

Draft

**TOWN OF RED HOOK**  
**CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Minutes of meeting

February 8, 2012

Members present: Chairwoman Laurie Husted, Dr. Jane Ferguson, Susan Ellis, Zoie Riel, Anne Rubin, Karen Schneller-McDonald, Denis Collet Absent: Sarah Imboden

Guests: Councilwoman Brenda Cagle, Mike Zelig, Green T Energy Inc. owners Indigo Munoz-Weaver and Terry Weaver, Laurie Rich, Red Hook Village Trustee Jennifer Norris, Tivoli Green Committee member Kathy O'Connor, Robert Tynes

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairwoman Laurie Husted called the meeting to order at 7: 15 P.M. Laurie announced that at 7:30 P.M. Green T Energy Inc. would give a presentation on the “smart metering” program sponsored by Central Hudson. She introduced Mike Zelig as a resident interested in the work of the CAC, noting that there is a vacant position on the CAC, as well a Task Force positions for the Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP).

**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 11, 2012 MEETING:** The minutes of the January 11 meeting were approved with a motion made by Jane Ferguson and seconded by Anne Rubin.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (DEC) SUMMER CAMP**

**SCOLARSHIPS:** Laurie Husted announced that the CAC is waiting for a reply from the VFW about whether or not they will fund the scholarships for two students, as they have for many years. Laurie sent a letter to the VFW requesting the funding, but they won't vote on it until their February meeting. As the application process is behind, Laurie will send e-mails to start promoting it as soon as the word comes from the VFW. Denis Collet asked which camp is used; the reply was that there are several choices, with the closest being Camp DeBruce in the southern Catskills.

**NEW ENERGY STAR LAW:** Laurie Husted reported that she had received a draft memo from Energy Manager Anne Marie Hirschberger with details of the new State Energy Star Law and the updates that the Town will need to include to stay in compliance. It will be passed on to the Zoning Enforcement Officer Steve Cole and Building Inspector Bob Fennell to encourage the Town to be proactive in adjusting regulations. Laurie added that Anne Marie is being asked why the Town of Greenburgh wrote a new Energy Star Law for new construction, instead of updating their existing regulations.

**PLANNING BOARD MINUTES REVIEW:** Laurie Husted noted that at the February 6, 2012 Planning Board meeting there was renewed discussion of the Oaks Preserve subdivision. The CAC previously made comments on the wetlands impacts of the configuration. Laurie asked Anne Rubin if

she would review the minutes, and also asked if Anne had planned to write a letter. Jane Ferguson agreed to do the review of the March 5, 2012 Planning Board minutes.

**CONSERVATION TERM EASEMENT TAX ABATEMENT PROGRAM:** Laurie Husted reported that at the last Town Board meeting, the Town Board heard public comments about the program, including opinions that the program should not just be dissolved, but there should be a way to improve and facilitate it. The Town Board agreed to establish a Task Force and wants a CAC member on it. Brenda Cagle said that the Town Board thought that it might take a month of work. Mary Anne Johnson from Ag and Open Space, Planning Board Chairwoman Chris Kane, and Trilby Sieverding have been appointed, and the Board is awaiting Jim Ross' appointee and a CAC member.

Brenda Cagle said that one of the considerations for dissolving the program was that while 13 applicants had been reviewed and approved by the CAC, only 3 filed easements. There also was mention of a table in the law that the owner of a property under term conservation easement would receive a certain percentage of assessment reduction. Town Attorney Chris Chale has informed the Town Board that it cannot tell the Assessor how to set assessments. Anne Rubin asked if the Town Attorney had any suggested alternatives. Susan Ellis said that there should be standards that define the determination of reduction in property value based on the conservation easement restriction. Anne Rubin asked the time frame for the Task Force work, as she might be interested, but might be away for most of March. Brenda Cagle said that the Town Board would meet next on February 14 and should decide then.

**COMMUNITY FUND – RUTH OJA ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP:** Chairwoman Laurie Husted announced that the scholarship fund is \$1,800.00.

**GREEN T ENERGY INC. – CENTRAL HUDSON HOME ENERGY SAVING PROGRAM:** Chairwoman Laurie Husted introduced the principals of Green T Energy, Indigo Munoz-Weaver and Terry Weaver. She asked CAC members and other guests to introduce themselves.

