

Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission

August 21, 2025

Zoom Video Conferencing

MINUTES

Present: Skip Arthur, Mike Harkavy, Ken Goldberg, Mary O'Donnell, Stephen and Elizabeth Shafer, Leslie Surprenant, Carole Furman, Zach Horton, Stephanie Bassler, Bill Barr

Approval of July 17, 2025, Minutes

The motion carried.

Town Food Waste Collection/Composting

Zach reported on food waste and composting initiatives, including grant applications for food waste containers. He explained that the town had applied for county-funded "roll-off" containers to manage food waste generated in the Town. The plan involves coordination with the town transfer station and possibly the high school for student participation and community service. Skip questioned the regulatory requirements for composting, including permits and proper composting pads. He noted that without a secured site and a specific permitted plan ~~the~~ composting, especially with biodegradable plastics, could become problematic. Elizabeth expressed concern that Greenway, which had previously managed waste, was no longer involved, and without them, the system could collapse. Zach admitted logistics were not finalized, and there was no backup plan. Stephen asked whether the award for the containers had been granted; Zach said they were still waiting for official confirmation. Skip emphasized the need for updates, noting that the school board was unaware of these plans.

Planning Board Referral

Skip introduced comments from Adriana regarding a possible CAC referral to the Planning board on a project on West Saugerties Road (the Repucci subdivision of Howie Wittenbecker's property). Carole explained that the land contains extensive wetlands under DEC jurisdiction and that DEC would be involved. Stephen raised the possibility of unmapped wetlands requiring additional review. Elizabeth asked about federal jurisdiction over the Great Vly, and Leslie confirmed that both federal and state oversight applied. Leslie added that vernal pools are ecologically important but may not be protected unless interconnected. She also described best practices for culverts, including lowering the culvert below the stream bed to allow aquatic passage. Stephanie Bassler suggested involving wetlands engineer Joe Damrath as an independent expert, and she offered to connect Skip with him. The group concluded that since DEC is involved, there was no need for a formal CAC referral at this time, but they should monitor the situation.

CCAP

Mary O'Donnell then presented updates to the Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP). She thanked members for proofreading and clarified issues with Table 1, which listed emissions data from Ulster County. Stephen had flagged minor inconsistencies in units but agreed the data was reliable for CO₂ emissions. Mary then highlighted the industrial sector, which contributes about 17–18% of Saugerties' emissions, almost entirely from Northeast Solite, a coal-burning plant. She suggested the CAC recommend creating a task force to explore emission reductions. Elizabeth questioned why DEC permitted coal burning, but Mary said that was an issue for a task force, not the CAC directly. Leslie stressed the importance of including Solite representatives on any task force, while Stephen outlined technical options such as carbon capture, fuel conversion, or hydrogen-based cement production, though all were impractical or far-off. Stephanie noted the need for funding, pointing to NYSERDA as a potential partner. Carole observed that community pressures from nearby farms and venues might push for stricter oversight. The group agreed to add an industrial sector section to the CCAP recommending a task force.

Mary outlined the next steps: finalize the plan, send it to the Town Board with a memo, open post it on the town website for public comment, gather feedback, and finalize it for approval by the Town board. Elizabeth volunteered to assist with outreach when the plan is public. Leslie reminded the group that she had volunteered to help compile public comments. Mary also announced that the plan's cover would feature the Climate Smart Saugerties banner instead of a photograph, which members agreed to.

Pollinator Meadow

Leslie reported on the Pollinator Meadow, which needs perimeter weeding. She recounted a positive encounter with a child who admired the meadow and said she would lead another public educational session in mid-September with Lifespring, a senior learning community. She plans to reseed restoration areas in November. Skip encouraged her to circulate dates for both weeding and reseeding so volunteers could help.

NYS Forest Grants

Leslie flagged new DEC Community Forest grants for municipal land acquisitions or conservation easements. The grants range from \$50,000 to \$300,000 for forested parcels of at least 10 acres, covering surveying and legal costs. She suggested Winston Farm as a candidate, though noted the money was insufficient for its scale. Stephanie proposed the North Street woodland in the village as another possibility. Leslie said even partial easements would be worthwhile.

Town Liaison

Zach updated the group on Winston Farm. He explained that substantive comments on the Draft GEIS were being compiled and that both the sponsors and the Town Board would review them. A central question was whether the final GEIS would consist of the draft plus comments and responses or whether the draft itself would be revised. Ken Goldberg and Stephen pressed for clarity, stressing that without changes to the document itself, comments could be sidelined. Zach agreed that this needed clarification. Mary stressed that the community overwhelmingly supported preserving 73% of open space, not at least 50%, and that cutting into the 500 acres of forest would destroy the town's main carbon sink. Elizabeth echoed her concerns. Water supply testing was also identified as unresolved, with Zach noting that developers' projections lacked sufficient hydrology.

Zach will clarify how substantive comments will be incorporated into the final GEIS and update the group.

Zach also confirmed that state funding had been secured for upgrades at J.C. Field, with construction likely to begin in the spring once Parks and Rec is ready.

Announcements

Leslie said she could not attend the upcoming Ulster County Environmental Management Council meeting and suggested Linda might attend instead.

Adjournment

The motion carried at 6:40 p.m.

Prepared by: Kevin Freeman, Secretary