

Economic Development Committee (EDC)

MINUTES

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Committee Members Present: Arthur Merrill; Tina Molé; Richard Parete; Jason Merwin; Jeff Senterman; Innes Kasanof; David Warne

Committee Member(s) or Staff Absent: Thomas Snow Jr

Staff Present: Barbara Puglisi; Lynn Kavanagh; Tim Cox

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 A.M.

Minutes from the EDC meeting of October 3, 2023 were moved and passed without comment; *all in favor.*

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation

Peter Manning of the Catskill Mountain Club gave a presentation to the Economic Development Committee in regard to Trail Towns.

Loan Update

Barbara presented an update of loan activity, which showed the following:

CFF Loan Activity through 2/29/2024 staff indicated there is \$5,000,000.00 in the budget for 2024. Currently there is 1 (1) loan committed; totaling \$635,000.00 and two (2) loans in process; totaling \$1,417,880.00 leaving a budget balance of \$2,947,120.00. Barbara updated the committee on loans closed since the beginning of the program inception is \$104,501,006. She added the outstanding balance of current loans is currently \$26,271,202.

Barbara presented a chart showing CWC's collateral position of defaulted and delinquent loans as of 2/29/2024. The total Default and Delinquent rate is currently 3% and is separated into two categories to show the difference between the two. The Default Risk Rate is 1% and the Delinquent Risk Rate is 2%.

Barbara presented a chart showing a breakdown of CWC Loans that have been "written-off" as of 2/9/2024. The total dollar amount of the write-offs is \$4,280,421.80. The chart showed that 72.36% of the total amount written off were loans located in Delaware County. Additionally, 18.54% of the write-offs occurred in Ulster County and the remaining 9.11% in Sullivan County. There have been no write-offs in Greene or Schoharie County.

Barbara presented a chart showing the fund allocation for each county.

Catskill Mountain Club Request

Barbara directed the committee's attention to the handout provided by Peter Manning (attached) in regard to his presentation. She stated the handout shows the current Board Members of the Catskill Mountain Club as well as a cost estimate for the funding they are seeking in order to complete the trail project. Rich asked if the proposal included Delaware County officials as a part of the project. Barbara answered this is preliminary and Peter is looking to put together a steering committee to make a Trail Town document to give to elected representatives. Rich stated the O&W Railroad Rail Trail which runs through several towns has a coalition which is made up of volunteers that do similar work but each town has a municipal representative as well. Lynn asked if the O&W Rail Trail was owned by the towns. Rich answered yes. Lynn stated most of the proposed trails are on City and State land and not on town properties and referenced the Recreational Plan that was completed in 2020 which outlined Trail Towns. Jeff Senterman stated he is not clear on what Peter is asking for CWC pay for and added he thinks it's a good idea to develop these Trail Towns but thinks it's not something CWC should pay for. Art stated Peter had reached out to him asking for a letter of support in regard to a smart growth grant but was contacted by Peter again stating they were moving in a different direction and no longer needed the letter Art stated he agrees with Jeff and thinks it's a good idea but would like for the request to be more clear as he isn't quite sure what the funding is for either. Jeff stated he thinks there are more appropriate funding sources available, Art agreed. Jason stated he is leery to give out grant funds as CFF doesn't currently have a grant program and while he thinks the project is a good idea he agrees with Jeff and Art about there being more appropriate funding options available. Barbara stated when she spoke with Peter she had asked if he would be working with one specific town in order to create a trail town or if it were to serve as a guiding document and Peter stated it would be a guiding document for trail towns.

Garage Funding Bids

Jason stated the garage bids were discussed during the Wastewater Committee Meeting and added there is a resolution going before the board in order to increase the amount of funding needed in order to complete the garage. Jason reminded the committee that CFF funded the construction of CWC's new headquarters and has been paid back through the lease with DEP. Jason stated there is not enough in the original allocation but it will need to be increased in order to complete the garage by 1,004,000.00.

Innes Kasanof made a motion to approve; Art Merrill seconded the motion; All in favor

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:40 A.M.