Indigo Munoz-Weaver gave some background on Green T Energy Inc. The company was originally hired by Central Hudson to install their "smart meters" for the pilot project for the CONSERT Home Energy Saving Program. CONSERT is a southern company hired by Central Hudson to set up the pilot project. Central Hudson had many problems with the program, from differences with demographics, thermostats and wiring, to different needs for the area. The style of recruitment did not work, as participants were not adequately prescreened and when Green T Energy Inc. arrived to install a "smart meter", they determined many to be ineligible. This created a loss of faith in the program. Other participants became disgruntled because customer support was not adequate. Green T Energy Inc. said that if Central Hudson wanted the pilot project to be successful, that Green T Energy Inc. needed to be able to address these issues. CONSERT asked for suggestions and agreed to Green T Energy Inc.'s proposals. Indigo added that now they are trying to resolve other problems with the program, one of which is that Central Hudson stopped marketing the program, so there is a lack of community awareness about the program. They have also come up against rumors of conspiracy theories about the "smart

meters,” including that there may be cameras in them that the government is watching. They want to address these issues with neutrality and give the public information that will allow them to make a decision based on facts. Without a successful pilot project it will be very difficult to move forward, though with the information that has been gathered about energy needs and potential production, the Public Service Commission is pushing Central Hudson to move forward. Indigo noted that Red Hook and Tivoli have been the chosen target for the pilot project; they are already set up for telemetry monitoring. Green T Energy Inc. is looking for advice and help in promoting this project.

*Privacy and security:* Denis Collet asked some questions. He said that he feels that privacy and security issues are a real concern and he doesn't think that either has been really addressed by the program. Any time that there is monitoring of a resident's house for energy use, there is potential for release of that information to someone who would use the information for harmful purposes. He asked where Green T Energy Inc. stands with those issues. Indigo replied that both issues are definitely a major concern with “smart metering,” and their data bases are encrypted using the same security strategies used for online banking and medical information. The data storage is located in San Antonio and Baltimore, and no one else has access to the data bases. Even Central Hudson is not monitoring the information on a regular basis, only when needed for billing purposes. Their main focus is on the grid itself, and monitoring voltage changes, which are significant for this area. Terry Weaver added that there is a need to balance loads and explained that happens through circuits, not individual homes. Indigo said that an additional security issue is the concern that because the “smart meters” are wireless, they can be tapped into. She said that the meters use cellular waves, which are not easy to tap into. She further investigated what information is given to the data base company for a customer's account, and noted that customer's id numbers are random, there is no name and only a zip code and e-mail address, which adds extra security. Denis said that may not be enough separation for the case where someone is determined to get information about high profile persons or homes, and the challenge is to balance conservation of energy in a centralized system with security. Adding subcontractors and trading partners means less accountability for customer information. Anne Rubin asked what liability Green T Energy Inc. has for security issues, how they would assure someone that their information is secure. Indigo discussed the background of their involvement with CONSERT; they researched the company background, why Central Hudson chose them, and why Central Hudson chose to do the program in the first place. Central Hudson already has all of our information. The data base is strictly there for information; it is just data being passed back and forth in a two way communication. Green T Energy Inc. does not maintain a data base.

*Monitoring and controls:* Denis Collet asked if they were just monitoring information or adding controls. Indigo replied that they do both. Monitoring of the information is there more for the consumer, as studies have shown that increasing consumer awareness through monitoring information results in 5% reduction in energy use. Controls have two forms, normal conservation event and peak load times. A normal conservation event happens only during peak hours. Peak load times are during the summer months when it is very hot and air conditioning demands are excessive; the system is not set up to meet excess demands. Demand is growing 25% more than transmission capability. In a

normal conservation event, when the system is stressed, the controls will turn on and take back 2 kilowatts from each “smart meter.” This may mean that the air conditioning will go up 4 degrees. Usually the control shuts off before a customer notices the increase in temperature. However, a customer can opt out of the control by touching the panel screen. In a critical conservation event when a blackout is pending, the control will override.

