

Conservation Advisory Council Town of Hillsdale, NY

David Lewis, Chair
Amy Davidsen
Mary King
Gretchen Stevens
(open position)

MINUTES CAC MEETING, 15 JANUARY 2026

The meeting was convened at 7:08pm at the Hillsdale Town Hall. David, Amy, and Gretchen were present. Mary was absent. Jamie Carano Nordenstrom (Town Council liaison) was also present.

Approval of Minutes

The December minutes had been approved via email.

Old Business

Roe Jan Water Quality Sampling

Kaare Christian confirmed that the Roe Jan Watershed Communities have received the check from the Town of Hillsdale for the analysis of 2025 water samples from Collins Street and the Roe Jan Park.

CAC Open Position

We have received no applications for the CAC position. David will send a note to Mary's acquaintance who had expressed interest, to see if he'd like to attend the February CAC meeting.

Culverts

Gretchen had sent the CAC a summary of her conversation with Tracy Brown (Trout Unlimited) about potential grant sources for culvert replacement. (Those notes are attached to these minutes.) Tracy will examine the southern Mitchell Street culvert in January, and we will then have a further conversation about which grant programs might be most appropriate.

Comprehensive Plan

The town has not yet received official notification, but learned from a press release that Hillsdale has been awarded the NYSDOS Climate Smart grant for revising the Comprehensive Plan. The Town Board will need to execute the contract with NYSDOS before the town does any work that is to be reimbursed by the grant. In the meantime, the Town Board can appoint a Comprehensive Plan Committee whose initial task is to prepare the RFP for consultants. Also in this period, the CAC can think about our preferences for the format and content of the Plan, and elements to be included in an RFP for consultants. Jamie says there are many RFP templates available online that would give us a headstart, and we can also use the preliminary RFP that she drafted for soliciting estimates for the first grant application in 2024. She said that the town might use the town engineer, CPL, to help with drafting the RFP.

We discussed the idea of having subcommittees of the Comprehensive Plan Committee to focus on particular aspects of the Plan, such as business, infrastructure, housing, agriculture, and natural resources. Jamie recommends that the consultant be required to optimize the eventual Comprehensive Plan for AI searches. These will be decisions for the Comprehensive Plan Committee, but the CAC can make recommendations whether or not we are represented on that committee.

Jamie suggested that, after the Comprehensive Plan revision is complete, it might be appropriate for the Town Board to establish a Comprehensive Plan Board—a standing board that would continually identify and propose updates to the Plan.

Farm Inventory

To add to our current list of commercial farms in Hillsdale, we will check the list of tax exemptions attached to every town budget. Jamie will send us the most recent budget with that attachment. David will consult the registrations listed with the Farm Service Administration.

CAC Reappointment

All existing CAC members were reappointed for another two-year term.

New Business

Tree Planting for Earth Day

Jamie reported that, to help celebrate Earth Day on 18 April, the Columbia County Climate Smart Committee is promoting a tree planting program for municipalities, with trees supplied by the Soil and Water Conservation District. The CSC is hoping each municipality will order trees and plant them on public lands and (with permission) on private properties. The CAC should think about possible sites for planting trees.

Garbage Receptacle Law

Jamie and Amy have noticed many residences—particularly those used by short-term renters—where garbage cans are left out by the side of the road where they are frequently overturned and the contents scattered by bear and other wildlife. Scattered trash is not only unsightly but can be dangerous to wildlife and humans. Jamie would like to propose that the town adopt a Garbage Receptacle Law requiring that garbage cans be kept indoors except on the day of pick-up.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01pm.

Action Items

David:

- Invite the prospective CAC applicant to the February meeting.
- Check the FSA registrations for farms to add to the inventory.
- (carried over) Sign Mary up on the CAC calendar

Mary:

- Draft article on rat poisoning for the town newsletter.
- (carried over) Draft a letter opposing the use of herbicides along roadways, to be sent by the Town Council to our state representatives.
- (carried over) Submit regular reports to the Town Board about EMC activities.

Amy:

- Add to the farm inventory list
- (carried over) With Gretchen, look for sources of funding for culvert replacement and start to gather information needed for 2026 applications

Gretchen:

- Speak with Tracy Brown about her January field visit and the implications for potential funding for culvert replacement
- (carried over) Prepare next draft of the Open Space Plan
- (carried over) Draft a road salt article for the town newsletter
- (carried over) With Amy, look for sources of funding for culvert replacement and start to gather information needed for 2026 applications. Confer with Richard Briggs about which culverts to prioritize

All:

- Scan Comprehensive Plans from other towns and consider the kinds of format and content that we'd like to have in Hillsdale's revised Plan.
- Consider the kinds of elements that should be included in an RFP for Comprehensive Plan consultants.
- Add to the list of active farms.
- Think about possible sites for planting trees for Earth Day.
- (carried over) Look for suitable parcels for a future Community Forest

GS notes from 19 December 2025 phone conversation with Tracy Brown

1. Whereas the past WQIP grant program for culvert replacement mainly favored replacement of culverts that acted as barriers to aquatic organisms, now the program will also consider culverts that are undersized (but are not aquatic barriers), although they still receive fewer points in the application evaluation process. This means that the Mitchell St culvert could now qualify for a WQIP grant.
2. If a culvert or bridge replacement requires a span of 20 ft or more, the county takes over the work even if it's on a town road. So I assume that the grant application would then be out of our hands.
3. The Mitchell St culvert under discussion may need a span of about 20 ft. Tracy will visit the site in January to check out the situation and get some better measurements, and will let us know what she finds. Her measurements will be based on the current DEC standards for culvert diameter or bridge length, not on simply replacing the undersized structure that's there now.
4. Tracy was recently successful at helping Taghkanic obtain a WQIP grant for a culvert that was undersized but not an aquatic barrier.
5. The WQIP grant decisions are partially based on the miles of stream that would be affected by a culvert project; that is, the upstream length that would be opened up to aquatic organisms when the new culvert is no longer a barrier. For that reason, Tracy says that we might want to bundle two or more culvert projects into a single grant application. The highest number of evaluation points for connectivity would be reached at one mile of additional connected stream.
6. She says that the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) grant program is also worth pursuing. It is among the CFA (Consolidated Funding Application) grants that are typically announced in the spring and have application deadlines in June or early July.
7. The Hudson River Estuary Program is another good grant source. The HREP funded the Hillsdale Road Crossings study, and likes to support this kind of follow-through. Their grant applications are typically issued in the spring (e.g., May), after the state budget is passed.
8. For the CSC and HR Est Program grants (and maybe for others--I'm not sure), culverts prioritized in the Hillsdale Stream Crossings report will be favored.
9. If the town highway dept. itself does the culvert replacement work instead of contracting it out, some things such as equipment use, transporting materials, etc., can contribute to the required match for the grant.