

Final Report for the Copake Hamlet Revitalization Task Force

Presented to the Town Board on June 10, 2021

Greetings Madame Supervisor and members of the Town Board. Several months ago, in my discussions with Jeanne in regard to the proposed and now recently appointed Copake Economic Development Advisory Committee, I voiced the opinion that perhaps the Copake Hamlet Revitalization Task Force's existence had served its purpose and that its mission would now be better carried out in the context of the CEDAC, with its focus on the whole town of Copake. It is with full support of the Task Force that tonight I ask the board to take action to dissolve the Task Force. But before you do, I would like to give a brief summary of the work of the Task Force from its inception to the present day.

The Copake Hamlet Revitalization Task Force was appointed by the Copake Town Board in 2012, following the adoption, in 2011, of the Copake Comprehensive Plan. The mission reads as follows: "The Copake Hamlet Revitalization Task Force is charged with the task of implementing the Comprehensive Plan in taking "all steps necessary to revitalize and rehabilitate 'downtown Copake' as a mixed-use, walkable, compact, livable and affordable place."

The Task Force had its first meeting on August 22, 2012. Original members of the Task Force were Rus Davis, Jerry Krauss, John Pollok, Nancy Schultz and Roberta Roll, who was elected chairperson. Jeanne Mettler served as liaison to the town board. Subsequent members of the Task Force over the years were Chris Quinby, Jennifer Redman, Peggy Lewis, Len Barham and current members Peter Kelly, Andy Fisher, Alan Friedman and Tom Goldsworthy. Richard Wolf served as liaison, and currently Jeffrey Judd is liaison.

Our first project was to meet with all the local business owners to get a sense of the business climate in the hamlet and what they needed to sustain and grow. We assisted wherever we could and helped to organize and publicize new business openings, such as the Copake Front Porch Market and later Copake Rapid Care, Clock Tower Pub and Grill, Copake General Store, Copake Wine Works and the Bank of Greene County.

We also wanted to figure out what other types of businesses would be desirable and viable in the hamlet. At our second meeting, in Sept. 2012, among other suggestions, John Pollok proposed the idea of having an urgent care facility. We did quite a bit of research, assembling materials on demographics, housing, medical availability and other pertinent information, and then sent a letter of proposal to Jay Cahalan, CEO of Columbia Memorial Health. We subsequently set up a meeting, at which we presented a power point expertly put together by Nancy Schultz. CMH was impressed enough to follow up and, several months later, gave the go-ahead. It took another two and a half years before the hospital was ready to move forward enough to get to the point of groundbreaking on June 29, 2015. During that time, building arrangements were negotiated with the Rescue Squad. The town also had to raise \$25,000, and this fundraising

effort was ably spearheaded by Pat Pollok and Anita Salberg, with the assistance of Copake Community Service, Inc. Copake Rapid Care was opened on June 13, 2016, with a ribbon cutting on June 27, 2016. From all reports, the center is a tremendous success. We have continued to advocate for a pharmacy, or at the least, a dispensary (for pharmaceuticals...we'll leave other dispensary prospects to the CEDAC).

During this time, we also proposed hiring a planner to create a development plan for the hamlet. Place Alliance was hired and, in conjunction with River Street Planning & Development, created the Design and Development Plan for the Copake Hamlet, completed in October 2015. This plan made it feasible at last to convince the county DOT to go ahead with a long-awaited road re-design in the hamlet, which is now in the planning stages and should see the beginning of construction sometime next year.

The Task Force was also interested in the way the town supported businesses and wanted to facilitate a responsible but building-friendly reputation for Copake. We met with the planning board and zone enforcement officer and researched building code procedures, with the aim of creating a brochure which would help both commercial and residential builders understand the steps needed to undertake projects in Copake, both large and small. The building department now has that document available on the town website, as well as in hard copy.

Another initiative based on the Comprehensive Plan was to make Copake a bicycle-friendly destination. The Bike Copake committee was formed with ten members, and the Roe Jan Ramble was born. The first community ride was pedaled by approximately 75 riders in 2013, and by 2019 the Ramble had grown to 580 riders. Last year, the ride was organized virtually, but, at the moment, an in-person ride is being planned for this fall.

The former Copake Economic Advisory Committee had started a newsletter, the Copake Connection, under the leadership of Karen diPeri. When that committee dissolved, the Task Force took on the newsletter, headed up by Jeanne Mettler and Roberta Roll; it continues under the editorship of Roberta Roll and the expertise of Lynn Connelly, publishing for the town each month.

During the Land Use Review, which was required to align with the Comprehensive Plan, the Task Force provided input with regard to setbacks, density, use, districts, parking and design standards.

