

Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission

August 20, 2026

Zoom Video Conferencing

MINUTES

Present: Skip Arthur, Bill Barr, Kevin Freeman, Stephen Shafer, Elizabeth Shafer, Mike Harkavy, Leslie Surprenant, Ken Goldberg, Nicole Roskos

Approval of July 16, 2026 Minutes

Stephen pointed out a misspelling of Greg Chorvas's name. The minutes were then accepted.

CSTF

Lindsey was not present but had supplied an update. The questionnaires connected with the climate-resiliency work had been submitted. The broader survey was being conducted across approximately ten communities. Out of roughly 480 responses received at that point, 144 were from Saugerties. Skip emphasized that Saugerties had generated more responses than any of the other participating communities.

The next stage is the planning-tool meeting. Lindsey had sent out a scheduling poll, but at the time of the CAC meeting she had received few or no responses. Because scheduling a full stakeholder meeting was proving difficult, she was considering conducting multiple one-on-one stakeholder conversations instead.

Skip described the planning-tool update as already underway. Stakeholder meetings were being scheduled to answer remaining questions, and invitations or save-the-date notices for a separate vulnerability workshop were expected to go out by email. That workshop is intended to be an in-person event later in September.

The invitation list was based in part on the municipalities and community stakeholders previously identified through the questionnaire process. Skip said Mary McNamara had been added. He also added Patrick Landewe and Patrick Wadden of Arm-of-the-Sea because Wadden is particularly engaged with environmental issues. Skip suggested that Leslie or other CAC members might also be appropriate participants.

The September vulnerability workshop is intended to bring together people familiar with Saugerties and its environmental conditions so they can help identify where the community may be vulnerable to climate impacts.

The discussion then expanded into ecological vulnerabilities, especially invasive species and tree health. Skip described seeing large, mature oak trees—some perhaps forty or fifty years old—

dying near High Falls Road. He said one tree on a friend's property had died over approximately two years.

Leslie mentioned oak wilt as one possible concern, although she said she was not aware of oak wilt being established specifically in Saugerties. She recommended contacting the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation forester in New Paltz so the trees could potentially be examined.

Skip also reported on work Linda is undertaking under the Climate Smart Task Force. Linda was absent because of family obligations, but she was scheduled to meet with Evelyn Laferriere of the Hudson Valley Regional Council. Their purpose is to begin work on the Greenhouse Gas Inventory for Government Operations, an action that was approved in 2019 and is expiring.

Battery Energy Storage System Report

Skip raised the Village of Saugerties resolution calling for a BESS moratorium. Speaking explicitly as a village resident rather than as chair of the CAC or on behalf of the CAC, Skip said he was upset by the resolution because he believed several statements in it were poorly informed. He said he did not believe village officials had attended the educational presentations on BESS.

One example he criticized was the village's invocation of the Moss Landing battery-fire incident and concerns about evacuation. Skip argued that the conditions at Moss Landing, particularly battery containers being positioned too close together and being located in an enclosed building, represented older practices from which regulators and the industry had already learned. He said current law and safety requirements were specifically changed in response to those lessons.

Skip's central criticism was not that village officials lacked the right to support a moratorium. He said elected officials had every right to take positions. His concern was that they should first be well informed, hear different sides of the issue, and attend presentations designed to explain the technology and the regulatory process.

Bill said the proposed moratorium seemed to contain two different ideas: first, that BESS should be halted until the relevant issues were thoroughly studied; and second, that the permitting process itself should be stopped.

Bill's position was that the first concern was essentially already being addressed because the Planning Board is studying the relevant questions and will not approve the project unless those questions are satisfactorily resolved. From that perspective, he said, the existing review process functions almost like a de facto moratorium.

The second issue, stopping an applicant from going through the permitting process, raised a more serious legal concern for Bill. He said KCE, as an applicant, has a right to apply under the town's zoning framework. If the town refused to allow the application process to proceed, Bill warned that the town could be accused of failing to follow its own Zoning Law and could expose itself to

an Article 78 proceeding. Skip reiterated that the proposal is in fact being studied and cannot proceed without required permits.

