

Minutes for Town of Gardiner Open Space Commission, Nov. 26, 2018, 5-6:30 PM.

Attending: Jean McGrane, Chair; Rebecca Benner, Laura Rose, Kay Hoiby, Kellie George, Linda Geary, Laura Wong-Pan.

Quotes:

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

– John Muir

“All things are connected like the blood that unites us. We do not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.” – Chief Seattle

Continued Development of our 2019 Strategic Action Plan

We reviewed the 2 potential goals we'd discussed at the last meeting to see if anyone had any comments, additions or modifications to make.

Goal #1: *Achieve new protection and public access.*

Jean noted the importance of the following to achieve this goal:

- 1) encouraging voluntary preservation,
- 2) identifying sites that could provide opportunities for public access,
- 3) identifying properties with the characteristics that are described as priority in the existing Town of Gardiner Open Space Plan,
- 4) identifying a short list of strategic partners whose direction and work can help advance our vision and
- 5) tracking funding opportunities.

Goal #2:

Education with concrete suggestions for what interested parties can do to protect land:

We agreed that it would be helpful to sort where the town is in relation to preservation prior to moving ahead with this goal. We agree that being able to offer this service is an important priority for our group. Further work needs to be done to prioritize ideas previously generated and to develop a plan of action for this goal. This will be addressed at future meetings.

We then moved on to discuss our other two potentially central goals:

Goal #3: Partner with local non-profits to advance their agenda and/or identify resources to support shared interests.

We decided this is a step towards achieving our goals, rather than a separate goal. And we decided to modify this one to a) include groups that are not non-profits, and b) to put our own goals central.

Updated, it reads:

Partner with appropriate organizations to amplify and advance our shared goals.

Goal #4:

Develop a data base of and conservation management plan for, the town's easements.

Of all of the potential goals, this is the most pressing and our group agreed that it should be the one we're working on right now. We decided that focusing here will help us begin to achieve Goal #1 (new protection.)

To work towards achieving the 4th goal, we have accomplished several things to date:

- Looked through the Town's zoning code and files to research what information already exists around conservation easements.
- Found Gardiner's previously adopted 1989 Resolution #30-1989:
Guidelines and Criteria for Conservation Easements.
- We were unable to find a comprehensive database of existing easements.

- Created a working list of Gardiner's conservation easements.
- For the most part: identified the owner of each easement, the grantee of each, and the organization responsible for monitoring.
- Work continues to complete this database.
- Sources of information include: Ulster County's Tax Assessment Roll, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, the Land Trust Alliance, the Open Space Institute, Mohonk Preserve, Minnewaska State Park, Riverpark Homeowner's Association, Gardiner's assessor and a town generated list of town owned parcels.

- Established who the monitoring organizations of permanently conserved land in Gardiner are: The Wallkill Valley Land Trust, Mohonk Preserve, Minnewaska State Park, the Open Space Institute, Riverpark Homeowner's Association and the Town of Gardiner.

- Found that the town has accepted both land and easements with no baseline documentation, monitoring or enforcement plans in place.

- Agreed that each Town of Gardiner owned easement should have baseline documentation, a monitoring schedule, and a clearly defined set of procedures around easement enforcement.

- Determined that there is no not-for-profit in the area that will take on responsibility for the town's existing parcels, or every new parcel to be preserved in the future.

- Reviewed the 2011 Gardiner Open Space Commission recommendations to the town regarding conservation easements. It encourages us to develop plans similar to those of our neighboring communities. We have begun to check in with them, to learn about their successes and challenges.

-Prepared a list of questions to use when interviewing each town so our information will be consistent and comprehensive.

-Contacted professionals who know how to handle baseline documentation.

If we are to be successful at following through on both the Town's Master Plan, and the 2007 GOSC Plan's goal of preserving more open space, the town will be asked to take on more conservation easements.

Discussion of activities since our last meeting:

- Jean, Laura WP and Laura R reported on their meeting with Paul Colucci and Mark Moran, of the TOG Planning Board. A variety of topics were covered with the most pressing being the acceptance and monitoring of conservation easements.

Needs identified by the participants include:

-Developing a plan for baseline reporting, and monitoring TOG owned easements.

-Putting a plan in place for enforcement, in the case of violations.

-Identifying options for funding and insurance, to cover enforcement if required.

-Creating a standardized template for applicants to include in the granting deeds when the town is accepting new easements.

(To date, the Town's attorneys have reviewed deeds drafted by developers' lawyers. With our own template, expectations can be made clear, and the Town's interests better protected.)

Participants agreed there is a need for the Town Board and GOSC to work together on these items.

The Shaft Road development's conservation easement was discussed. The importance of completing a baseline inventory of the property was discussed.

Laura WP has identified potential consultants to conduct a baseline inventory and will provide the information to Paul Colucci.

We were also asked by the town to be part of a discussion about the Hess easement. Report on Jean's Meeting with Dawn Hite of the Open Space Institute.

OSI wants to convey the Hess easement back to the Town of Gardiner. The Town Supervisor (Marybeth Majestic) is interested in knowing what is entailed and what it might cost. She is interested in learning about what other towns are doing. Jean reviewed the benefits of holding the easement, including that the Town has the most knowledge of the status of the property, the wildlife corridors and streams.

Next Steps, Things To Do:

- Provide the Planning Board with contact information for a professional with experience handling baseline documentation, as well as proposed conservation easement language. (Possibly Kelly Dobbins from Orange County Planning, who Laura Wong-Pan spoke with.)
- Contact WVLT to meet with GOSC members to discuss working as joint partners. (Jean.)
- Survey neighboring towns to identify current conservation practices and procedures for conservation easements, including solicitation, acceptance, monitoring and enforcement.
 - *Use the list of questions for interviews prepared by Jean and reviewed by GOSC.
- Towns: New Paltz (Rebecca);
 Shawangunk (Kay);
 Warwick (Laura WP);
 Crawford (Jean),
 Red Hook. (Laura R)
- Continue development of Gardiner's easement database. (Laura R.)
- Upcoming meeting: December 4, 2018- Joint meeting of the various Boards.
Jean McGrane and Linda Geary will attend.

Next GOSC meeting: At Gardiner Town Hall, December 10, 2018, 5:00 PM to 6:30 PM.
Snacks: Laura Wong Pan. Quotes: Rebecca Benner