

Town Board Meeting
Thursday
January 8, 2026
7:00pm

This meeting is being held "in-person" in Town Hall. The access information for the meeting has been posted and there are members of the public present virtually.

Members Present: Supervisor Wolf, Councilperson Gansowski, Councilperson Gabaccia, and Councilperson Morningstar, and Councilperson Haight

Present: Town Clerk Lynn DeRocha, Attorney Jonathon Tingley (*virtually*)

Call to Order

At 7:00pm, Supervisor Wolf calls the Town Board meeting to order. Supervisor Wolf opens the Town Board meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Supervisor Wolf mentions that this meeting is being held in person in Town Hall but we are allowing remote access. This meeting is being recorded and the recording will be posted online within five business days.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Councilperson Gansowski and seconded by Councilperson Morningstar to waive a further reading and accept the Minutes as written for the Town Board Year End Meeting of Monday, December 29, 2025.

All in favor. Motion approved.

A motion was made by Councilperson Morningstar and seconded by Councilperson Gabaccia to waive a further reading and accept the Minutes as written for the 2026 Organizational Meeting of Friday, January 2, 2026.

All in favor. Motion approved.

Announcements

Supervisor Wolf announces a request for people with flu-like symptoms to conduct business at the outside window of the Town Clerk's office at Town Hall.

Supervisor Wolf announces a ceremony commemorating the Knox Trail at the Hillsdale Firehouse on the upcoming Saturday at 11:30 a.m.

There will be a community meeting at the Park Building on Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. regarding the "Shepherd's Run" proposal. The meeting will include a presentation by a falconer on the proposal's potential impact on endangered species.

The Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) in-person public comment hearings for the Shepherd's Run proposal will be held at Town Hall on Wednesday, January 21st, and Thursday, January 22nd, with sessions at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. each day. Two virtual hearings will be conducted by ORES the following week on Tuesday, January 27th, at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Those who wish to speak at the virtual hearing must sign up by noon on Monday, January 26th. The Town Board is sending reminder postcards about the hearings to all Copake residents and businesses.

Upcoming activities at The Grange, including "Jamming at the Grange" on Sunday, January 18th, from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; a chili cook-off on Saturday, January 24th, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.; a performance by the Chatham Trio on January 31st; and Open Mic Night on Friday, February 6th, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Correspondence

From-Grant Langdon, several phone calls and emails

From-Ken Dow, engagement letter

From-Jon Tingley, engagement letter

From-Park Commission resignation letters from Liana Jensen, Stephanie Poucher, and Jordan Hawver

From-Willa Field, thank you letter to Highway Superintendent William Gregory

From-New York Association of Towns, letter regarding Comp Alliance

From-Asset Pursuit, letter regarding judgement against 13 Lackawanna Properties, LLC

From-Noel Fair, Ethics Board Chair, letter of reappointment recommendations

From-Governor Hochul, Christmas card

Supervisor's Report

This year will be the year during which several issues important to Copake's future are addressed. Among these are Hecate's proposed Shepherd's Run utility-scale solar project (more about this in the Solar Update), renovation and repurposing of the Roeliff Jansen School building, and the creation of a 'Copake Spur' – a bicycling, jogging and walking trail that would connect the Harlem Valley Rail Trail to the Copake hamlet.

The Roeliff Jansen School building has been closed since June 1999. The original building, constructed in 1931 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression, and a 1952 addition to the school, have fallen into significant disrepair. A small portion of the roof has collapsed; asbestos and mold remediation will be required; the windows have been boarded up; for a time, the building had been occupied by squatters; and currently, it is home to some four-legged and flying creatures.

Despite the building's condition, the property remains of significant interest to developers. Situated on 39 acres and bounded by the Roe Jan Kill and State Route 22, it has been inspected by developers with a

variety of interest and goals. One would like to develop a resort and day spa. Several others would like to construct affordable housing; others, senior housing; still others are interested in developing the property for mixed use, including housing and a performance space. Developers are attracted to the idea of building single homes or multiple housing units behind the school. Affordable housing – housing, period – is desperately needed here in Copake and throughout the area. The lack of housing continues to drive young families away to the point where the average age of Copakeans is close to 60. We will continue to pursue all leads aggressively.

For many years, the Copake Spur long has been an elusive Copake dream. When we found out that the State Department of Transportation planned to rehabilitate the bridge on Route 22 just north of Weed Mine Road, we asked if they could include a passageway underneath the bridge that could accommodate people coming to and from the Rail Trail. Many months later, DOT vetoed the idea, but said we could instead use a below-road opening a few yards south of the bridge, known as the “cow tunnel” because of its use years ago. The problem: it is wide enough and deep enough, it is said, for only one fat cow. Undaunted, we are looking at grant opportunities to pay for reconstructing and expanding the cow tunnel, or perhaps installing a much larger culvert nearby.

