

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

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Concerned Citizens sets April 2 meeting in bid to carry on work



Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens members had hoped for greater attendance at a meeting on the group's future at Olean Public Library Monday night. Another meeting is set for April 2 at the library to seek new members.

OLEAN — Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens, environmental watchdogs for more than 30 years, is looking for new blood to carry on their crusade for clean water and land.

A meeting at Olean Public Library Monday night seeking ideas and new recruits was live streamed on Zoom, but drew more current members than people looking to help provide new leadership.

Moderator Kathy Boser of Allegany, one of several former Concerned Citizens presidents who are still active in the group and attended the meeting, listed many of the group's accomplishments since it was formed in 1991 to help fight the proposed Farmersville landfill.

Boser noted most of the remaining members were getting to the age where they want to turn over the group to new leadership, dissolve or merge with another group.

Kathy Kellogg of Farmersville, the group's first president, said Concerned Citizens was instrumental in keeping the proposed dump in the public eye. "It took over 20 years," but the county eventually took the property for back taxes.

In the beginning, Concerned Citizens boasted 500 members, Kellogg said.

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Other speakers included former president Lois Zendarski of Franklinville, Rob Mrowka, the most recent president, and member Barbara Dyskant.

Boser, who became involved with Concerned Citizens in the 1990s when Allegany Wind was first proposed, listed several local environmental issues the group has been involved in including the **West Valley Demonstration Project** cleanup, shipping garbage by rail, monitoring oil and gas operations, unplugged wells and cooperating with other groups to stop plans to treat fracking waste in Coudersport, Pa., and dispose of it in the Allegheny River.

Mrowka, who took over as president in 2018, said the group went dormant due to COVID-19 and a lack of environmental issues. He noted the group was opposed to the proposed Alle-Catt Wind Farm even though it had pulled its support for the legal fight.

Mrowka also noted the group's opposition to the proposed National Fuel Gas Northern Access Pipeline, which "is still in limbo."

Concerned Citizens also became involved in the Four Mile Road oil and gas production in Allegany after the methane explosion of a home on Four Mile Road several years ago. The group tested air in area homes for methane, a byproduct of oil and natural gas production Mrowka said.

One issue the group did not address was the sewage overflows in the city of Olean, which flow into the Allegheny River.

Mrowka commented on the low attendance at the meeting and on Zoom. "It's time for me to step down and turn it over to new leadership."

"What's next?" asked Boser.

Olean businessman Nate Smith offered to let the group network with his conservative political group, the Right Thinkers.

Environmental attorney Gary Abraham, a longtime Concerned Citizens member, suggested a monthly film series and discussion.

"We're all still concerned," Boser said. "How do we get momentum? How do we get new leadership?"

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Another meeting of the group will be held at the library at 6:30 p.m. on April 2. "We need to get the message out," she said. "We need to come up with ideas and generate interest."

Boser said, "My hope is that with efforts to drum up some interest, we can come up with a plan to continue Concerned Citizens as it is or combine with some other group. Are we going to continue or are we going to dissolve?"

RICK MILLER