping.

Adrian suggested that public/private partnerships be considered for funding.

Michelle said this is noted in #5 *Maintain existing partnerships and seek new partnership opportunities with neighboring municipalities, community organizations, Town Departments, as well as private sector entities, including civic groups, schools, non-profits, and other organizations to assist in maintaining, supporting and operating parks and recreation services and facilities.* Ed Vergano stated that this is being explored with an Ice Hockey Rink.

Jim strongly suggests, as one of the big policies that ties in with everything we want for this Master Plan to be, to encourage a sit down with all stakeholders and have a goal that the schools and private groups be in the room with us to discuss how we collectively serve our residents. Seth said that we can encourage participation but nothing forces a school district to come to the table. Rosemary added that in the town, it is complicated by the number of school districts involved.

Michael Huvane noted that the continuity changes when the School Superintendents change.

Maria said in Croton, all the different parties were invited to attend the fields meetings and they were happy to be involved in the process. This meeting took place at a Work Session but there are two meetings per year where everyone picks the field space and another that is held to check in on how everything is working.

Seth suggested that a policy be to set up annual sit downs, with all stakeholders involving field space within the town borders.

Michelle included a Cultural category in the Draft Recreation Policy. All agreed that an amphitheater is still desired in the town. Everyone was encouraged to visit the Peekskill Riverfront.

Michael Huvane asked about #13 *Maintain and develop navigation channels in the Hudson River through maintenance dredging and other channel improvements to ensure access for recreational boaters* and asked if the Town can “mess with” the Hudson River. Michelle answered “no” but they can work with the Army Corps. It was decided to change the wording (to encourage this and tie it in with economical possibilities).

Seth asked if #11 *Develop and adopt definitions that describe and differentiate between the various types of open spaces located throughout the Town* - was a repeat from Open Space. Michelle answered that it was in both places because we weren't sure where to place it.

Rosemary asked Jim and Michael about #4 *Provide recreational facilities to maintain a standard of XX acres of recreational land per 1,000 residents*. This is from an old base study. Jim will try to determine this XX figure.

Chris Kehoe asked about the pool at the VA Hospital. Is there a possibility to get some recreational use there? Seth believes we can develop a cooperative plan and encourage this. Chris stated that there is land at the VA to use, if working with the VA officials is a possibility. Could fields be placed there? *****We lobby the VA periodically for both. The pool is currently closed- Linda Puglisi***.**

A discussion of #9 *Provide one public access point for every X mile of waterfront* followed. Michelle realizes this will be difficult to accomplish because there is an entire section of waterfront that can not be accessed; however, this is more thought provoking. Seth does not believe this is a burning issue in Cortlandt.

Rosemary stated that the Town's prime waterfront access points are at Annsville, Verplanck and Oscawana. The County parks are George's Island and Croton Point Park.

Michelle asked if they would just want public access or include access to boating.

Jim said the "Holy Grail" would be to have a walking trail along the river, end to end. This cannot be accomplished for many reasons: Indian Point, the VA in Montrose. He asked do we have a specific policy to say we want this to happen, even though realistically we won't see the full line but when we have possibilities, we should get any access we can. Chris stated we have a mapped, adopted Town of Cortlandt shoreline trail which is part of the Westchester River walk trail which is mapped. This does help because at Annsville we applied for a grant and are building a little portion of it, we applied for a grant in Verplanck and are building a portion of it. So it may need to be clearer in the Master Plan, to help when applying for future grants.

Jim agreed and said although it may take many years and may involve building piers into the water around Entergy, etc., which will be costly, it could possibly happen, one day.

Seth asked when you have a chance to do it always, should you blindly always do it. Jim still thinks it should be a goal to look at that possibility, even though it may be outside our reach in our current financial position. But it may be that Entergy closes someday, etc.

Rosemary asked to shift the focus away from Entergy and look at other locations along the river where it may realistically apply.