Recent developments make a spur trail especially important for Copake. New York State Parks will be installing a prefabricated bridge across Route 22 at Black Grocery Road. Work should be completed sometime this fall. It will enable Rail Trail users to easily travel to and from Hillsdale, bypassing Copake in the process. A spur would encourage people come into Copake and to patronize our businesses. Approximately 180,000 people use the Rail Trail annually, so the ability to divert a small percentage into Copake would be very helpful to Copake’s business community.

Redeveloping and repurposing the school building and creating a Copake Spur are two lofty, difficult goals. We will continue to work towards realizing them.

Solar Update-January 2026

The Columbia County Board of Supervisors opposes development of Hecate’s Shepherd’s Run solar facility. Citing several concerns, the County Board twice has unanimously adopted resolutions opposing the 42-megawatt, utility-scale facility.

The proposed site would be on mostly prime agricultural land. Many of the approximately 175,000 solar panels, together with inverters, transmission lines and other equipment, would be on a field adjacent to the Taconic Hills Central School District campus. Fire safety issues are of great concern. A facility fire would put 1100 students, teachers, and staff at risk from toxic smoke and fire. The dedicated but small, all-volunteer Craryville Fire Department would be hard-pressed to muster sufficient firefighters to respond effectively. Perhaps most significantly to the Board of Supervisors, the vast majority of Copakeans do not want a very large solar factory in Craryville. Copake has opposed Shepherd’s Run since Hecate first announced its intentions in 2017, and to the Board of Supervisors, this is all about Home Rule. What happens in Copake has implications for every Columbia County town.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Matt Murell put it this way, “It’s a mystery to the board and myself how New York State can virtually ignore its own law when it comes to the possible permitting of this solar project. I’m referring to the principle of Home Rule.” He noted that the state’s official website provides that towns and villages are “general purpose” units of local government with “broad home rule powers to regulate the quality of life in communities...[and that] the home rule powers available to New York local governments are among the most far-reaching in the nation. The extent of these powers makes the

local government a full partner with the state in the shared responsibility for providing services to the people." In a press release last month, Chairman Murell said, "There's no better time for New York State to stand behind its words than right now and deny the Shepherd's Run permit." He added, "This is a perfect example of the state ignoring the rights of small, rural communities."

Stuyvesant Town Supervisor and County Majority Leader Ron Knott added, "We are a community based in large part on agriculture and open spaces," said. "Our local government leaders work diligently developing comprehensive plans and local zoning regulations to protect our natural resources."

In issuing a draft siting permit for Shepherd's Run, the state's Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission (ORES) cavalierly overrode sixteen of Copake's zoning regulations that had been carefully crafted over many years to protect Copake's land and beautiful, rural environment. ORES offered no substantive reasons for the overrides, noting simply that each was "unduly burdensome."

Rather than allowing Copake to continue to be a responsible, effective steward of its lands, ORES thus far has chosen to substitute its judgment for that of Copakeans, the people who know Copake best. Doing this in the name of "saving the planet" is foolish when our local environment is destroyed in the process. Shepherd's Run would not create permanent jobs for Copake, nor would we receive the electricity that the facility would generate. That would go directly into the grid and flow south.

New York has long been a Home Rule state. It is unthinkable that its principles should be sacrificed for the benefit of an out-of-state developer who – make no mistake – is in this to make money and get out. Hecate has no interest in Copake or preserving our environment. If it is awarded a final siting permit, Hecate will sell it to an operator, pocket the profits, and move on to the next project.

In-person Public Comment Hearings, scheduled for Wednesday, January 21 and Thursday, January 22, at 2:00pm and 6:00pm each day at Copake Town Hall are important opportunities for all of us to let ORES know what Shepherd's Run's massive installation would do to our small, rural town. I anticipate that speakers will include several concerned supervisors from other county towns.

For those of you who cannot attend in-person, ORES will conduct two virtual hearings on Tuesday, January 27 at 2:00pm and 6:00pm. Those who wish to speak at a virtual hearing must sign up by noon on Monday, January 26. Instructions are available on the town website and are also posted at Town Hall. Don't wait until the last second to register: the multi-step instructions require careful attention.

Finally, we are mailing a postcard reminder of the upcoming hearings to every address in Copake, both residences and businesses. Special thanks to Town Clerk Lynn DeRocha for accomplishing this huge and important task.

I hope to see and hear many Copakeans at the ORES hearings. Make your voices heard!