Stephen noted that Skip's letter criticizing the Village for calling for a moratorium  been published in Hudson Valley One and encouraged everyone to read it. He described it as a strong and fair letter. Skip said he had deliberately tried not to be insulting because officials are entitled to their views, but he again stressed that they should be adequately informed.

Stephen then reported that a third company was seeking permission to build a BESS facility in the Town of Ulster. He identified the company as Mission and said the proposed development was called the Slide Energy Project. According to Stephen, the project would be located literally across the street from the Alcazar site. Stephen said Mission had submitted an approximately 800-page application to the Town of Ulster. The Ulster Town Council was expected to discuss whether the town would act as lead agency.

Stephen's concern was somewhat paradoxical: he acknowledged the need for battery storage but said concentrating several BESS projects in the Town of Ulster could produce intense local opposition. He predicted that another proposal would likely increase animosity toward BESS development in that area.

Town Liaison

Bill discussed the broader problem of misinformation during Town Board public-comment periods. As a relatively new Town Board member, Bill said he was still adjusting to being on the government side of public meetings. He recalled his own experience as a citizen using privilege of the floor to ask the Town Board to take action. He said it had always frustrated him when members of the public spoke and received no response. For that reason, Bill said he understood some of the frustration expressed by people currently criticizing BESS projects.

However, Bill drew a distinction between legitimate disagreement and the spreading of demonstrably false information. He said he did not want Town Board meetings to become a venue where misinformation was repeatedly promulgated without correction. He was considering speaking up when a public commenter made a clearly incorrect factual claim.

As an example, he cited a statement at an earlier meeting that BESS installations were "catching fire right and left." Bill said that was simply factually false. Skip cited a figure of approximately 0.06 percent in response. (Correction .0%) Stephen suggested Bill could frame such interventions as a "point of fact."

Mike recommended that the Town Board establish a practice in which members do not engage in argumentative back-and-forth with public speakers but do correct misinformation when necessary. Mike emphasized the distinction between supplying accurate information and debating the speaker. Bill agreed with that approach.

Bill learned that there was no absolute prohibition preventing a Town Board member from making that kind of factual clarification, although the normal structure of privilege of the floor does not involve extended dialogue.

Bill then reported that a meeting on the Drinking Water Source Protection Plan was scheduled for August 25. He said the Village of Saugerties would be involved.

Skip said he considered village participation important and had been disappointed that the village had not been more formally involved in the climate-resiliency and vulnerability work.

Bill brought up a conversation he had had with Tom Konrad from Marbletown. He said their conversation concerned plug-in solar. Tom had sent him Marbletown's resolution and a draft local law.

They discussed proposed state legislation referred to as the Solar Up Now New York (SUNNY) Act. According to the meeting discussion, the legislation had passed both the New York State Assembly and Senate but had not yet been signed by Governor Kathy Hochul. Bill said the governor had until December to act and that, if signed, the law would take effect approximately ninety days later.

Bill reported that Marbletown had already moved proactively and passed a resolution supporting the legislation and drafted a local law. The municipality also instructed its clerk to send copies to state representatives. Tom's environmental commission in Marbletown was directly involved in the work.

A key feature discussed was that qualifying plug-in solar systems would not require the normal permitting process. Skip explained that plug-in solar and virtual power plants were two separate ideas that had been discussed together at an earlier Environmental Management Council presentation by Tom Konrad.

Skip had previously forwarded Konrad's information to Fred.

On plug-in solar, Skip described systems of up to roughly 1,200 watts. He said these are sometimes called "balcony solar" systems in Europe because apartment residents can place solar panels on balconies. In other situations, the equipment might sit in a side yard.

The important regulatory distinction discussed at the meeting was that, if installation does not involve construction—such as adding outlets or drilling through walls—the system could simply plug into an existing electrical connection without requiring a permit.

Skip said the electricity generated would be used by the home first, thereby reducing the amount of electricity purchased from Central Hudson.

