

Gardiner Open Space Commission Minutes

August 13, 2018

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead

Present at the Meeting: Jean-Ann McGrane, Kay Hoibe, Linda Geary, Laura Wong-Pan, Laura Rose.
Minutes taken by: Laura Wong-Pan.

Procedure for editing minutes:

Jean McGrane suggested that Becca Benner (or whoever takes the minutes) send them out to all the members, and then any changes anyone in the group wants to see should be sent to Laura Rose, who will edit.

- Jean passed out the New York Agricultural Landowner Guide.
- Found! Open Space Commission file cabinet in the Town Hall.

Ongoing Outreach to Conservation Related Organizations:

Ag & Markets: Becca has not had a chance to reach out. Kay Hoiby will reach out to David Behm. Jean McGrane will talk to Seth McKee about Scenic Hudson.

At Jean's suggestion, we made a list of additional organizations that we can reach out to, to learn more from and create alliances with. These included: The Open Space Institute, Walkkill Watershed Alliance, Mohonk Preserve, the Ulster County Environmental Council and the American Farmland Trust. Climate Smart Gardiner may also be a helpful partner.

We talked about the need for a spreadsheet to keep track of the relevant points that we learn about each organization. Questions to ask include:

- What are their priorities and their focus?
- Name of the best contact for us within their organization.
- What do they look for in a project?
- Is Gardiner of interest to them?
- Is there funding available?
- What's the process for applying?
- Time line and grant deadlines
- What other sources do they suggest we contact?
- Which organizations do they believe are doing the best work in this area?

Laura Rose will create a spreadsheet the group can share. Anyone who speaks with an organization can then add to the spreadsheet with the information they are able to gather.

Laura Rose report on ongoing discussion with WVLT, and planning.

She talked about the possibility of us creating a mission statement, as a way of focusing our work and finding our way forward. The 2007 Open Space Plan doesn't have one; instead it is broad and aspirational, and it takes on more than we can get done in the short term.

She also discussed ways that land can be conserved, including donated conservation easements, the purchase of development rights, and zoning. She continued her discussion with the Wallkill Valley Land Trust this month and shared what she was told about the differences between conservation easements monitored by an organization, and restrictive covenants placed in a deed.

Public Engagement:

Laura R suggested that once we are fully up to speed, we educate our community on the mechanics and benefits of donating conservation easements and encourage them to donate if appropriate for their land. 28% of Gardiner is located in the hubs which are identified in the Open Space Plan as priorities for further preservation. If people donate voluntarily, it's likely that some of that land will fall inside our hubs.

We talked more about educating ourselves; will need to find out what Mohonk Consultations might have available in terms of education.

Linda Geary report on the Ulster County Planning Board .

Linda Geary is on the Ulster County Planning Board. She reports that it is an advisory group, consisting of representatives from each town. There are development projects that require approval by the Ulster County Planning Board before they can be approved by a Planning Board or Town Board, such as those projects that are within 500 feet of a county road. Each town that has big development projects will submit the plans for approval to the Ulster County Planning Board. The UCPB usually relies on recommendations made by the Ulster County Planning Department. If a Town does not implement the advisory recommendations of the UCPB, it has to send a letter stating why the recommendations were rejected.

The Ulster County Planning Board, with the Ulster County Environmental Management Council adopted a County Open Space Plan. Linda distributed information about this. There are links on the Department's website that may be of interest, including some about protecting biodiversity.

Linda represents the Town of Gardiner for the County Planning Board and forwards the reports to Paul Colucci and Mary Beth Majestic after each meeting if the vote has to do with Gardiner.

List of Agricultural Exemption Properties:

Laura Rose got a list from the County that identifies 113 properties in Gardiner (including name, acreage and SBL#) that have agricultural exemptions. Some of these are duplicates, as in, several farms have more than one SBL #.

Per Linda Geary- you have to have a certain amount of income from agricultural business to qualify for an exemption. We do not know details about the amount of the tax exemption, or what each of the farms in Gardiner produces, exactly. We discussed the wide variety of activities that can be used to qualify for this exemption.

Jean McGrane suggested we look into the creation of a map showing the location of parcels with ag. exemptions. Linda will call Dennis Doyle of the UC Planning Dept. to see if he can help us access a County map that highlights the ag. exempt properties. Might be available through the Ulster County assessor's office; Real property tax dept. This led to a discussion of whether or not we can create additional maps (ex. one that overlays the Hub maps with the parcel outlines grid) to give us visual

cues about figuring out specific Gardiner parcels to consider targeting for preservation in the longer term.

Records from Prior Open Space Commission:

Jean McGrane passed around a memo from Marc Moran from July 2011 with recommendations for the Town to create a system for protecting conservation easements. Jean suggested we look at what other towns have done, and we should check in with them to see how their protocols are working.

We are still working on our list of all of the easements in Gardiner. We don't know yet if the Town of Gardiner holds any conservation easements. We don't know if they want to, or if we want to advise them to establish a system for doing this themselves. This will require more research and further discussion. Linda Geary said that the Town owns property it was given when plans for developments were submitted, that are not preserved in perpetuity. We don't know the restrictions on the disposition and use of those Town-owned parcels, or the environmental conservation benefits of those parcels. We have a list of the Town-owned parcels and need more information about each one that isn't in use.

Budget:

Deadline of September 7, 2018 for the budget request. The Commission discussed money for educational outreach and postage, and the potential need for a mapping consultant for creating GIS maps to assist us in finding viable properties. Laura Wong-Pan will speak with Angela Sisson to find out the cost of creating such a map. Linda Geary suggested that the Town be asked to allocate money for a survey and appraisal, so that there will be ready money in the budget when we are able to identify and move forward with a viable project. How much does the WVLT charge if they are going to take over the monitoring of a Town-owned parcel? We discussed that it might be premature to ask for funds for projects when we are still in the planning stage. But we also don't want to be caught unable to proceed with projects as we hadn't asked for seed money.

Next Steps on moving forward:

- (1) Discussion was held about updates to the Open Space Plan and whether we should focus our mission on revising the Plan. There was a difference in opinion as to whether we want to focus our efforts on the revision of the Plan.
- (2) Jean suggested we each come up with a statement about what success would look like for the Open Space Commission. She said to imagine ourselves 5 years from now, looking back. What would make our time on the Commission worthwhile? Our statements can be converted into short and long-term action plans.

Next meeting: September 17th at 6:30 pm, Gardiner Town Hall.
Linda will bring snacks; Kellie will bring an inspirational quote.