

**Economic Development, Historic Preservation
& Environmental Conservation Committee**

MINUTES

September 1, 2023

8:30 am

Members Present:

- John Della Ratta, Chairman
- Laura Robertson, Town Planner
- Kevin Walsh, Chairman of Planning Board
- Beth Greenwood, Comptroller
- Dart Strayer, Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Council
- Jamie Puccioni, Supervisor
- Jean Foti, Secretary to the Supervisor
- Trisha Bergami, Planning Department
- Matt Yetto, Engineering
- Alaina Finnan, Attorney

a. Public Concerns

None

b. Minutes

a. August 4, 2023

Chairman Della Ratta made a motion to approve the August 4, 2023 minutes and it was seconded by Mr. Walsh. The minutes were approved unanimously.

c. PRESENTATION

a. Metroplex Updates – Dr. Horton & Chairman Gillen

Dr. Horton started by stating he has lived in Niskayuna since 2003. He said no one has been more instrumental to the transformation of the Town and the City of Schenectady than the Chair of the Metroplex Development Authority Mr. Ray Gillen. Mr. Gillen thanked Dr. Horton and also thanked Supervisor Puccioni for appointing Dr. Horton. He also introduced Mark Storti from his Planning Office who is right there when Mr. Gillen is involved with a project and is also very instrumental to their success.

Mr. Gillen pulled up a power point presentation on the screen and began his presentation by stating that Metroplex is a State Authority set up by the State Legislature but controlled locally. He stated that they have a unified Economic Development Team and everyone tries to work together. Keeping open space and green space is all part of the smart growth principles which are critical to their mission. One of their important missions is to restore the core urban areas and redevelop existing sites.

38 Mr. Gillen's presentation went through several slide that showed information about what Metroplex
 39 does and the improvements that have been completed to Niskayuna as well as Schenectady. He mentioned
 40 helping with Niskayuna Commerce Park, E-One, and Momentive, and stated that having GE R&D and
 41 KAPL were great economic drivers that Niskayuna should be proud to retain. Another great
 42 improvement is the CO OP Plaza.

43 Chairman Della Ratta said that the CO OP Plaza is a perfect example of Metroplex and the County and
 44 the Town working together. The O.D. Heck building was also mentioned. A piece of the building is
 45 being used as office space but there is a piece not being used. Metroplex investigated this but the cost of
 46 asbestos removal is so high it makes it undevelopable for the time being.

47 The Walmart building in Mansion Square is still vacant but Mr. Gillen said they have a contact for the
 48 person in charge of closed stores for Walmart so hopefully with that info and some interest in the
 49 building this can be filled.

50 Mr. Gillen stated they are working on some other properties with Ms. Robertson and the Supervisor.

51 Zombie properties was another topic in the presentation. State law changed and allowed governments to
 52 foreclose on zombie properties after one year instead of four years. This was a big help to turn over
 53 these vacant homes. The unfortunate thing right now is that the Supreme Court is reviewing the rules
 54 so all of the accelerated foreclosures are pending until they get a ruling.

55 Another piece of property that Mr. Gillen brought up was the ball field behind Van Antwerp School, he
 56 said it is very forlorn looking He said the school should really work on that area.

57 The Supervisor thanked Mr. Gillen for coming in and his presentation on all the activity that has taken
 58 place in the Town. The Supervisor said she wants to make Nott Street our main street which would
 59 include adding historic lighting and banners. She wants to bring back that main street feel to our Town.

60 **d. Resolutions / Finance Committee**

61

62 a. A Non-Binding Resolution recognizing and supporting the Quiet Niskayuna Initiative

63 Ms. Robertson said she needed a little more time for this in August but it will be ready for September.

64 b. A Resolution combining the Climate Smart Communities Task Force with the Conservation
 65 Advisory Council and designating a Climate Smart Communities Coordinator

66 Ms. Robertson said she is meeting with Mr. Strayer next week to work this out.

67 c. A resolution appointing a new member to the Conservation Advisory Council

68 Ms. Robertson said she is not sure if this will be combined with the above resolution or it will be on its
 69 own, that will be figured out at the above meeting as well.

