

VILLAGE OF ATHENS
MINUTES – PUBLIC HEARING - JANUARY 18, 2023

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

PRESENT: Mayor Amy Serrago, Trustee Gail Lasher, Trustee Rob Scott and Trustee Josh Lipsman

ABSENT: Trustee Stephan Bradicich

PUBLIC HEARING:

The Purpose of the Public Hearing tonight is to hear public comment on RESTORE NY Grant Application.

The Mayor opened the meeting by providing the public with some background on the project.

In February of 2020 the village was alerted by various agencies ('Keep it Green' and 'Riverkeeper') that the property on the riverfront next to the Athens Boat Launch was being 'eyed' by a company that wanted to turn it into a construction and demolition processing facility. This would be detrimental to the village. For this reason the village passed a moratorium on site plan reviews and halted development in that area thereby dissuading those potential buyers from pursuing the purchase of that property.

Presently the VB is thrilled that Scenic Hudson has purchased the property. Trustee Lipsman had the idea to gather a group of people together to make something good happen there.

The Mayor handed the hearing over to Trustee Lipsman.

Trustee Lipsman explained that the property in question is a vacant warehouse located at 133 N. Washington Street. He became aware of the grant money available through the state to help restore under-utilized buildings. This is an important location on the riverfront. Given this information he decided to get some interested parties together and make a plan to apply for funding. One of the requirements of the grant application is to hold a public hearing.

He noted that there are three speakers attending remotely this evening to inform and present.

All of this information will be available on the Village website

1. Rita Shaheen, Director of Parks for Scenic Hudson Landtrust

Ms. Shaheen informed everyone that Scenic Hudson has been working for over 60 years protecting the Hudson River Valley's communities visual and natural resources. They are committed to strengthening the Hudson Valley's villages, towns and cities, which are woven together by their people, their nature and their history

They formerly pick industrial sites and transform them into ecologically restored riverfront parks which reflect the unique vision of their community. All of these parks have the same thing in common and that is that the land was once off limits to the public and then becomes a place where people can come together in nature.

Late in 2021 Scenic Hudson purchased this property as an industrial site/warehouse knowing that there was potential in the 1,000 feet of river shoreline, connection to other places along the river, the history of the village and the warehouse.

Ms. Sheehan commended the village board for being strong leaders in this project and they look forward to working with the VB and others collaborating and partnering in this project.

2. Kaja Kuell, Urban planner and architect- Hudson Valley Collaborative

Provided a slide presentation of the early conceptual preliminary ideas as a result of discussions with Scenic Hudson the Mayor.

The project is entitled the 'Athens Riverine Living Museum and Education Center'.

3. Carlee Drummer, Columbia-Greene President

Ms. Drummer stated that the college was interested in purchasing the building in 2020 but could not afford the renovations it would need. That was when she joined with Trustee Lipsman regarding the collaboration for this project.

She also noted that Athens was the original home to the College and they are looking forward to seeing this project come to fruition and are very hopeful that the grant is approved.

She extended a 'thank you' to Scenic Hudson Landtrust.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. John Van Buren – inquired as to whether the Hudson Maritime Museum is interested in this project?

Trustee Lipsman replied that they have been in touch and are very interested in consulting on permanent/temporary exhibits and also assisting where they can.

2. Susan Brady – inquired as to where the 'South Cove' is located? She also inquired as to whether expansion in the future was ever considered.

Reply 'not yet'

3. Chris Pfister – extended a 'thank you' to the VB for being active in this project. He mentioned a few things:

- that whole area is a problem – on one side of the property there is a dilapidated house and trailer and then on the other side there are Peckham Materials fuel tanks. The Boat launch is supposed to be fixed but as of yet is not. He noted that there probably should be a 'grand plan' for that area so it is a nice entry from the north into the village.

- is there any update on the Peckham Plant?

The Mayor noted that they met quite a while back and expressed interest in moving more of their activities away from the riverfront but that was a while back and she needs to 'touch base' again.

- What is the cost of the project?

Trustee Lipsman replied 1.275 million dollars.

-Mr. Pfister also noted that flooding in that area has always been a problem and the barges are an eyesore

The Mayor stated that the Boat launch will be on the agenda to be fixed by NYS Parks due to the passage of the Bond Act in November.

It was also mentioned that rehabbing these sites will cost the taxpayers money.

4. Sam Merrit (remote)- he 'runs boats' along the river and took over the ferry run between Hudson and Athens. He thanked everyone for including 'vessel access' in the plan. Small boats in the cove and large boats on the bulkhead are very important and make sense.

Trustee Lipsman reiterated that any expected funding we receive can only be used on the renovation of the building and not on all of the other grounds and boat access/docks. All of these items are extra and the village will need to fundraise.

5. Trish Fleming – When will the village know if the application has been approved?

Mayor and Trustee Lipsman concurred that it will be probably be April before we hear anything.

6. Participant – Noted that it will be nice to have a college campus for those residents in Greene County.

Also, on another note – it's a huge opportunity to connect river communities and to cross the river.

7. Ellen Roth – Congrats to Trustee Lipsman and all the stakeholders to go forward with this project.

8. Chris Pfister – mentioned the parking situation – which started a discussion.

Is there any possibility to include the Athens Museum in this building?

Trustee Lipsman stated that the museum might not work there because it is on the water and alot of the artifacts in the museum cannot get wet. Also, this is called the Riverine Museum and not all of Athens history is river related.

9. Melanie Taylor – will it be run by the college or the village?

Trustee Lipsman – not finalized yet. The College will commit a facilities person to be a custodian of this building but scheduling and management are not finalized.

Mayor mentioned that Trustee Lipsman is the point person and are currently just getting through the application process.

10. Bob Harden – Mentioned that this is very exciting and 'thank you' to Scenic Hudson . Noted that his wife was involved in the project on the Detroit River and these projects can be transformative.

Mayor and Trustee Lipsman informed everyone again that all of the information can be viewed on the village website.

Adjourn Public Hearing at 7:45PM – Motion made by Trustee Scott, seconded by Trustee Lipsman, all in favor.