

Town of Red Hook

Agriculture and Open Space Committee

Minutes of January 23, 2012

Attendance: John Hardeman, Michael Grady Robertson, Marina Michahelles, Mary Ann Johnson (7:15), Richard Biezynski (7:20) and Secretary Linda Keeling

Absent: Chairperson Pete Hubbell, Norman Greig, James Stagias, and Ken Migliorelli (7:25 pm),

Guests: Town Board Councilman William O'Neill (liaison),

Speakers: Mary Kay Vrba (Director) and Lydia Higginson (Assistant Director) of Dutchess County Tourism, 3 Neptune Rd., Suite Q-17, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 (845-463-4000 or 800-445-3131)

Meeting Opened: Secretary Linda Keeling opened the meeting at 7:07 pm.

New Business: John Hardeman was officially appointed and welcomed to the group. Although the group had five members at the beginning for a quorum, Marina had to leave at 7:55 after the group had its discussions. Therefore, the draft minutes from 12-27-12 could not be voted on.

The purpose of this special meeting was to hear from Dutchess County's Tourism regarding how her organization might help promote the Red Hook farming community.

Staatsburg State Historic Site: There's an RFP being offered to an organic farmer with the use of 10 acres including barns. This is a brand new project. Mike mentioned the Locust estates.

John Hardeman indicated that DC Tourism is doing a good job in getting the word out. Mary Kay Vrba would like to respond to the group's needs as the request was for how DCT could help promote Red Hook's Agricultural farms. Linda Keeling explained to her the Red Hook Farmer's Quarterly (RHFQ) concept being sponsored with ads and featuring a farm on the front cover. It would include restaurants, associated businesses and be totally self-sustaining.

Mary Kay said DCT has 19 information racks around the County and they service them once per week during the winter and twice per week during the summer time. The RHFQ would not fit in the rack as it would have to be 4 inch by 9 inch. There are three spaces that are 8.5 in. x 11 in. The travel guide and the state guide are those sizes. If set aside they either don't get picked up or get misplaced. She suggested charging a little bit more and distributing it along the Thru-way. They still will only take the 4 x 9 piece. She suggested 500-1000 pieces to start.

Lydia wanted to know who we are targeting. Linda responded locals and out of the area tourists. We will distribute them in local restaurants, hotels and businesses and beyond. There will be a map in the middle with the locations of the farms. We will also have what farms sell what and when.

Bill O'Neill wanted to know how many farm markets are in town. There are about a dozen. John Hardeman asked how our number of farm stands compares to other places? Lydia has not counted for that but felt we had a lot.

Mary Kay said people like the tours spelled out. She gave the example of the "Garden of Eating" tour which encompassed four counties: Dutchess, Columbia, Albany and Rensselaer. There was a paper with a self-guided itinerary in Dutchess County and she passed around other tour information. There were also overnight package stays. She suggested contacting the Grand Dutchess or the Red Hook Inn. She suggested a discount or scavenger hunt.

Lydia noted that a package like that could be posted for free through the "I Love NY" promotional but it needs an overnight stay component. It would involve staying at a hotel, visiting the farm stands, going to the local restaurants using the local product then stay overnight. That would get the whole community involved then perhaps other businesses could give a discount. Those are the kinds of things people are looking for in a brochure when they come.

Marina felt that most people coming up here are using their cell phones. She felt paper brochures are good too but wanted to know what other means might be available for promoting the area. Mary Kay mentioned the Hudson Valley Bounty website which they should get on. It helps farmers find restaurant outlets for their products and vice-a-versa. There's also a consumer page so if the consumer wants for example apples or heirloom tomatoes they can be found there, Hudson Valley Tourism, for which Mary Kay serves on, serves the 10 counties on both sides of the Hudson River. There's a Hudson Valley app which is \$100 to get on that. People can download the information and see what's in a radius of that area. This app has just been launched and there aren't many farms on it as yet. She said at I-tunes, the app can be downloaded for a couple of dollars. Marina felt this information should be on other websites and forums like the Hudson Valley Growers forum. There were some problems launching the app due to paper filing consideration with Apple. The Hudson Valley Tourism, however, is mobile. She noted that people still want the printed material. One of the things coming back is direct mail pieces. This is attractive to the younger groups.