70 d. A Resolution to award a contract for a Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Government Climate
 71 Action Plan RFP for Niskayuna's Climate Smart Grant with NYSDEC

72 Ms. Robertson said she is going to try to get this out in early September but it may need to be October.

73 Ms. Robertson said she has one more thing to add to the resolutions. The annual amount budgeted for
 74 the charging stations at the parks was not enough to cover the bills. Livingston Energy did not explain
 75 that there would be a charge for delivery of the electricity which is four to five times more than the cost
 76 of the electricity. Therefore, the Town is short on funds and needs to do a budget modification.

77 Ms. Greenwood said she can make an adjustment to finish out the rest of this year.

78 Ms. Robertson said she will include the delivery charge when planning for next year's budget.

79

80 **e. Discussions**

81 None

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83 **f. Planning Board (Kevin Walsh) – report attached**

84 Mr. Walsh gave the following updates: The Planning Board recently completed a 2386 Algonquin/2383
 85 Troy Road lot line adjustment that required a ZBA variance and approval. The 1900 Union /1854 Union
 86 lot line adjustment applicant needed to modify the plans or go to ZBA. 2890 River Road was a new
 87 application at the last Planning Board meeting that they have started to review. Troy Road/Brookdale
 88 has an open item of removal of remaining POD and approved for a shed and Aqueduct Road/Rivers
 89 Ledge called for a tentative resolution at the next Planning Board meeting.

90 g. Zoning Board – 1 case for September

91 Ms. Robertson said they are planning on adding 1900 Union Street to the September meeting so there
 92 will be two cases at the meeting.

93

94 h. Grants Update

95 a. NRI grant update

96 Ms. Robertson said she went to the awarding of the Mohawk River Watershed grant for a little while.
 97 Niskayuna was announced to get the \$15,000 (90/10) award which will be \$16,500 to continue the NRI
 98 effort. She thanked Mr. Ramasubramanian for attending the full event and helping so much with the
 99 grant.

100 b. Critical Pedestrians Connections Update (St Josephs & Upper Union) – request for W&S
 101 sign

102 Ms. Robertson said the push button lights are in but people are not necessarily stopping. She is asking
 103 to take the Water and Sewer big sign and put it out there to get peoples attention to stop.

104 c. River Road Park Pavilion / Lions Park deck update

105 Ms. Robertson said Mr. Henry has been working hard on the River Road Park Pavilion and Lions Park
 106 deck update. The River Road pavilion is a grant that the Supervisor got from Phil Steck. The Town is
 107 hoping that it can be done in as little as a month. The Lion's Park deck will take a little longer because
 108 it is a historic building and the volunteers are making sure that everything is being done right. This
 109 should be complete very late this year or spring of next year.

110

111 i. Complete Streets

112 a. Reviewed Rivers Ledge project connections and updates to Bike path

113 Ms. Robertson said a general consensus is that the improvements at Rivers Ledge were well worth it and
114 they were okay with the changes to the bike path viewshed along the Phase 2 buildings.

115 b. May shift demonstration project to a bike rodeo / sharrow event in Spring

116 Ms. Robertson said shifting the bike rodeo to Spring works a little better for the Committee

117 **j. Tree Council**

118 a. Hillside Ave Project – awaiting Highway approval: Still working on this project.

119 b. Master Plan Updates: Still working on updates.

120 **k. Conservation Advisory Council (Dart Strayer)**

121 a. Working on logistics of combining with Climate Smart Task Force – Adding new members

122 Ms. Robertson is meeting with Mr. Strayer next week on this.

123 **l. Climate Smart Communities Task Force**

124 Ms. Robertson is meeting with Mr. Strayer next week on this.

125 **m. Architectural Review Board**

126 a. Provided comments on Rivers Ledge project

127 The ARB worked really hard and provided comments to the Planning Board which they reviewed and
128 everybody basically came to an agreement.129 **n. Comprehensive Plan Committee**

130 a. Release of Survey to Residents: Ms. Robertson will be sending this out.