Trail Towns Proposal (*Draft*)
to the
Catskill Watershed Corporation
from the
Catskill Mountain Club

This proposal demonstrates the Catskill Mountain Club's (CMC's) intention to advance regional initiatives of mutual importance. The proposal furthers adopted planning goals and objectives and reflects discussions between the CWC Economic Development staff and the CMC to explore a project that will benefit the region. The content is illustrative, flexible, and subject to change, based on dialogue that can improve its effectiveness. This proposal is accompanied by a slide presentation for the CWC Economic Development Committee.

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Background

Outdoor recreation has always been integral to Catskills. Access to an abundance of public parkland for many recreational pursuits is an important ingredient in the quality of life for many residents and visitors. Recreation plays a key role in supporting the economic vitality of our communities, and the development of sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities are compatible with watershed protection objectives. The Catskill Forest Preserve, with its 300,000 acres of the "forever wild" land and waters and all its recreational opportunities, has long been touted as a vital contributor to the region's future. Many lands acquired in the Catskill-Delaware Watershed for water quality protection are also open to the public, while great expanses of open water on four reservoirs offer expanded boating opportunities.

The Catskill Watershed Corporation has been involved in advancing several initiatives related to recreation over the years. Examples include working in partnership to improve access to NYC-owned lands, undertaking regional marketing projects (e.g. recreation web map), expanding the recreational boating program, managing the construction of much-needed parking areas funded by NYS, and funding the planning and implementation of the wayfinding sign system, which directs travelers to more than 100 recreational destinations. In 2020, CWC co-authored the Greater Catskill Region Comprehensive

Recreation Plan, with DEC, DEP, and the Catskill Center. As with many plans, the content is action-oriented and instructive, but needs our commitment to breathe life into it so that the visions can become realities.

The Catskill Mountain Club (CMC) shares great interest in implementing goals and objectives of outdoor recreation planning instruments. We have valuable experience working with communities and agency partners on successful trail projects. CMC and CWC Economic Development staff met in 2023 to explore potential ways pursue the development of a Trail Towns program in August 2023. It was agreed that CMC would develop more detail and illustrate how we could advance the Trail Town effort. This includes providing more information about the CMC, including its history, experience, and qualifications in advancing successful trail related projects in the region.

Statement of Need

As part of the Watershed Agreement, the economic development study conducted for the West-of-Hudson Watershed reinforced the asset-based strategy for the future of the region's economy. Citing the many inherent strengths of the Watershed -- proximity to a huge population base; diverse, year-round recreational options; environmental quality; and attractive communities as focal points for development -- the HRA Report (1999) recommended that the assets defining the region and make it special be leveraged for economic benefit. The Catskill Forest Preserve Public Access Plan (NYSDEC & DOT, 1999) recommended trail linkages between Catskill Communities, the Forest Preserve, and New York City's watershed lands be pursued.

The recommendations of these plans are not only still pertinent, but in many locations intense levels of visitation have exceeded the carrying capacity of the infrastructure in supporting safe and rewarding experiences. From 2012 – 2022, it is estimated that the number of annual visitors to the Catskill Park more than doubled, with some 12 million people now visiting annually. Prior to pandemic in 2020, recreational use was intensifying. This was followed by a sharp acceleration that overwhelmed many locations, especially in the eastern portions of the region. Management policies, resources, and actions - in part by necessity -- became more reactive and corrective. For example, DEC adopted regulations to address intensive use at two extremely popular locations.

In addressing management regionally, the Greater Catskill Region Comprehensive Recreation Plan (2020) set forth a series of recommendations to better integrate the region's trail system with hamlets and villages. The plan focuses on the development and implementation of a Catskill Trail Towns program, and it includes CWC as a leader in this effort. The plan assesses existing conditions and identifies numerous opportunities; however, these will need to be acted upon to achieve success. Regionally, there are strategies for *dispersal* of visitors through improved promotion of lesser-known recreation resources; and locally, the opportunities center on better connectivity between these resources and our communities.