Lydia mentioned that the DCT website has a section called "Farm Fresh" and she posts weekly and on Facebook. It could be special events like a cheese making class. There is quite a following as there were about 5,000 people at the Farm Fresh tours. So anytime you have an event, send it to DCT and it will go out to multiple locations. The Farm Fresh on the DCT website gets 2000 visitors per day. So let DCT know if you are having a special event or launching a new product.

They have done a coloring book for kids. It was done by a local artist and tells what you learn when you go on site. They do a program with Metro North, bringing people up from the city, and provide transportation to some of the farm areas. A couple of years ago, they did a Farm Fresh booklet which has to be updated. There is a pull out map which showed the farm locations and what they sell. It included and educational pieces of what product grows when, the names of structures, like a silo.

Also on Feb, 28th we are doing a Culinary Tourism. She encourages all to come as there will be farmers and restaurateurs speaking about how to market and how to make the most of Hudson Valley restaurant

week and how products get into restaurants and how chefs use that. The key note speaker is Eddie Purcell, a writer and others. The last session will be on the future of agri-tourism. Other future areas will include distilleries and an apple cider trail.

Mary Kay reemphasized using the various media to get Red Hook's products known to the public. Lydia suggested the town page should have what to do in Red Hook. Break it down to days and what can be done. Mary Jane reminded all that the town website does not want to focus on specific businesses. She felt the farmers could work with the Chamber's website.

John Hardeman wanted to know what funding would be necessary to reinstate the DCT brochure. Mary Kay stated their funding has been cut drastically from \$150,000 to \$75,000 for the "I Love NY" publicity. She felt that in the past the farmers have not been supportive. Last year, the Farm Fresh program was underwritten from a person in Westchester County because there was no funding for the transportation. She would like the support from the local farmers to support the Farm Fresh program which has been in existence for about 6 years which was a result of a CIA Conference at that time. Lydia noted that all farms can be listed on the website for free, just fill out the form.

Linda Keeling asked if there is a way to connect CIA graduates with local restaurants. Lydia mentioned that on the website, restaurants using local produce are coded a farm fresh restaurant. It was noted that the Dutchess County Fair has two racks. Mary Kay mentioned that one of the problems with using Metro North is the timing and it only goes to Poughkeepsie. She explained the reason Metro North doesn't come this far is that several town north of Poughkeepsie didn't want it and they need a rail pull off area. There's also limited transportation money. It costs DCT \$25,000 to do 6 weeks.

John Hardeman said if you were to consider Tivoli, you would have to deal with Amtrak. They use to sponsor a fall balloon festivals. He suggested maybe working with them then having buses available to the farms. Mary Kay said that's where farm support would be helpful as it would cost about \$2,000 for the bus service. Rich Biezynski talked about the former Mayor of Tivoli who thought the Park would have been good for a farmer's market if the train stopped at Tivoli. Mary Kay noted again that the timing is the problem. Mary Jane Johnson mentioned that in Millbrook they used the train and had a small group visit the winery and after a few years offered a wine making camp. Providing the transportation has been the biggest problem but it has been successful for them.

John Hardeman suggested a day cruise from NY and dock somewhere then have a shuttle go to a restaurant. Mary Kay said again the timing is still a problem. She said Metro North could be used if we had some additional transportation for a weekend. You would need \$5,000 to do two different weekends. People spent on average about \$80 per person made up of wine, cheese, apples and baked goods. They received a list of where they can get Dutchess County products at local markets. It's not an end all but gets the person thinking about where their products are coming from. It's an educational piece which brings then up to the Fair for which DCT provides transportation. It's developing a relationship with the consumer for the long run.

Rich Biezynski noted that people are not going to carry off a lot of product especially fresh or frozen products but a gathering does provide an opportunity to educate the public about each of the farms and

what they have to offer. Mary Jane said in the past they distributed insulated bags the size of pizza boxes and the people would fill them up. They cost about \$4 each.

