

Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission

July 16, 2026

Zoom Video Conferencing

MINUTES

Present: Skip Arthur, Bill Barr, Carole Furman, Kevin Freeman, Kathleen Gray, Stephen Shafer, Elizabeth Shafer, Mike Harkavy, Leslie Surprenant, Ken Goldberg, Mary O'Donnell, Lindsey Strehlau-Howay of Cornell Cooperative Extension

Approval of June 18, 2026 Minutes

Stephen identified one spelling correction: the surname Voorhees should contain two consecutive letters "o." No other substantive revisions were proposed. The committee approved the prior minutes by voice vote with the spelling correction.

CSTF

Skip reported that the committee's recent Community Climate Action Plan submission had been sent to the Town. Bill had not received any formal reaction. Skip emphasized that Mary and other committee members had devoted substantial time to the submission and asked that Town officials review it and provide feedback.

Discussion of Resilience/Vulnerability Questionnaire & Survey

Skip then introduced Lindsey Strehlau-Howay of the Cornell Cooperative Extension. Lindsey had provided a municipal questionnaire, a community survey, and supporting outreach materials. Skip explained that the municipal questionnaire contains five sections. Town personnel would complete most of the municipal information (the first 4 sections), while the CAC would help identify knowledgeable community stakeholders for a later workshop and would lead or support broad distribution of the public survey.

Skip reviewed the draft public introduction to be sent with the distribution of the survey. The proposed language stated that Saugerties has experienced extreme-weather incidents worsened by climate change, including flooding and other hazards, and that the Town, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the CAC Climate Task Force were seeking public input. The survey asks residents to evaluate hazards such as increased flooding, sea-level rise, extreme heat, and drought and to provide comments about local conditions and infrastructure. The survey results will inform the Town's vulnerability assessment and later planning for climate adaptation.

Kathleen asked how this work relates to the Ulster County Hazard Mitigation Plan, which already identifies risks for the Town and Village and involved municipal stakeholders such as police and emergency personnel. Lindsey distinguished the two processes. She characterized the

hazard mitigation plan as a more top-down process, often led by a contracted planning firm and municipal or emergency-service stakeholders, while the Resiliency Tool and Vulnerability Assessment were intended to be more bottom-up and to incorporate direct public input about local priorities and lived experience.

Lindsey said the long-term objective is for the hazard mitigation plan, vulnerability assessment, and adaptation plan to inform one another and reduce duplicative work. She described timing problems in Columbia County, where an adaptation plan and hazard mitigation update proceeded on separate schedules and could not be fully synchronized. Skip added that CCE's efforts with Saugerties will update the Town's 2019 resiliency work and will satisfy Climate Smart Communities actions, including a vulnerability assessment.

Lindsey recommended outreach through community groups that could both display a QR-code flyer and email their own networks. The Saugerties Library was identified as particularly useful. Ken confirmed that the Library Director might be able to approve distribution without waiting for the next Library Board meeting. Additional suggested channels included the Town Hall, post office, local cafes, Stewart's locations, the Farmers Market, Smith Hardware, Connie's Bake Shop, the Orpheum Theatre, Kiwanis, local-farms, community and conservation groups, and the network of residents concerned about Winston Farm.

Lindsey asked for a municipal contact who could help her schedule the two-hour planning-tool meeting. Bill identified himself as the appropriate liaison. He said the questionnaire had already been sent to selected Town personnel. Lindsey recommended representation from the Building or Code Enforcement Department, Police Department, Highway Department, fire services if possible, and the water system. Bill agreed that representation from the water department was essential because of recent water-quality issues and because the Village supplies water to important portions of the Town.

The group distinguished the municipal planning-tool meeting from the later vulnerability workshop. The planning-tool session will focus primarily on Town plans, reports, existing capabilities, and gaps. The broader workshop will include community stakeholders and can include Village representatives even though current grant funding is formally supporting a Town project. Skip asked members to send him names of knowledgeable residents for the workshop. Mary McNamara and Patrick Landewe were identified as possible participants based on prior shore, water, environmental, or emergency-related work.

It was emphasized that climate hazards do not follow municipal boundaries. Mary recalled that the 2019 resilience work had been a joint Town–Village effort and suggested that Village participation is essential because the municipalities share or depend on connected water, police, waterways, infrastructure, and emergency systems. She specifically suggested Greg Chorvas who oversees buildings, grounds, and recreation, because evacuation and extreme-weather planning could involve Town facilities.

Mike added that the Village may be the most vulnerable and densely populated portion of the community because it lies along the Hudson River and Esopus Creek and includes wastewater infrastructure. He recommended involving the mayor and the person responsible for the Village water system.

Battery Energy Storage System Report

The committee reviewed its battery energy storage system, or BESS, work. Bill reported that the CAC's BESS report had been well received by Town Board members and was available through the BESS website and on Facebook.

There was conversation about the previous evening's Town Board question-and-answer session with representatives of KCE/Key Capture Energy. The group generally considered the presentation highly professional and technically strong. They said the representatives answered questions directly.

Elizabeth said the discussion addressed noise and decibel levels more extensively than previous meetings and covered concerns about possible acidic or hazardous fumes. She noted that the presenters explained that perceived sound can include subjective factors in addition to measured decibel levels.