Bill said Tom had suggested that Saugerties could join in a letter of support for the state legislation, potentially as a signatory with other municipal conservation bodies. Skip thought Saugerties should seriously consider supporting the proposal because the local implementation

appeared relatively simple. Bill suggested it might make sense to prepare for local action but perhaps wait until Governor Hochul actually signed the state legislation.

Skip brought up virtual power plants as a separate issue from plug-in solar. He described a virtual power plant as a digital aggregation of many smaller distributed energy resources, potentially including household batteries and other small sources of electricity. By coordinating those resources, the system can function more like a larger power source within the electric grid.

Skip said this could potentially reduce electricity costs by making greater use of locally available or distributed energy rather than relying exclusively on other grid resources.

He said under the current regulatory structure proposal only utilities such as Central Hudson could participate leaving ESCOs and CCA at a disadvantage.

Tom Konrad was going to advocate before the Public Service Commission for changes that would allow ESCOs and CCA to also participate-and wanted municipalities to become actively involved in supporting his efforts. Skip suggested that having Saugerties and other towns formally sign on would strengthen Konrad's position before the PSC.

Skip clarified that plug-in solar concerns relatively simple local rules governing small solar systems, while virtual power plants involve a broader regulatory and grid-management question requiring Public Service Commission involvement.

Skip noted that he had previously sent Fred information on both ideas and had circulated Tom Konrad's PowerPoint presentation. He said the material could be circulated again because Konrad's presentation would clearly explain the concepts.

Bill concluded that he would tell the Town Board that the CAC supported the two initiatives.

Environmental Management Council (EMC) Report

The group then discussed an upcoming Environmental Management Council presentation in which Carole was expected to give a very short report on Saugerties CAC accomplishments. Carole asked members for recommendations about what should be highlighted.

One of the clearest suggestions was the Community Climate Action Plan as a major accomplishment. Skip felt Mary particularly should be credited for this work, saying she had worked diligently on the Community Climate Action Plan for roughly two years and deserved recognition.

Carole asked whether there was a PowerPoint presentation associated with the plan. Leslie said she did not think a full presentation was expected. Based on her experience with previous EMC events, she remembered each CAC being represented by approximately one slide.

This led to a detailed clarification of the two related climate projects currently underway.

Skip explained that the resiliency tool and vulnerability assessment are distinct but sequential.

Saugerties had completed earlier resiliency work around 2019. The current project is updating that resiliency tool. Skip described the tool as a way of examining how Saugerties could become more resilient to climate-related disasters and disruptions. Updating the resiliency tool is a recognized action within the New York Climate Smart Communities program.

The vulnerability assessment is more intensive. It is intended to identify specific places, systems, populations, or resources within Saugerties that may be vulnerable and then consider how those vulnerabilities could be mitigated.

Skip emphasized that this would have been difficult for the CAC or town to undertake alone. Cornell Cooperative Extension obtained funding and is providing expertise and staff assistance. Once the work is completed, the Hudson Valley Regional Council can help ~~convert~~ the completed projects to be documented Climate Smart Communities actions so Saugerties receives formal credit.

Skip said that this collaboration itself should be highlighted by Carole because other CACs may hesitate to undertake complex resiliency and vulnerability projects. Saugerties can show how collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension and regional agencies makes the work manageable.

The group appeared to agree that the pollinator meadow would be an easy and visually strong accomplishment to show in the EMC presentation. Mike said a slide featuring the pollinator garden would take only about ten seconds of Carole's three-minute presentation.

Leslie remembered the EMC format as one title slide or image for each municipal CAC rather than a full traditional PowerPoint.

Skip concluded that Carole needed to clarify exactly what kind of visual or supporting material the EMC expected, but the group had supplied enough substantive material for her to choose from. The Community Climate Action Plan, current climate-resiliency and vulnerability work, and pollinator meadow emerged as the strongest candidates.

