

TUG HILL COMMISSION

MINUTES OF MEETING

Ava, New York – April 22, 2008

Chairman Vigus opened the meeting at 4:11 p.m. Commission members in attendance were Mdms. Cheresnoski and Schuler along with Messrs. Stone and Reader. Staff members included Mr. Bartow, Mrs. Collins, and Circuit Rider Mrs. Ritter (Northern Oneida County Council of Governments) along with guests - Guy Case, supervisor from Boonville; Mark Trnchik, councilman from Annsville; Robin Davis, supervisor from Western; Bob Sauer, chairman – NOCCOG Executive Committee and James Ossont, supervisor from Ava.

In the absence of Mr. Yerdon, Chairman Vigus appointed Mrs. Schuler to serve as acting secretary at today's meeting.

On a motion made by Mr. Reader and seconded by Mrs. Schuler, the agenda was approved as presented.

On a motion made by Mrs. Schuler and seconded by Mr. Stone, the minutes of March 26, 2008 were approved as presented.

Chairman Vigus welcomed members and guests and introductions were made. Chairman Vigus wished everyone a happy "Earth Day" today and hoped everyone was enjoying the beautiful spring weather we are having.

Chairman Vigus noted that there were 625 people in attendance at the Commission's Local Government Conference this year, exceeding last year's attendance. He commended staff and commissioners for all their hard work in making this another successful event. The Local Government Conference survey is almost complete.

A draft summary of the 2008 Local Leaders Survey is included in members' packets for their review. The comments, overall, were very good. Responses were adequately represented throughout the region. Mr. Bartow highlighted some of the responses on the survey results. The survey is called for every five years in the Commission's legislation enacted back in 1998, Article 37 of the Executive Law. The survey was mailed to 383 persons with some knowledge of Tug Hill and programs of the Commission. Mr. Bartow noted that this was the first time in the history of the Commission's survey that "helping to protect the environment" ranked highest (96.3%) of all categories as essential or important followed by helping communities find money for water, sewer, housing and similar infrastructure (94.5%). Program effectiveness rated quite well in overall performance. Mrs. Schuler commented that it was nice to actually get a voice on the phone when you called the Commission versus some agencies who use phone menus. Mr. Stone asked if the same questions were asked on each survey in the past and present. Mr. Bartow commented that they were basically the same so that the Commission would have something to compare past answers to present day ones. Mrs. Schuler commented that clerks really weren't aware of what the Commission actually does. She went on to add that they have some knowledge, but overall, were not in tune with the whole concept of the Commission's work. Although the Commission sends out mailings and informational documents to them, they still seem to be in the dark as to what services the Commission offers. Mrs. Ritter mentioned that she mailed newly-elected officials letters out last week

Attendance

Acting Secretary

Agenda Approved

Minutes Approved

Welcome

**Local Government
Conference**

Local Leaders Survey

to her NOCCOG area.
Chairman Vigus and Mr.

Bartow will work with the Strategic Planning Committee on a “white paper” that presents the survey results for presentation at the May 29th SuperCOG meeting and then it will be forwarded in June to the Governor and our state legislative leaders as well as our Tug Hill delegation. Over the summer and early fall, the Commission will arrange meetings with our local legislators to go over the survey as well as major activities of the Commission.

Sage Nominations

In commissioners’ packets we have placed a 2008 Sage Nomination form. A letter and nomination form was mailed to local leaders, council of government representatives, and circuit riders. The deadline for nominations is June 13. Mrs. Cheresnoski, Mrs. Schuler and Mr. Yerdon with work in conjunction with Mr. Bartow on compiling the nominations and presenting their findings to the Commission board with a recommendation at our June 24th Commission meeting. Voting on the nominations will take place at our Commission meeting in July.

Performance Evaluation

Chairman Vigus met with Mr. Bartow this past month to review his performance evaluation.

Executive Director’s Report

Executive Director’s report followed.

Next Commission Meeting

Mr. Bartow noted that our next Commission meeting will be held on May 27th in Redfield. He asked if members had any ideas for a tour prior to the meeting. Mrs. Schuler suggested a visit to The Braes. Mrs. Cheresnoski and Mr. Reader suggested “Wares of Wood,” a manufacturing wood products plant that makes shelving for stores. They are located in Williamstown. Mr. Reader said that he would contact Mike Engst for this tour and will get back to us with the information. Mr. Reader also suggested that in June when the meeting is held in Parish, he could arrange for a tour of the East Coast Resort, a community mobile home park that rents to folks who come up here for visits, reunions, vacations, etc.

Other Meetings

Mr. Bartow noted that the Projects Committee will meet sometime after April 22nd. The Strategic Planning Committee will meet sometime in May prior to the SuperCOG meeting to approve the Survey White Paper. The SuperCOG meeting is scheduled for May 29th at Katie and Karl’s in Camden. Topics for the meeting will include the Commission’s five year survey, indicators survey, special areas, and low volume roads.

Tug Hill Indicators Study

The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College has proposed a Tug Hill Indicators Survey on behalf of the Commission to be done as a phone survey. The study will include an assessment of resident perceptions on the current conditions of the community in the Tug Hill region. The survey is still under review. The Commission will incur an added cost if done as a phone survey. The Commission is looking at several grants to supplement the cost. Plans are to have the survey done in the fall.

