Cleaning up their act
Environmental Policy Commission’s post-bag ban wish list includes greener Village Hall, municipal garbage pickup, Walkkill River pollution watch

by Frances Marion Platt

“One of Don [Kerr’s] earliest points of interest was to get signage on the river warning that it’s not suitable for primary contact,” Gian Starr relates. “One of the things on our wish list is creating a coalition of communities along the Walkkill,” which would work together to identify sources of pollution.

September in response to the news that the Village Board had decided to convert to natural gas heating for Village Hall. He quickly mustered up enough opposition to the concept of using fracking products in a municipality that had been among the first to outlaw fracking that the Village Board backed down, and is expected to commit to using more sustainable heating options once trustee Ariana Basco returns from a leave of absence.

“Thar was my main issue for 2014,” Young says. “For 2015 I’m reviewing the requirements for ClimateSmart Communities certification. I’m also exploring the potential for a village-wide garbage contract, instead of having four trucks come down each street.” One option might be for the village streets to be broken up into a grid, with trash hauling companies bidding to provide service to one quadrant each, possibly paid for by the village itself. “You’d think with the amount of taxes we pay, we’d be entitled to it,” he says.

EPC chair Donn Kerr takes the concept a step further: “We’re looking at the idea of being able to do municipal trash pickup, where the village would own its own trucks... It’s likely to take a year to figure out and put in place. People would be able to participate as their contracts with the trash haulers currenty serving the village run out.”

As anyone knows who has attended a recent Village Board meeting where the issue of alternative water supplies during the Catskill Aqueduct shutdown has been discussed, the state of the Walkkill River is Kerr’s special area of concern on the EPC. “One of Don’s earliest points of interest was to get signage on the river warning that it’s not suitable for primary contact,” Starr relates. “One of the things on our wish list is creating a coalition of communities along the Walkkill,” which would work together to identify sources of pollution.

Kerr credits mayor Jason West with convening a group that is “meeting regularly” with representatives from organizations with an interest in the Walkkill, including Riverkeeper and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Out of these discussions have come plans for a conference on the future of the river, to be hosted by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz on April 23. More information about the conference will be announced once the speakers are lined up, says Kerr. “The idea is to get people from the entire Walkkill River area, including farmers from Black Dirt country. They’ve also inviting people from Sussex County, New Jersey, where the Walkkill rises.”

Other projects currently on the EPC’s docket, according to Young, are the research that Joanna Torres has been doing on solar versus LED streetlights, recently presented to the Village Board; and Rachel Lagodzika’s work to have the Millbrook Preserve “recognized and protected.” Lagodka was deeply involved in efforts to protect the natural area when the Woodland Pond development was proposed during Mayor West’s first term of office, and Young says, “She could tell you every beaver that is there and where it makes its home.” Long-term, the group has a mandate to create a land use audit: “an overarching overview of environmental resources” in the village, after which says Young, “the commission can become a board.”

So there’s more than enough work on the agenda to keep all the members of the EPC busy. Young says that they are seeking additional volunteers to help them with their research: “Anyone who thinks banning plastic bags is a good idea, anyone who things blocking the use of fracked gas is a good idea — those are our folks.” Village residents who think they might like to get involved are invited to attend an EPC meeting on the last Tuesday of each month.