Denis Collet said that it appears that Central Hudson is involved in the program to avoid investing in new infrastructure. He noted that the CAC has spoken about potential changes that the Public Service Commission would consider about virtual net metering and solar farms. He added that Central Hudson will not agree to them. He sees the “smart metering” as a short gap method for Central Hudson to continue to avoid the responsibility of changing their model and avoid addressing the issue of how to treat renewable energy alternatives. Indigo Munoz-Weaver replied that Central Hudson has costs for supporting the technology and data base for “smart metering,” but is not totally for the program. Indigo added that her company is not interested in that political and financial aspect, but in the conservation of energy. Research shows that everyone saves in doing this, from the utilities to the consumer. How it will affect customers in New York is yet to be determined. They anticipate a 5 – 15% savings, though the technology will allow much more progress depending on how Central Hudson uses it.

Denis Collet asked about what other issues of the technology Green T Energy Inc. is experiencing; is there an issue with the 4 degree set-back, where it is not consistent? Indigo answered that actually for a customer that cannot tolerate great changes in temperature, it could be programmed for a 2 degree set-back. Denis asked what track record there is of failure for the equipment to perform properly; where has it been applied for two or three years successfully? Indigo noted that it has been successfully applied in Texas, North and South Carolina and Maryland; there are now 27 million homes with “smart meters.”

Indigo Munoz-Weaver continued her explanation of how “smart meters” operate and how they can be accessed. Zoie Riel asked if you can control the meter by just turning down the settings. Indigo said that yes, a customer can control the meter anywhere that they can get online, including by smart phone. There are 4 set points for a day that are programmed when the meter is set-up. Outside of the basic program that the customer sets up, the customer can change the settings anytime that he or she can access the portal, or by changing the thermostat. The customer’s basic information is never online, but can be accessed through the data base. It allows the customer to see the energy usage in real time, with separate data for hot water heaters, air conditioners, etc. It is very revealing to customers and gives them tools to make energy usage decisions.

*Outreach for pilot project:* Zoie Riel asked where we are now. Indigo replied that the pilot project only has 50 people right now, but had been planned for 200. They may not reach 200, as the program ends by October. Anyone who signs up can keep the equipment, and will have potential to access the portal. Denis Collet asked if the “smart meter” would be adapted to a net metered situation. Indigo replied that the potential is there, but she needs more information about how that would work. Anne Rubin asked if an important goal is having customers cut energy usage at peak times, is there an

education component for customers who don't qualify for a "smart meter?" Indigo and Terry Weaver replied that Green T Energy Inc. wants to reach as many people as possible. Indigo said that she thinks that it will be up to concerned members of the community to carry it on. Laurie Husted noted that in the Energy and Climate Action Plan there are a number of suggestions for reduction of energy use that community members can choose to feel that they are doing a part. It was suggested that WKZE radio station be used as a resource for public service announcements, also PANDA television. Anne Rubin suggested doing outreach at the Recycling Center on Saturdays. Indigo noted that Green T Energy is doing a referral based program, where anyone who refers a customer that signs up for the pilot program will receive \$20 for each referral; for the CAC they will donate the money to the CAC. Their goal is to try to have the project put together by March. Installations will be done until June. When the pilot project ends in October, the utility will analyze the data and then the utility will make it commercial.

Zoie Riel asked what do we gain by making the pilot project successful or what do we lose if it is unsuccessful? Indigo replied besides the reduction in energy use, that it gives the opportunity to see how the technology will work here and what benefits can be achieved here. Terry and Indigo Weaver noted that every utility which has done the pilot project has gone full scale, because the pilot results have been impressive. If a pilot project is faulty, it puts our area behind in the process. Con Edison has already signed contracts to do Westchester, Rockland and Orange counties.

Laurie Husted said that the CAC would expect press releases and other things that the CAC can circulate. She thanked Indigo and Terry Weaver for explaining the "smart meter" program.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Chairwoman Laurie Husted announced that there would be a free screening of the movie "The Big Table" at Bard College on Saturday night at Bard College. It documents local farming operations and features Ronnybrook Farms.

Laurie also announced that a webinar on Sustainable Economies Through Energy Planning will be broadcast on February 22, 2012 at noon. She hoped that a CAC member would tune in.

**ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (ECAP):** Laurie Husted noted that the Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP), as CAC members had observed, left a lot to be desired. The Energy group has asked PACE University consultants to incorporate the ICLEI software, which they have been working on the last three weeks. The software allows assumptions about costs and percentages. The Energy Group asked that PACE make some predictions about carbon savings and cost, and organize the plan with a basis that is nationally recognized. She said that the ICLEI software is good and that the subcommittees that form to work on the ECAP will make use of it. It will be in the ECAP. By next week the ECAP will be more organized; subcommittees can then start to prioritize what they want to do. Then, when events like the webinar come up, Laurie wants leaders of the subcommittees to embrace them within the context of the plan. A main goal now is to find leaders for the subcommittees. Laurie added that the software has 6 measures that communities can do to reduce their carbon emissions. The Energy group asked the PACE consultants today to go through the ECAP, with respect to the ICLEI software and the items that are relevant to Red Hook, and include items such as

weatherization, which is a large omission. Then, instead of being an isolated community project, the ECAP will be related to a national standard and the CAC will feel more comfortable that it will be worthwhile.

*Issues with content and format of the ECAP:* Denis Collet said that Laurie's summary of improvements to the CAP somewhat addresses the content, but that he still has concerns about the format, including the lack of definitions – no glossary, no table of contents, nothing that would make the document something that the CAC could publish. Laurie said that the document would be better, and at the end of the day what matters is what the CAC does with it and the subcommittee's work. Zoie Riel asked how much time they had to finish the ECAP; Brenda Cagle stated that it is supposed to be ready to distribute to the Town Board by February 17, 2012. Brenda added that they said yes to table of contents and appendices, no to index.

*CAC not satisfied with the final draft of the ECAP:* The CAC further discussed expectations for and disagreements about the final ECAP. Denis Collet felt that what was really absent is a theme - these are the trends; these are the directions, these are the things that you do in a home, like building science. Laurie Husted said that there was agreement that there was so much more to do, that much had been done and that the CAC would work with what it has. Denis acknowledged that the CAC could have noted deficiencies earlier, but asked what level of quality the CAC needs to feel comfortable with to publish the document on behalf of the Town and CAC. If it is not going to make it based on Energy Manager Anne Marie Hirschberger's time and commitment, then the CAC needs to look at alternatives. He asked if PACE University's support was lacking and added that the level of professionalism did not justify the amount of the contract. The CAC needs to say that it is just not satisfied. Laurie answered that she agreed to a point, but felt that given the time remaining that it would not reach the outcome that the CAC expected. Zoie Riel agreed with Denis, and said that the CAC should be able to politely press for the expertise that PACE should be able to deliver. Anne Rubin agreed that PACE should be told why the CAC has reached these conclusions. Denis continued that if the ECAP is to be informative it needs to mention not only the cost/benefit, but where we are headed, the state of the market. He expected some of that research and references to come from PACE; people need a pathway to the information that they need to be able to take actions, which isn't in the ECAP. Laurie pointed out that state of the art technology is a specific time. Denis agreed, but PACE needs to address that, and correct misinformation, such as solar panel installation costs \$3,000. Zoie Riel suggested a renegotiation, as the CAP does not provide the value contracted for. Denis agreed that the CAC had trust and faith that PACE would be able to bring their entire resources to apply to the contract and it did not deliver a product worth \$52,000.

Denis Collet continued that the CAC should collectively work on a theme, a direction showing the trends. There are actions that we take as citizens, actions that businesses do that influence their direction, actions of the utilities and the government, and the CAC needs to blend them in a way that it makes sense to a person reading the ECAP, so that when they look at the individual actions they can take, they know where they fit. He does not see that in the ECAP.

Susan Ellis added that she reviewed the section on Land Use and Water, finding that it concentrated on low flow fixtures, rain barrels and conservation easements, but did not address wetlands protection, stormwater management, watershed planning, flood control or rain gardens. Karen Schneller McDonald noted that there are two considerations, the content and the quality of the writing.

Councilwoman Brenda Cagle said that she had met with Energy Manager Anne Marie Hirschberger in the afternoon and expressed the CAC's concerns. Anne Marie said that she would speak with the new Director of the program at PACE. Zoie Riel said that she thought that the new Director needs to talk with the Town. Brenda said that she would arrange a meeting with PACE. Denis said that he would be willing to join Laurie Husted and Brenda in a meeting with them.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 P.M.

**NEXT MEETING:** Wednesday March 14, 2012 at 7 P.M. at the Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Ellis, Secretary