Commission on Local Government Efficiency

The Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness report is due out May 15th. The report was established in April 2007 to examine ways to strengthen and streamline local government, to reduce costs and improve effectiveness and maximize informed participation in local elections and facilitate shared services. New York State Comptroller DiNapoli recommended more accountability. Commissioners will be provided a copy when the report comes out.

Mr. Bartow discussed payments of taxes on state lands with members. He showed a map and table illustrating various town’s total acreage, total state land acreage, town levy, taxes paid by NYS and percent of town levy paid by New York State. He noted that we don’t have the same degree of percentages as compared to the Adirondacks and Catskills. We are not as severely impacted. This data will be presented to the Cooperative Tug Hill

Council of Governments at their annual spring meeting on Thursday. Mr. Bartow

said that the information will also be distributed to the other COGs as well.

The Commission published a “Working Lands” book back in the 90s and the Commission is thinking of revisiting that paper so we can determine what is happening to our lands now and make a comparison.

The Commission on Property Tax Relief will be holding hearings. A report is due out on May 15th. He noted that if we cap on school taxes, then we may have to cut back on expenditures.

Mr. Bartow noted that in members’ packets were copies of memorandum in support of Senator Griffo’s bill S. 7167 to amend the highway law and the vehicle and traffic law, in relation to the maintenance, improvement and repair of particular town roads. The Nature Conservancy; Forever Wild – The Adirondack Council; and the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust were a few in support of this bill. The Commission met with Department of Environmental Conservation on the new language and hopefully this issue will be settled soon.

The Black River Watershed held its first public meetings on May 20 & 21 in Watertown, Lowville, and town of Webb.

Additional funding has been requested for Sandy Creeks EBM. Mr. Bartow attended an EBM council meeting in Albany. They have a \$5m budget for 2008-09. Stakeholders fund most of the projects.

The town of Martinsburg is moving forward on negotiations on Roaring Brook Wind farm. The land is owned by Berry Brothers.

Black River recently put in a Great Bend/Felts Mills Brookfield Power FERC application.

Mr. Bartow is working in conjunction with Michele LeDoux on the American Maple Museum project. Mr. Bartow handed out a financial report on resources for this project noting funding still needed.

Mr. Bartow noted that the Commission’s Local Government Conference was again successful and he thanked commissioners and staff for all their hard work. Survey results for the conference will be finalized soon.

Two community development grants were recently submitted. One for Constableville and the other for Lorraine. Mr. Bartow noted that staff has been doing a number of grants lately.

The financial report followed.

Mr. Bartow reviewed the Commission’s proposed budget with members. He noted that there was a little bit of a rollover this year, otherwise the budget remained basically the same. The Commission received \$75,000 for the Tug Hill aquifer which is reflected in the report under consultants' expenditures. The Division of the Budget sent a memo to all agencies regarding spending reductions and financial management plans for the upcoming fiscal year. The bulletin establishes guidelines for the development of agency spending/reduction for implementing the enacted 2008-09 state budget. Each agency has been requested to submit their plan no later than May 16th. Last month, Governor Paterson proposed \$800m in additional spending reductions necessary to protect the state’s finances

Working Lands Book Revisited

Commission on Property Tax Relief

Memorandum of Support

Black River Watershed

Sandy Creeks EBM

Roaring Brook Wind Farm

FERC Application

Maple Museum

Local Government Conference

Community Development Grants

Financial Report

in an increasingly difficult economic time. He noted that these reductions are not optional, but are

mandatory. Emphasis should involve eliminating non-core functions and non-essential spending with focus on delivering core programs more efficiently. This means a 3.35% general funds reduction for the Commission. Mr. Bartow felt that we may be able to meet this goal on the non-personnel services side but may fall short on the personnel side of our budget. The Finance & Administration Committee will meet on May 13 to review the plan. A copy of the plan is included in members' packets. A short discussion ensued on the reduction policy.

Chairman Vigus called for approval on the budget proposal as submitted.

On a motion made by Mrs. Cheresnoski and seconded by Mr. Stone, members approved the following resolution:

**Resolution
Approving Budget**

RESOLUTION #2008-1:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Tug Hill Commission hereby accept the 2008-09 Commission budget as presented.

**Open Period
for Comments**

Open period for public comments followed.

Mr. Sauer noted that he agreed with the earlier statement made by Mrs. Schuler that clerks are unaware of the Commission's charge. He had heard about a co-generator grant that may be available and thought about how to inform these folks about these things. He suggested that the Commission do a presentation at the Chamber of Commerces in the region to let them know what services are available through the Commission.

Mr. Bartow commented that we have done a few of these in the past, but could do more. Mrs. Schuler thought this was a great idea.

Mrs. Cheresnoski suggested that when we announce the Local Leaders Institute classes that we could also mail to the Chambers and they could spread the word.

Mr. Bartow will send a PowerPoint presentation to Mrs. Schuler that he did several years ago to the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce. Mrs. Schuler commented that the presentation should be given at their level so that focusing on what they want or need in their communities. Mrs. Schuler suggested checking Jack Schultz' website (keynote speaker at this year's local government conference) as he has some great ideas.

Mrs. Ritter noted that she and Mrs. Gibbs attended a three hour session on natural gas mining with Cooperative Extension and the Farm Bureau. She noted that the session was excellent and may be one that the Commission should think about doing as a presentation to towns and villages.

Adjourn

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Reader and seconded by Mrs. Schuler to adjourn the meeting at 6:07 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne C. Schuler
Acting Secretary