The plan offers guidance in distributing visitors across the region, so that the increased activity in outdoor recreation can further enliven communities through a much-improved trail system. Involving communities and providing assistance and guidance are necessary ingredients for taking advantage of the recommended opportunities.

In 2023 the Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG) issued its final report. The CAG was formed by the State of New York in 2020 amid a surge in visitation to the Catskill Park and communities within it. The report echoes the Regional Rec Plan and champions the creation of Trail Towns. The report presents: a more holistic and region-wide management strategy that involves the creation of new destinations within the park; the promotion of underutilized trails and recreation areas; the alleviation of overcrowding in hot spots; and the redirection of heavier visitor use patterns to spread the benefits to additional communities. Among many other pertinent recommendations, the report recommends more local government participation in the Catskill Park Advisory Committee.

Qualifications of Catskill Mountain Club

Founded in 2004 and linked to the 100th anniversary of the Catskill Park, the CMC is a non-profit organization of outdoor enthusiasts dedicated to providing a wide range of non-motorized outdoor group activities throughout the Catskill Park and Region. CMC is a membership organization that leads outdoor events regularly, and we work with partners to build and maintain trails. We've created six trails in the Catskills, five of them involving watershed lands owned by NYC. Currently, CMC is working on the Morris Hill Trail, which is located adjacent to the CWC/ DEP offices and Water Discovery Center. CMC is also an advocate for the region. As a co-founder of the Catskill Park Coalition, we remain active in working with state elected officials and agency staff to address the needs of the Catskills and provide resources.

While the CMC Executive Director would be responsible for the majority of work in the Trail Towns project, the CMC Board of Directors will contribute valuable guidance. The qualifications of the executive director are summarized here, and the experience of the board of directors, as it relates to trail efforts, is included below.

Peter Manning, Executive Director, has 25 years of professional experience, with a focus on the Catskills. Serving with the NYS Department of State, he was stationed in the CWC offices and worked in partnership with CWC on many initiatives. These include the establishment of a First Stop Shop for businesses and the planning and delivery of programming at several annual Catskill Local Government Day events. As the regional planner at the Catskill Center, Peter utilized a grant from CWC to work with communities to achieve official designation of the Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway. In partnership with CWC and state agencies, Peter organized the Catskill Wayfinding Sign Project, which resulted in the installation of highway signage for more than 100 recreation destinations. In addition to his responsibilities with CMC, he is working with the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce on the nomination to extend the Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway.

Program and Product (Illustrative Components)

1) Development of a Catskill Trail Towns Manual

(Organized and conducted in cooperation with CWC Economic Development staff)

- Review and assess all Trail Towns content in the Greater Catskill Region Comprehensive Recreation Plan (Regional Rec Plan) and determine applicability to the Catskills.
- Revise and update content of Regional Rec Plan, e.g. Trail Town Amenities.

- Research and assess materials of the national Trail Town Program (the Progress Fund) and determine structure, organization and suitability for the Catskill Trail Towns project.
- Explore and gather pertinent information from other state and national Trail Towns efforts; adapt to Catskills.
- Fully present the benefits of Trail Towns; include Catskill-specific examples.
- Develop general and specific guidance material for Catskill communities to undertake trail town projects.
- Identify short- and long-term projects; included steps to achieve.
- Incorporate successful examples of trail projects from the region.
- Seek GIS (Geographic Information Systems) professional assistance for the development of maps for the manual.
- Complete, print, distribute, and web-post manual.

2) Engagement of Catskill Communities

- Publicize and promote Catskills Trail Towns through various means, e.g. websites, news announcements, and local and regional meetings.
- Develop criteria for choosing a limited number of communities for focused technical assistance.
- Advance concepts sketched in Regional Rec Plan, both regionwide and locally.
- Develop a series of steps for local communities to become empowered to undertake and pursue.
- Identify places of improvements where trails can connect to communities.
- Identify sources of funding.
- Work with stakeholders to identify projects and work towards implementing these.
- Organize workshops and field trips grounded in Trail Town concepts and practices.
- Empower local stakeholders to undertake trail projects.