Skip said the meeting demonstrated the value of extended, rational public dialogue. He noted that KCE representatives had offered to meet again and that Paul Williamson had reached out to an opposition group to offer a separate conversation. Skip also reported that the environmental review is more detailed than he had initially understood. The Planning Board is reviewing the Environmental Assessment Form, and specialized BESS-safety and geotechnical consultants are expected to supplement the Town's regular consultants.

Carole clarified that the formal public hearing would occur before the Planning Board, not the Town Board, and that the hearing period could be extended if public participation required additional time.

Carole reported that the Town was arranging a site visit to an operating BESS facility in western New York on July 28 for approximately ten to fourteen participants. The facility was described as approximately twenty megawatts and in operation since about 2023. The trip would allow officials and board members to observe charging and discharge operations and to experience the facility during a higher-output period, including the actual sound environment. Because many Planning Board members could not attend on the proposed weekday and the drive would be approximately four-and-one-half to five hours each way, Bill said Stephanie was considering a weekend date. Mike supported a suggestion that the Town or facility operator create an authorized video of the visit so the information could be shared with residents who could not travel.

Drinking Water Source Protection Plan and Local Water Systems

As Town liaison, Bill answered a prior question from Mike Mary about whether the Drinking Water Source Protection Plan initiative applies to private wells. Bill said it does not; the program addresses public water supplies, which he described as systems delivering water through pipelines to five or more residences. The initiative therefore covers the Village reservoir system and public water districts but not individual household wells.

The ensuing discussion clarified that not all Town residents receive water from a single source. Members identified Glasco and Kings Highway as Town water districts supplied through the Village reservoir system. The conversation reinforced the need to include knowledgeable Village and Town water personnel in the resilience process because water governance and supply cross jurisdictional lines.

Environmental Management Council (EMC) Report

Carole summarized a presentation by Tom Konard concerning plug-in solar systems and virtual power plants. The plug-in solar concept would require a relatively simple municipal law. Based on the presentation materials, qualifying systems could be up to approximately 1,200 watts, consist of one to three panels, connect to an existing standard electrical outlet without new hardwiring, and offset household grid consumption in real time. The panels could be mounted on a roof, balcony, or ground structure without building penetration and are already common in Europe, where the approach is often called “balcony solar”. The presentation suggested a typical payback period of approximately three years.

The virtual power plant, or VPP, discussion concerned digital coordination of distributed resources such as household batteries, electric vehicles, and solar generation. Carole and Skip described a model in which many small resources could be aggregated to reduce peak demand, support the grid, lower costs, and potentially compensate participants.

Skip reported that Tom Konrad was encouraging municipalities to participate in a Public Service Commission proceeding. As described in the meeting, the current framework would allow utilities to operate virtual power plants, while Konrad was advocating that energy service companies and community choice aggregation programs also be allowed to participate. The original participation deadline had reportedly been extended from June 30 to October. Skip said he had sent the information to the Town Supervisor, who appeared interested in joining the proceeding. Members viewed this as potentially important to restoring the economic viability of community choice aggregation, which had been undermined by unfavorable rates.

Carole agreed to circulate Tom Konrad’s slide presentation to the committee. The CAC did not adopt a formal recommendation on a local plug-in solar law or on the Public Service Commission proceeding during this meeting.

Tree Ordinance Review

Skip reported that he had spoken with Nicole about the tree ordinance and received a copy. He had forwarded it to Leeanne for an overview and an assessment of what revisions might be needed for the ordinance to be acceptable to the Town Board.

Announcements

Leslie announced that she would participate the following day in a panel for young people entering environmental careers. The event would bring together professionals at different career stages, including retirees, to discuss the future of environmental work and emerging challenges. It would also include résumé assistance. The event was to be held at the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development and hosted by CRISP, the Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership. Leslie said the organizers specifically valued her long-term perspective as a retired invasive-species program leader.

Mary reported unusually heavy Eurasian watermilfoil growth in the Esopus Creek above the dam, appearing much earlier in the summer than expected after prolonged heat. She asked about the status of the former Town–Village cooperation arrangement to harvest the milfoil.

Bill recalled that the harvester had originally been acquired through a partnership involving the Town, the Village, and Mullen, after which the Village operated the equipment in cooperation with the Town. Mary said her most recent understanding was that the Village ultimately purchased the harvester. Bill agreed to ask the Village about the current operating arrangement and report what he learned.

Leslie said that three or four weeks earlier the shoreline, wetland, and beach area appeared relatively clear, but she had not observed conditions after the most recent extreme heat. She cautioned that mechanical harvesting is not a long-term eradication method for milfoil. The plant is brittle, and fragments can establish new growth. Harvesting can remove the upper portion of the plant and create boat lanes or temporary recreational access, but it does not reliably eliminate the root system. She contrasted this with water chestnut, for which removal can be more effective if completed before seed production.

Kathleen Gray formally announced that she would retire from the Town effective July 31. Sasha Sittner, formerly of the Clerk’s Office, will assume a part-time role focused on administering and closing the remaining open grants.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and the meeting concluded by consensus at 7:15 p.m.

Prepared by: Kevin Freeman, Secretary