Town of Knox Conservation Advisory Council Meeting Notes 6:30 PM March 25, 2025

Attending: Eric Marczak, Rick Georgeson, Nelson Kent, Amy Lauterbach and Dave Nelson, as well as Gary Kleppel

Eric opened the meeting at about 6:30 PM.

Housekeeping

- Eric made a motion to approve the February 18 meeting minutes. Dave seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Education and Outreach

Biosolids

- Recent Altamont Enterprise editorial and other local news coverage is drawing attention to the use of municipal waste biosolids as fertilizer.
    - NYS and Albany County are working on this issue. The 90 day moratorium on their use will likely be extended.
    - Town law may be more restrictive under home rule precedent.
    - Cumulative effects of PFAS, heavy metals, microplastics, drugs, semi volatile organic compounds are dangerous.
        - Is there a safe level? Precautionary principal: don't use them.
        - Testing for these pollutants is costly.
    - Economic argument - poisoned water and soil will ruin farms and farming livelihoods.
- Alternative – encourage CCE to develop a network for sharing manure, compost and other safe soil amendments.
- Definitions – ask Knox Town Board to accept the NYS DEC definition of biosolids:
    - "The accumulated semi-solids or solids resulting from the treatment of wastewater from publicly or privately owned or operated sewage treatment plants, excluding grit, screenings, and ash generated from incinerating biosolids."
    - Amy will draft a start for a proposed change to the zoning ordinance to add a definition.
- This is an issue of statewide concern – we'll stay in touch with our representatives.
    - Proposed legislation is for a five year ban in NYS.

Farmland Protection Plan

- A section on common ground between agriculture and conservation will focus on resources that are critical to both.
    - Rural character, open space
    - Karst and the water supply
        - Historically, the lack of reliable water supplies is a reason for the lack of industry.
        - Karst is more drought prone than non-karst geology, having focused recharge areas.
        - Ask Thom Engel to speak to the Knox Town Board about karst?
    - Knox has significant wetlands, high number of bird species, other species.
        - Our town park wetlands is a Cornell "hotspot" for birding.
        - Dave's been seeing 5 eagles (2 adults, 3 immature) near his property.
- If an activity is making money on open space, the open space will be conserved.
    - Agriculture is a good way to make money.
    - Conservation measures protect farmland.
- What protections can be applied to agricultural practices?
    - Personal safety and safety of livestock – use fencing around sink holes.
    - Avoid disposal of dead animals in sink holes.
    - Keep manure and biosolids away from streams, sinkholes.
    - Plant vegetation around streams, other water sources – it removes nitrogen.

    - Regenerative versus conventional agriculture is sustainable.
        - CCE is addressing this.
        - Agricultural Environmental Management program with NYS Ag & Markets and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts incentivizes farmers to use sustainable practices.
            - Ken Saddlemire is enrolled.
    - CCE could develop a network of farmers to distribute environmentally safe compost.
- Forest management – Eric will follow up with Evan Taylor of the Agricultural Advisory Council on this.
    - Analysis of forests – how to take samples in an area and extrapolate based on height, stages, ages, etc.
- An inventory of farms and farmers in Knox is in progress.
    - Corn, beef, hay, sheep, horses, pigs, poultry and vegetables have been raised in the past 10 years.
        - Hops, apples, basswood in past years
        - Historically, wood was burned to make ashes for factories that made soap.
    - Homesteading, locavore movements have increased the numbers of small agricultural operations.
    - Direct marketing and agritourism can be profitable – e.g. Carrot Barn, Indian Ladder Farm
    - Wineries, breweries, distilleries are becoming more common.
        - Limestone water is alkaline, which is good for breweries.

<u>Map Library (for Open Space Inventory)</u>

- Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy has added parcels to the Bozenkill Preserve.
    - Dave will arrange a private tour with waterfowl biologist Brian Swift.
    - Nelson will overlay the tax map with the map of the preserve to determine how much of it is in Knox.

<u>Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs)</u>

<u>Wetlands Boardwalk</u>

- Eric reviewed traffic in the past 11 months: over 250 people signed in to the registry book, representing 31 municipalities, including Colorado, Georgia and NYC.
- Some teetering in the plank walkway needs to be stabilized.

<u>Other Discussion</u>

- Historic Altamont met recently. Work on the connecting trail will resume around May 1.
- Progress has been made on the kiosk near the old Key Bank.

Nelson motioned to adjourn, Rick seconded and the meeting concluded at 8:01 PM.
The next CAC meeting is planned for 6:30 PM on Tuesday, April 15.