In 2016, we knew we wanted to apply for state funding for a Waterfront Revitalization Plan. In order to do this, we needed to have some state designated inland waterways. The effort was spearheaded by Jeanne, who worked with Assemblymember Didi Barrett and then-Senator Kathleen Marchione to get the Roeliff Jansen Kill, Bash Bish Brook and Taghkanic Creek designated in the spring of 2016. We applied for the grant in July 2016, and the town was awarded \$40,000 with a 100% match in December 2016. We hired consultant River Street Planning & Development, and after a long delay in getting documents in order from the state, we commenced work in August 2019. With an

enormous amount of input and support from local citizens and work by the Project Advisory Committee (which was made up of members of the Task Force), along with advice from our state project manager and extraordinarily generous help from our skilled consultants at River Street, we completed the plan in March 2021. The Town of Copake Waterfront and Community Revitalization Plan for the Bash Bish Brook, Roeliff Jansen Kill & Taghkanic Creek is now at the NY State Office of Planning, Development and Community Infrastructure for final approval.

In 2018, it became apparent that signage was needed to direct people to our amenities and attractions. Jeanne led the process to have signs erected on Rt. 22 and in the hamlet to point the way to our business district and to the Rapid Care facility.

Also in 2018, efforts were made to install an EV charging station. Because of various obstacles, this project was put on hold, but it will be taken up by the CAC.

This past year, the Task Force, assisted by Rus Davis and CCS, Inc. organized the yearly holiday decorations for the hamlet, which involves purchasing evergreen trees and decorating them with lights for the winter holidays. The program enlists local businesses and citizens in creating a festive atmosphere and a way to honor loved ones.

Historic preservation has been on our agenda for the past several years. We met with a representative of the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, who advised us on areas of the hamlet which might or might not qualify for historic designation. Recently, our efforts have culminated in the establishment of a Historic Preservation Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Conservation Advisory Committee. They will now take over the important task of helping residents and the town recognize and preserve our historic properties.

Throughout our existence, revitalization and rehabilitation have been at the forefront of our thoughts. Several members of the committee have quite literally put their money where their mouths are in purchasing properties in town and rehabilitating them beautifully; the Octagon House and the house across the street from it are two prime examples. This almost certainly has led to a number of other purchases and current renovations on Main St.

The Task Force has continued to advocate for established and prospective businesses, most recently with the new owner of the old railroad depot at the south entrance to the Copake hamlet. We worked with the Columbia County Economic Development Corporation to develop strategies for revitalization and gave periodic updates to our contacts there as to what buildings were available and what businesses we would like to see in Copake. We felt strongly that a business association would be advantageous for the businesses in town and many of them expressed interest. A neighbor volunteered to set up a website to promote Copake and business interests. The Task Force set up a first meeting for interested businesses which was well attended, and the showing of the beautiful draft website was enthusiastically received. Despite the initial enthusiasm and

one subsequent meeting, the association did not get off the ground; this is something we hope for in the future.

We had conversations and researched opportunities for the Roe Jan School, for events and festivals, for housing, for arts venues, for a brewery. We dialogued with Habitat for Humanity and helped them with establishing a new Habitat home here. We worked with foundations and private citizens to support our initiatives. Our efforts and projects, both large and small, have had an impact. Several events were planned and paths pursued that came to naught for one reason or another. However, even when no visible product or outcome was realized, I do believe that our intentions, our conversations in meetings and with friends and citizens, as well as our outreach to local organizations - such as the Copake Grange, have all resulted in building momentum toward our revitalization goals, ones which will continue into the future. (As an important aside, I will say here that several years ago, some of the members of the Task Force decided to join the Grange, which was flagging in membership and faced closure. This started a renewal and rebuilding of Grange membership and the many activities that take place there today).

On May 26 we had our last (and 127th) meeting, held live and in-person for the first time since last February, after which we started meeting on Zoom. I am deeply grateful to have served on this committee and to have had the unflagging support of the town board throughout our time. I am also deeply appreciative of the hard work and camaraderie of each and every member of the Task Force.

As a result of our work over the past nine years, here are some recommendations that the Task Force wishes to make to the town board.

1. Establish a town-wide email list. This will be enormously helpful in getting information out to citizens, including emergencies and notifications of town events and community planning workshops.
2. Update the town website to provide a fresh look and a more cohesive and comprehensive representation of and guide to the town.
3. Appoint someone to make sure that projects from the Waterfront Plan are implemented, including grant writing and funding resources.
4. Hire grant writers to apply for funding for Waterfront and other projects. This could be done on an ad hoc basis or through a yearly contract with a grant writer. We have information on both possibilities.
5. Update the Flood Damage Code to be in conformance with the NYS Building Code and requirements of various NY State agencies. Model code is available from NYS DEC.
6. Robinson Pond should have a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.
7. Purchase or lease the parking lot that is jointly owned by Copake General Store, Copake Wine Works and Church Street Deli, or have some other arrangement, in order to maintain the lot and create municipal parking.
8. Re-negotiate a lease with Nellie Peck on the lot adjacent to the current municipal lot.

9. Research the new “Zombie” Property Law and ascertain whether the town might be able to take over a “zombie” property that has been abandoned for a specified amount of time.
10. Take all steps possible to encourage sustainable agriculture as a way to preserve farmland, farmers’ livelihoods and mitigate climate change.
11. Take all steps necessary to adjust building, zoning and land use codes to mitigate climate change in various ways.

Thank you,

Roberta Roll
Chairperson, Copake Hamlet Revitalization Task Force