3) Formation of a Trail Towns Steering Group

- Membership: CMC, CCCD, NYNJTC, Catskill 3500 Club, CWC, DEC, DEP
- Purpose: to help guide the project and to work collectively in pursuit of the following --
- Identify and address policy concerns and challenges; help streamline.
- Identify impediments to specific projects, assess, and work to resolve.
- Examine the status of projects identified in the Regional Rec Plan, the CAG Report and other plans and advance accordingly, e.g. the “low-hanging fruit”
- Assist in the implementation of projects by exploring funding resources, activation of volunteers, and other means.
- Explore facilitating the duties of agencies in the implementation of trail related work.
- Report to CWC and the Catskill Park Advisory Committee on a periodic basis.

Estimated Project Costs

\$50,000

\$42,000 for 1) – 3) above

\$8,000 for GIS and print/ publishing services

Project Duration: Two Years

Summary of CMC Board Members Qualifications

Wendell George served as the CMC's first executive director from 2017 – 2021. Among numerous significant achievements, Wendell developed the Ashokan Quarry Trail in cooperation with DEP. This interpretive trail offers an easy, scenic hike and tours the former quarrying works used in the construction of the Ashokan Reservoir. In 2021, Wendell co-authored the Trail Connectivity Report, which recommended numerous specific trail projects to improve the region's trail system. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower.

Ann Roberti has been instrumental in working with all partners to develop CMC trails in Andes and Delhi for many years. She has been a leader in the effort to restore the historic fire tower to its original location atop Bramley Mountain – a project that is expected to be completed this year. Ann is the President of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower, a non-profit organization that sprung from the CMC and focuses on the fire tower restoration efforts. For many years, Ann generated the Club's newsletter and social media content.

Rick Roberts serves as Club President and has been a major player in the creation of the Delhi Trails, in cooperation with Delaware Academy and the Village of Delhi. Rick is also active in the Finger Lakes Trail Conference, with a focus on establishing trail connections in the Downsville-Walton area. He serves on the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower Board of Directors.

Aaron Bennett is a co-founder of the CMC and was responsible for much of its development in the earlier years, including the establishment of the CMC website. Prior to his current employment with NYCDEP, Aaron wrote the Plan for Enhanced Recreational Access to the Upper East Branch of the Delaware Watershed. The plan envisions the development of several recreational hubs, including the Arkville Hub and the Morris Hill Trail.

Lize Mogel is an interdisciplinary artist, educator and counter-cartographer. Since 2016, she has been working on Walking the Watershed, a long-term engagement with the landscape, history, and politics of New York City's water supply, and the relationship between the City and the mostly rural communities that supply its water. She's led bus tours and created an audio tour about the NYC drinking water system in

Laura Battelani is a founding member of CMC and has been committed to supporting CMC's membership, financial, and bookkeeping duties for many years. She is a local business owner and long-time trail maintainer with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.

Lisa Lyons owns Morgan Outdoors, a Sullivan County business specializing in outdoor recreation equipment. Lisa regularly creates outings, events, and programs that connect people of all ages and

abilities to the natural world. She has been a contributor to regional planning efforts in the Catskills and most recently served on the Catskills Strategic Planning Advisory Group.

Bob Moses enjoys the outdoors and has been a long-time CMC event leader. He is very experienced in trail designing and building and has instrumental in the development of CMC's trail efforts.

Michael Drillinger is active with a number of local land trusts and historical societies. He is a DEC-licensed New York State hiking and camping guide and a member of the New York State Outdoor Guides Association. He founded Speak to the Earth, a program based in Ulster County that promotes equitable and inclusive access to natural and wild protected places for all people.

John Sandman coordinates trail maintenance for all CMC trails and he is the primary maintainer for the Bramley Mountain Trail. He serves on the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower Board of Directors. As a retired professor at SUNY Delhi, he has worked with the university to involve students in trail project.

students in the maintenance of CMC trails.