

Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission

April 16, 2026

Zoom Video Conferencing

MINUTES

Present: Skip Arthur, Carole Furman, Stephen Shafer, Ken Goldberg, Mary O'Donnell, Elizabeth Shafer, Mike Harkavy, Leslie Surprenant, Bill Barr, Nicole Roskos, Kathleen Gray, Dick Martinez, and unidentified Zoom attendee 'dia mansbach

Approval of March 19, 2026 Minutes

Mary asked that the unidentified Zoom participants be reflected in the minutes. The motion passed.

CSTF

Mary raised concern about whether the numbers in the CCAP document had been double-checked. Carole said she had reviewed the numbers and had been trying to email corrections. Mary confirmed she had not received the revisions. Carole said she would resend the changes. Skip proposed waiting until the next meeting to ratify the final version.

Skip explained that a new local government climate action partnership was being formed under the UC Department of the Environment and that the county was circulating a survey to CACs, Climate Smart Communities committees and task forces to elicit ideas and participation. Skip pointed out that Saugerties still lacks a Climate Smart Task Force coordinator and that person ideally would be the one to be involved as lead in the county partnership. He suggested again the town should consider finding someone within the Town government-to fill the coordinator position from outside the CAC, possibly tied to the town's grants or special programs work. When she served in that role Mary had effectively treated the role as a serious part-time job. Mary clarified that the survey did not ask for a coordinator but rather someone who could attend a countywide gathering. Skip suggested Mary because of her experience, and Mary responded she would consider attending the meeting but would not commit to the coordinator position. Carole suggested Andy Bicking might be able to clarify what participation in the partnership would involve.

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) Conversation

Skip emphasized that the CAC had been asked by the Town Board to assess battery energy storage systems in general, not to insert itself directly into the legal and procedural mechanics of the SEQRA process for the specific Key Capture Energy proposal. He said the CAC should initially focus on the generic attributes of BESS: safety, environmental implications, grid support, renewable energy integration, and possibly noise. Linda said the identity and track record of Key Capture Energy itself might still matter, since in her preliminary research the

company looked more credible than some others in the industry. Skip accepted that the company could be mentioned as an example of operator history but stated that the CAC should not become involved in assessing the procedural mechanics of the SEQRA process itself, but that did not preclude relevant input during public comment periods.

Stephen described how he and others had been looking at generic BESS issues, especially fire safety, potential noise issues and the broader environmental benefits of energy storage. He felt that the CAC would likely have a role later in the SEQRA process, especially when it came time to prepare or respond to scoping materials. Mary noted that Stephen's language seemed to assume that a positive declaration was likely, whereas in reality the planning board had not yet reached that stage. Carole explained that the proposal was still very early in the Environmental Assessment Form stage. She said the applicant had submitted an EAF, consultants were reviewing it, and there would likely be a back-and-forth process for at least two more months before the Planning Board would even decide whether to issue a declaration. If there were a positive declaration, that would trigger a draft environmental impact statement and public hearing. Carole said that there would be many opportunities for public involvement, and that the process was still in an early, fluid stage.

Mike asked if the town had asked the CAC for its input on BESS in general. Skip felt the CAC should ideally produce a unified statement rather than sending only a fire safety or other issue memo in isolation to the Town Board. He wanted a fuller document that pulled together safety, environmental benefits, grid support, and related points so the CAC's overall view would feel coherent but was open to other options as more specific situations presented themselves. Mary asked whether, since the Planning Board was actively gathering information and since the CAC is one of the bodies that interacts with the Planning and Zoning Boards, it might be useful to share Stephen's work with the Planning Board now. Carole said that it would be appropriate if Stephen felt the materials were ready, though she also noted it might be smarter to ask the Planning Board what kind of submission would actually be helpful and when. Stephen said the fire safety document and the environmental benefits document were both close to ready, pending one more round of group review, but that the noise issue was more location-specific and less generic than the other two. Bill said he had asked Town Board members whether they wanted a report from the CAC, and they had said yes, but mostly because they wanted to be well informed on CAC's research.

EMC

Carole said there would be an EMC roundtable in August, the kind of event held annually except for the prior year, when Ulster County hosted the statewide Conservation Advisory Council Association. Rather than having every municipality deliver a short generic report, this year's organizers wanted each group to focus on something specific it was proud of or actively dealing with. Carole said the CAC would need to decide what theme to highlight, and suggested that

BESS, solar, or BESS fire safety protocols would all make sense. Leslie and Mike both spoke positively about the roundtable as a useful event.

Tree Ordinance

Nicole introduced the current draft and said she had incorporated some earlier comments, including help from Leslie. Mary noted that the ordinance, as drafted, needs to include language in the Process and Procedures section that states what is not required for homeowners regarding an application or a permit. The proposal stated that no application, permit, or fee would be required for removing trees under 18 inches in diameter at DBH, except for heritage or specimen trees. Additionally clear-cutting in a forested area of a quarter acre or less would not require a permit, again except for heritage or specimen trees. The goal was for residents to glance at the ordinance and understand it didn't apply to small yard trees.