Seth asked, if we (this includes everyone located up and down the river from Albany to New York City) are taking a patchwork approach to a river walk. Do we always want to say, if there

is 10 linear feet to be had for a cost, do we do it out of this goal, as lofty as this goal is.

Chris Kehoe stated that he thinks you would have to do it, with what the powers that be at the time, think is a reasonable cost. Michael Huvane added that we should, at a minimum, encourage it. Adrian agreed that for the Master Plan we should make recommendations. Michelle asked how the policy would read. Chris suggested referencing the Cortlandt shoreline trail in the document (which is part of the Westchester County Riverwalk and Greenway) and consider any and all opportunities to expand it.

Michael Huvane spoke about a lease the town has on a beautiful piece of property that Westchester County has given us, the Maple Avenue Playground, which we are unable to use. It is a gorgeous piece of property that we cannot access effectively because of the traffic patterns, lack of parking, etc. Michael believes it is a long-term lease from the County. The town maintains it and it is located at the intersection of Lafayette and Maple Avenue. It may be a part of Blue Mountain Park but there is no longer a sign there.

Jim spoke of other pieces of property in the town that have been dedicated to the town because developers could not build on it anyway. Can the town decide what is planned for these pieces of property?

Chris suggested this become a policy. Given our improvements in mapping, can the town investigate if these pieces of property be used for any passive or active recreation possibilities?

Seth spoke about a lot of open space and recreational parks that are in community neighborhoods that are maintained and owned by that neighborhood. The access is restricted and many are no longer being maintained. Some are very dilapidated (Mohegan Colony). Do we have any want to exercise any authority over these or dictate standards? No matter who owns it, it is in the town and they look like zombie parks. Michelle added if the Town would then take ownership, they would have to be opened to everyone, although they probably would only be used for those particular neighbors.

What happens is that the homeowners association no longer has the money to maintain these parks. Maria said there could be insurance issues. Rosemary noted that the Town does have a certified playground inspector who inspects all the Town-owned parks. Grant money could possibly be used but again it would then be for all town residents to use.

A standard should be suggested because these are eyesores in these neighborhoods.

Ed Vergano suggested that the wording be to evaluate the private parks and set the standard for them to be maintained. If they can't be maintained should they be dismantled and removed.

Rosemary will ask the town attorney, if the town evaluates and indicates that they are unsafe, are we on notice to fix it or can the building department close it down.

Safety is very important.

It was decided that the PRC Master Plan from January 2012 be incorporated into this new Master Plan, as is.

Anthony explained that AKRF will take all the comments and revise the DRAFT of the Open Space and Recreation policies. They will be posted on the Google Groups.

Seth Freach made one additional suggestion - to encourage any future development in the Town, to incorporate Cortlandt into their brand.

Sustainability will be discussed, in depth at the November 2014 meeting.

Chris Kehoe gave an update on the grant, which has been executed and signed (for AKRF to be paid). NYSERDA will be on a conference call to discuss the town meeting all their requirements.

Rosemary met with Supervisor Puglisi and the Supervisor has written and distributed a Press Release regarding the Master Plan Survey. The Survey is on the Town's website and Facebook page, unit March 1, 2015. Rosemary thanked Michael Fleming for working at Family Fun Day to distribute the survey information.

The survey took about 15-18 minutes to complete. Chris noted that not everyone is completing the entire survey.

A special breakfast meeting has been scheduled for Saturday, December 6th, 9a.m. – 12 Noon with the purpose, to not only review the policies, but the actual chapters as they would appear in the book itself, which will be given to the Town Board. Five chapters should be ready to be reviewed at that time.

Michelle would like the MPC to review these chapters in their infancy so if there are any formatting issues, they can be addressed at that time.

Adrian reminded everyone to try and participate in the Town of Cortlandt 5K walk/run on Saturday, October 25th at the Cortlandt Waterfront Park.

Minutes submitted by Judi Peterson