Department Heads/Committee Reports

None

Public Forum

Lindsay LeBrecht, Copake resident, thanks the board for their continued support against the solar project. Ms. LeBrecht mentions the lack of communication and transparency has been an issue from day one. Ms. LeBrecht is very thankful for what Sensible Solar, the town, and the county has done. Ms. LeBrecht states that this is the wrong place for Shepherd's Run.

New Business

- a. Proposed Local Law proposing revisions to SCOZ regulations of Zoning Code-A Local Law Amending Section 232-10 of the Copake Zoning Code, "Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone (SCOZ)"**
Supervisor Wolf introduces a local law to amend the zoning code regarding the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone.

Edgar Masters, Copake Falls resident, member of the Planning Board, explained that the revisions, stemming from a review prompted by a 20-year-old zoning code, simplify application, clarify understanding, and give the Planning Board more control through site plan review.

A motion was made by Councilperson Gabaccia and seconded by Councilperson Morningstar to formally introduce the Local Law proposing revisions to SCOZ regulation of the Zoning Code in the Town of Copake, proposed by the Planning Board.

All in favor. Motion approved.

A motion was made by Councilperson Haight and seconded by Councilperson Gansowski to approve the content of the full environmental assessment form (EAF), and authorize the supervisor to sign the environmental assessment form to move the process forward to the county for consideration.

All in favor. Motion approved.

- b. Proposed Rules regarding rentals of Park Building**

A motion was made by Councilperson Gabaccia and seconded by Councilperson Haight to approve and set the fees for park building rentals at \$100 for residents, \$150 for non-residents, and a \$200 security deposit, with the agreement to finalize the remaining details next month.

Four in favor. Councilperson Gansowski votes No. Motion approved.

- c. Engagement Letters**

A motion was made by Councilperson Gabaccia and seconded by Councilperson Haight to approve and authorize the supervisor to sign the 2026 Engagement Letter of Ken Dow.

All in favor. Motion approved.

A motion was made by Councilperson Gansowski and seconded by Councilperson Morningstar to approve and authorize the supervisor to sign the 2026 Engagement Letter of Jon Tingley.

All in favor. Motion approved.

d. Park Commission Petty Cash

A motion was made by Councilperson Morningstar and seconded by Councilperson Gabaccia to authorize and approve the new procedures for handling cash from Park Commission events, which includes requiring two people to count the cash.

All in favor. Motion approved.

Old Business

a. Community Preservation Fund

Councilperson Morningstar has nothing to add but will be back next month with a report.

b. Granicus-STR compliance monitoring company

Supervisor Wolf has nothing to add right now except that Erin Reis, the Code Enforcement Officer has been working with Granicus and the town will publicize the hot line once it is actually functioning.

Resolutions

None

Appointments

The Town Board agrees to post vacancies for the Park Commission.

A motion was made by Councilperson Gabaccia and seconded by Councilperson Haight to reappoint Constance Lopez and Christopher Simmons to the Ethics Board.

All in favor. Motion approved.

Budget-Approval of Budget to Actual Reports and agreement to post

a. Preliminary Budget to Actual Report-December 31, 2025

b. Agreement to post Budget to Actual Report

A motion was made by Councilperson Morningstar and seconded by Councilperson Gabaccia to approve and post the budget to actual report December 31, 2025.

All in favor. Motion approved

Councilpersons' Reports

Councilperson Gansowski reports that the Park Commission has not met since December.

Councilperson Gansowski is working on several things with Erin Reis from the Building Department.

Councilperson Haight reports that the Planning Board is not having a regular meeting this month but will meet again on the first Thursday in February.

Councilperson Gabaccia has nothing to report.

Councilperson Morningstar reminds everyone about CEDAC's Rock Around the Clock event.

Supervisor Wolf reports that the Comprehensive Plan Review Committee had its first meeting under the new leadership of Stephanie Rabin and it went smoothly and there was great attendance. They reviewed the results of the survey and in the next few months, they are going to start shaping recommendations based upon what they received so far. They are also going to arrange for another focus group with young families and young families with children because they were dramatically under-represented in the number of people who filled out the survey.

Public Forum

Scott Altman, Copake resident, wants to know why the town has to go to the county regarding the proposed local law.

Lindsay LeBrecht, Copake resident, regarding the park building rentals, thinks there are no real definitive guidelines for renters.

Town Attorney Jon Tingley clarifies the county's role in the scenic corridor overlay zone adoption process; the county does not have approval authority over the law, they have recommendation authority. If they recommend disapproval, the town can still adopt it as long as it's by a super majority rather than a simple majority. The town still does have the ability to adopt that even if the county does not like it.

Approval of Bills

Done

Executive Session

None

Next Meeting Date

Thursday, February 12, 2026, 7:00pm

Adjournment

A motion was made by Councilperson Gabaccia and seconded by Councilperson Haight to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor. Motion approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn M. DeRocha