131 b. Meeting with Complete Streets in September: They will be meeting in September. An exciting
132 change is that they are going to call the transportation chapter “Transportation and Mobility”.133 **o. Building Department / Enforcement**

134 a. Vacant Home Registration update – sending out Notice and Orders

135 Ms. Robertson said that the Town followed all the steps with the vacant homes but it is basically stuck in
136 the courts right now. Ms. Robertson said this doesn’t mean that the Town can’t work on our own
137 vacant home registration outreach. Ms. Robertson said she is working with the Town Attorney to
138 potentially send out Notice in Orders under our Town code for vacant home registration. This will make
139 it uncomfortable for the people with vacant homes, they incur a fee that increases each year the vacant
140 home is on the registry.

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p. Planning Department

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a. CDRPC Training October 20 – Hudson Valley Community College

145 Ms. Robertson said she sent out the information on the CDRPC Training which will be at HVCC on
146 October 20th.

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b. Update to the Town's Official Street Map

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Ms. Robertson said still working on the Town's Official Street Map.

149

c. Consaul Road Sidewalk

150 Ms. Robertson said they are still working on the Consaul Road Sidewalk. Chairman Della Ratta asked
151 about what was needed on Consaul Road. Ms. Robertson said the escrow is old and not going to cover
152 the sidewalk because of the high costs now so the best use would be to get the survey done.

153

d. Winnie Road Easement

154 Ms. Robertson said Mr. Chapman would really like us to reach out to the people on Winnie Road and
155 there is a home on Mohawk that ends on Winnie Road as well to get a pedestrian easement from them to
156 formalize a connection from Winnie Road to Merlin so those people can access the Flower Hill Trail.

157 Ms. Robertson said the Town Board has been setting aside money for Complete Streets Projects.
158 Complete Streets is very thankful. The Plum Street sidewalk was unable to be funded last year. The
159 Town Comptroller picked apart the budget for the money that was put aside along with some ADA
160 funds for the upgraded crossings and the Plum Street sidewalk will be done.

161

162

q. Metroplex (Dr. Horton)

163 Dr. Horton said it was great to have Mr. Gillen come to the meeting and his presentation really showed
164 the big picture of what they have been doing and their partnership with the Town. Dr. Horton said it
165 was amazing to see the amount of economic development and the number of jobs that have been created
166 over time. Dr. Horton said we have to give a hand to the Town Supervisor for her work on this as well.

167 Chairman Della Ratta said that he remembers when Metroplex took the old building that is now
168 Mexican Radio in the heart of downtown and got people involved and used public money and private
169 money and combined the building and really made something of it instead of letting it sit and decay.
170 From there everything just grew. The downtown area grew, the corridors going into Schenectady grew
171 and that in turn helped all the towns around it. Chairman Della Ratta said it was an amazing feat what
172 Metroplex has done in the past 20-25 years.

173

r. Legal (Alaina Finan)

174 Ms. Finan said nothing to mention except the registration of the vacant home update that was already dis-
175 cussed.

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177

s. Historical (Denis Brennan)

178 Mr. Brennan couldn't attend the meeting but emailed Ms. Robertson that he feels like if some of the vacant
179 homes that he visited for the Historic Preservation Committee weren't abandoned for so long they probably
180 wouldn't need to be demolished. Mr. Brennan felt if the homes were caught earlier they could be better pre-
181 served instead of getting ready for demolition.

182 **Adjournment**

183 Hearing no further comments, Chairman Della Ratta made a motion to adjourn the meeting it was
184 seconded by Ms. Puccioni. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 am.