Tree Ordinance

Skip said the proposed ordinance had gone to Leeanne, who forwarded it to the Building Department and to consultants for review. He specifically referred to Adriana and to comments that had been circulated to the CAC. Skip characterized the feedback as generally positive toward the concept of tree protection but said reviewers had identified significant implementation questions.

One concern was coordination with existing local law. The Building Department appeared to believe that provisions in the proposed tree ordinance overlapped with or related to existing Planning Board requirements, zoning provisions, and other ordinances.

Skip's interpretation was that those provisions would need to be harmonized so the tree ordinance did not conflict with existing code.

Another issue involved the potential cost of using an arborist. Skip questioned whether the ordinance required an arborist to be a permanent town employee.

Nicole said there was some confusion about who had authored the written comments. She initially thought Sean had written the document because Sean's name appeared on it. She later heard that the substantive comments were Adriana's.

Skip thought there may have been two separate pieces of feedback: one document from Sean Weaver and another marked-up version of the proposed law from Adriana.

Nicole said Carole believed the comments had been Adriana's words even though Sean had signed the document. The group was therefore uncertain whether the feedback represented Sean, Adriana, or both.

Nicole's concern that existing tree protections are inadequate and then raised a more fundamental objection to the suggestion that existing zoning law already contains sufficient tree protections.

She said LeeAnne's comments appeared to suggest that Saugerties already had protections for trees. Nicole attempted to locate the relevant provisions but could not find anything equivalent to the ordinance the CAC had proposed.

She pointed to a recent clear-cutting incident. According to Nicole, approximately three acres had been cleared before the project had even advanced through the zoning or Building Department process. For Nicole, that action demonstrated that there was no meaningful existing law preventing large-scale removal of trees before development review.

Leslie suggested asking LeeAnne to identify the precise existing provisions she believed already provided protection.

Nicole said Adriana or another reviewer had supplied chapter references, but the relevant portions of the code were extensive and difficult to navigate. She compared searching through them to looking for a needle in a haystack. Nicole characterized existing protections as vague, encouraging preservation of large trees rather than actually requiring the kind of tree-retention system the CAC had proposed.

According to Nicole, LeeAnne invoked the history of the proposed sound ordinance, which had consumed years of effort and generated significant public opposition before ultimately being abandoned. Nicole interpreted LeeAnne's comments as suggesting that the same thing could happen with the tree ordinance.

Stephen returned to the concern about Winston Farm and other large development projects. He suggested that controlling tree removal associated with major development had been one of the

main reasons the CAC pursued the ordinance. Nicole agreed and said LeeAnne's response did not appear to engage seriously with that concern.

Leslie and Nicole also challenged the suggestion that the town would face major costs because it would need an arborist on staff. Leslie said that was not what the ordinance envisioned. Instead, the town could use a contract arborist, paying that person only when professional tree review was required. More importantly, Leslie said the ordinance was designed so the relevant fees would cover the arborist's costs.

Despite Nicole's concerns about LeeAnne's response, she saw the comments associated with Sean Weaver and Adriana as much more manageable and described those concerns as largely technical.

Skip said that if the primary problems were technical, Nicole should ask the reviewers directly how the ordinance could be modified to eliminate those conflicts. Nicole also noted that Sean, as head of buildings, had not rejected the idea. She regarded his willingness to work with the proposal as significant.

The emerging approach was therefore to meet with Sean Weaver and Adriana, present the feedback already received, and ask how the ordinance could be modified to resolve technical conflicts.

Skip discussed two separate challenges facing the ordinance. The first is technical: ensuring the proposed law works with existing zoning, planning, building, and administrative requirements. The second is political and public-relations related: building enough public support to carry the ordinance through the public-hearing process and ultimately persuading the Town Board to adopt it. He suggested tackling those in sequence. First, eliminate technical objections so the ordinance is legally and administratively workable and meet tree retention goals. Once that is done, focus on organizing public support.

Announcements

Skip announced that the next Repair Café would take place on October 3.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and the meeting concluded at 6pm.

Prepared by: Kevin Freeman, Secretary