

Conservation Advisory Commission  
Minutes of the March 15, 2012 Meeting

Present: Curt Pueschel, Victor Lamoureux, Steve Appel, Cynthia Stephens/ Westerman, Shep Bennett, Michael Restuccia, Dick Pastore, Linda Green

Minutes of the February 16, 2012 meeting were approved by e-mail. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be on April 19, 2012 in the Town Board room.

Recent news concerning natural gas drilling concerns were reviewed. The previous evening, petitions signed by 1050 people in the Town requesting a drilling moratorium were presented to the Town Board. The possibility of a Town road ordinance was said to still be in discussion. It was noted that the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS) encourages road ordinances.

Members generally felt that the CAC should express their view to the Board that, while gas drilling will have some economic benefits, there are also significant negative effects and long-term costs that may outweigh the benefits; therefore, the Town should be very cautious about allowing it. One member felt that there was not enough factual information available about drilling for either the Board or the CAC to decide whether it would be good or bad for Vestal.

Cindy reminded the Commission that the draft SGEIS gives a municipality the opportunity to decide whether a permit application for gas drilling is compatible with approved land use plans. If it is not, the municipality can ask the DEC take a closer look and possibly not approve the permit. Unfortunately, the absence of an approved master plan for Vestal means that there is less basis of the Town to identify any area as being inappropriate for drilling.

Because Vestal is located right on the Pennsylvania border, Vestal could be one of the first places targeted for drilling when it is approved for New York. Concerns were expressed about the effectiveness of DEC enforcement, given the repeated cuts in agency personnel.

The Commission decided it would be appropriate to produce written recommendations for presentation to the Board on the various aspects of drilling. Draft sections written by individuals could be circulated to all members for comments and eventual approval.

Victor has been in contact with the Mary Kramarchyk, Urban Forestry Program Coordinator, regarding the DEC urban forestry and tree inventory grant programs. There will be grant announcement, probably in April. The CAC should use this opportunity to be of service to the Town.

Curt suggested that the CAC should consider whether we might create a website with information that would be of interest to citizens of Vestal. For example, the emerald ash borer (EAB) will be a pressing concern in the coming year. We could post descriptions that would help people identify ash trees on their property, information about how to recognize an EAB infestation, and a list of possible courses of action. While much of this information is available on the web, it would be helpful to have a single site customized to local concerns and perhaps with local contact information for treatment or removal of the trees. The sites of reported infestations could also be mapped so that people would be aware of the spread of the pest. Similarly, information could be posted about the invasive giant hogweed, which is known to be in Vestal and is a potential health hazard if handled.