Linda said that a quarter acre was too small and likely to alienate residents. She thought Poughkeepsie's plan, which uses five acres as the definition of forested land for this kind of purpose, was more realistic. Mary replied that the committee's actual concern was larger forested areas, not ordinary residential lots, and that the conversation kept blurring those categories. Leslie added that the Tree Committee had already gone back and forth on these definitions for years. At one point, she said, the acreage threshold had been higher, but pressure from tree-protection voices pushed things in a stricter direction. Carole pointed out the land across from Grant D. Morse where Mullen had gone in and clear-cut along the brook, roughly three acres, without any permit or meaningful oversight. She said that act had helped drive the sense that Saugerties needed an ordinance in the first place. Nicole stated that if developers can keep clear-cutting forested parcels before formal development review, the town will steadily lose the tree cover that makes Saugerties and the Hudson Valley what they are. She cited not only the Grant D. Morse example but also another clear-cut area on Pine Lane and said responsible development should at minimum preserve some trees rather than turning every site into an empty pad for houses. Mary added that the Planning Board only sees projects after trees may already be removed. The ordinance matters because it would stop people from stripping land first and only then entering the development process.

Elizabeth said she appreciated that the ordinance still seemed to allow removal of obviously dangerous or dying trees without much burden, but worried that because it would regulate private property rather than public trees, it might face major resistance. Mary clarified that unlike the village ordinance, which applies only to public trees, this proposal would apply to private landowners, which is exactly why it would be controversial. Leslie looked for support in the town's Open Space Plan and existing zoning language, hoping the ordinance could be tied to older adopted principles about forested land. Kathleen brought in a potentially useful DEC technical assistance opportunity for conserving forests through municipal land-use planning. Kathleen described it as free technical assistance that could generate reports, maps, and

conservation recommendations. Nicole said the application looked like it would still require a large unpaid volunteer time commitment, which she could not realistically take on. Carole and Leslie largely agreed that the workload sounded substantial even if the assistance itself was free. Mary suggested that it may be similar to past work with Cornell Extension and wondered whether the local burden might be more limited than Nicole feared. The matter was not resolved, but people agreed it was worth another look.

Mary proposed treating homeowners' property and forested areas differently. For ordinary individual homeowners, the ordinance could plainly say that trees 18 inches in diameter or less were exempt from an application and permit. For forested areas and clear-cutting, the town could impose a different threshold and different rules. Nicole agreed this would require a substantial edit, but not a conceptual overhaul. Skip thought the distinction was a major improvement because it would reassure homeowners while still targeting developers and larger-scale clearing. Mike supported whatever approach made the ordinance more likely to pass, saying the CAC needed a sense of what the Town Board would accept. Linda suggested sending the draft to Leanne Thornton and Bill Barr immediately in roughly its present state and get ~~political~~ feedback first. Skip disagreed, saying the homeowner/forested-land distinction was too important not to incorporate before seeking that feedback. In the end, the consensus was that Leslie would work with Nicole to revise the ordinance along those lines, especially by making permit exemptions for homeowners' property much clearer and by distinguishing those cases from forested-area rules. Then Bill Barr and Leanne Thornton would review it informally.

Town Liaison

Bill said there was no news yet on Winston Farm while the developers were still expected to come back with a final EIS, and announced that the town had concluded labor negotiations with the Communications Workers of America, the union representing town employees, resulting in a new contract with cost-of-living increases and some revisions to leave accrual. He also raised two cemetery issues. One involved Finger Ground Cemetery near Saugerties, where an outside preservation group and the Historical Society were concerned about historic graves, including Revolutionary War burials, and wanted the town to assume responsibility. The second involved Mount View Cemetery in the village, which Bill said was effectively out of money and might also become a town responsibility. Linda then offered practical information: she said historic patriot burial markers could potentially be obtained through the Pomeroy Foundation, via the Sons of the American Revolution, if proof of burial and service could be assembled. Bill said he would welcome that information, and Linda agreed to send it to everyone. Bill also mentioned a "Celebrate Libraries" event at the library and a history lecture by Gus Pedersen, plus the timing of final property assessments and the upcoming grievance day.

Additional Announcements

Leslie promoted Earth Day Week Saugerties and mentioned events including one with Judith Enck and Beyond Plastics at the Orpheum. Bill mentioned another batteries-related program

involving Melissa Everett at the Orpheum. Skip reminded the group that the CAC was a named sponsor of Earth Week and said ~~he and~~ Mary had prepared handouts, one on what residents can do about environmental and climate issues and another listing CAC accomplishments over the past several years. Skip said he would table during one of the Earth Week events and bring CAC materials with him while Leslie said she could provide relief at the table because the shift was long.

Adjournment

The motion carried at 7 p.m.

Prepared by: Kevin Freeman, Secretary