Mary Kay reminded all to use the DCT and Hudson Valley Tourism websites. If we come up with an itinerary or two that could be put on the website and marketed. There is also the NY site that that could go on. Retail farmers can be listed. She reminded all to come to the conference.

Lydia noted that they created recipe cards with the help of restaurateurs and had a scavenger hunt with each farm having a card. That helps with educating the consumer on how to cook a product the public might not be familiar with.

DCT does a food camp with the Culinary, works with food bloggers in exposing them to the farms and the do a press strip on the area which would give some exposure to the NY and NJ market.

John Hardeman asked if there was anything going on with the Red Hook Bicentennial Committee? Mary Kay said she has not heard anything about the event. She stressed the need to get the information to her so they can promote it. We have to formulate the package with the various businesses as she cannot sell it. She felt the dozen markets here could be a hook. We have to define what we produce here that is unique and sets us apart from other areas. For example; visit 5 farms and get entered into an overnight contest that will bring them back and spreads by word of mouth.

Rich Biezynski asked about why Albany is not considered as it is only 50 miles away. Mary Kay said traditionally her market research indicates that people do not travel south but will travel north. From Albany they either go east, north or west. Rich felt we should be promoting the Hudson River and view of the Catskills. He noted that when the Taconic Parkway was built, it diverted traffic away from Rt. 9 and the farms.

Mary Kay emphasized getting the event information in to her as soon as possible. There are various conferences coming up for firefighters and Cessna pilots with a visit to the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome. They will be driving and flying up for the weekend. There will also be a huge Music Festival coming into Marist College. In September there will be a food channel from the UK which will reach 170 million people. It will be their only North American stop which will be in Dutchess and a little in Westchester. They too will need accommodations for their stay.

Linda Keeling asked if those tentative conferences are on the DCT website. Mary Kay so no, it is only in-house but you could contact them. They will be making welcome packages for all these people visiting, so she encourages us to have a booklet, flyer or travel guide ready welcoming to the various farms and indicate what the public could get.

John Hardeman asked if we buy the individual racks would that be allowed. Mary Kay said no as it would take up an individual space and would have to be hung up separately. Linda Keeling asked if the information was sent via email could they produce it or do we have to send you the hard copy? She indicated that if it is black and white they could do it but if it color you must produce it.

Offering samples like: maple syrup, tea, coffee, etc. helps get the product to the consumer with a promise of future repeat sales. Lydia suggested offering a coupon of “Buy \$25 of produce, get \$5 off” distributed at the Aerodrome event. The speakers left at 8:00 pm and everyone was enthusiastic for the future of promoting the local farms.

Other Business:

Term Easement Law and Town Board Possible Repeal: Mary Jane explained that in the past the Assessor did not give half of the participants any assessment break especially involving about three property owners. Former signees were contacted by Councilperson Brenda Cagle and those individuals were fine with staying in the program. Rich felt there were issues with signing up for 15 years at a 75% reduction and it was up to the Assessor as to whether or not the full amount would be granted. People felt they lost equity if they were going to sell it.

Mary Jane felt that the Town board needs to identify the problems and find a reasonable solution before eliminating the program. She said it was working just fine in Clifton Park. They look at their chart specified under their law. If you have an Ag assessment this will not help you. This program is intended for landowners of large parcels in various zoned districts.

Linda summarized and stated that the group would like the Town Board to reconsider and look at how other communities are handling this issue. Input should be gotten from the other committees involved with this program then ask for the Ag group’s input. The term: “at the discretion of the Assessor’ should be removed. The Attorney for the Town, Christine Chale, has some issues with the language. It was felt that the Town should not repeal the law without addressing changing the language.

MOTION: *Richard Biezyński motioned to adjourn the meeting, Mary Ann Johnson seconded, all agreed.*

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm

Next meeting: Monday, February 27, 2012, 7:00 pm, town hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda J. Keeling, Secretary

Approved 2-27-2012