

## **MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission, October 7, 2019, 5:30 -7 PM.**

Present: Jean McGrane, Rebecca Benner, Laura Wong Pan, Linda Geary, Kay Hoiby, Laura Rose, Kellie George.

### **Quotes:** (Kay)

"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you." - Frank Lloyd Wright

"Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Opening Business.**

Motion made by Becca to approve Sept. minutes. Kay seconded, all approved September minutes.

Quorum: We reviewed how many of us are needed for a quorum.

Since there are 5 permanent members, the number is 3.

### **Outreach:**

Jean has been communicating with Marybeth Majestic as a follow up to our presentations to the Town Board on September 27, 2019.

Topics have included: the conservation easement template presented by Laura WP, getting a baseline assessment organized for the Shaft Road easement, other Town held conservation easements, Town owned properties, annual monitoring, review of town laws around open space preservation, and the 2020 budget.

Dates were discussed for Laura R's presentation of the database to the Town Board; November 7th will be set as the date.

Since we haven't spent most of our 2019 budget, Jean suggested the Town could put it towards hiring the Wallkill Valley Land Trust to complete the Shaft Road baseline monitoring report.

Motion made by Linda to use our budget this way; Kay seconded, all agreed unanimously.

Laura R asked: are the boundary markers in place for this conservation easement yet?

They will be needed before the baseline can be completed. Kay said they have been placed.

Jean and Laura WP asked to read the deed for the Shaft Road conservation easement; Laura R to scan it in to circulate to the group, along with the deeds for the other conservation easements deeded to the Town.

Jean said she thinks that ideally, the Town should have baselines prepared for each of the properties it holds easements for. Laura R said she thinks this might be prohibitively expensive, and that maybe it's more important for each one to be properly marked so it can be walked at least, to be sure there's no dumping, clear-cutting or other illegal activity happening. Plus, a survey and clear marking have to be in place before a baseline assessment can be prepared.

We then discussed what goes into marking boundaries. There may be spikes in place, and descriptions in the deeds of where the boundaries are, as well as trees planted or fields mowed which could make it possible for the approximate boundaries to be walked, but it takes a licensed surveyor to confirm the boundaries, and mark them clearly.

Laura R said that following a surveyor's visit, more permanent, visible marking should follow immediately, before the small spikes and tape they place blends in with the landscape again.

Laura WP suggested some in our group could try walking the conservation easements, using the deeds, to see how complicated it might be to see what's there, even without professional boundary marking (or re-marking, as stakes make be there for the finding) or baseline assessments. Once everyone has had a chance to review the deeds, a small group of our members might try this. If so, it should be done before the snow flies.

Laura R said that it will be important to contact property owners before walking any of the easements. Jean to follow up with getting estimates for surveys. (We could also get a price for permanent marking.)

This led to a discussion of the checklist used when a property is monitored. Becca has researched this and says there is a surprisingly wide variety of options available. She will choose one that she thinks will be appropriate for our Town and either circulate it via email or bring it to us for review.

Jean then asked what we should recommend to the Town around the Town-owned properties. Should it be the same as for the Town-held conservation easements? Laura WP thinks monitoring the easements is more important. Laura R thinks they should all be monitored, whether or not they have surveys or baseline assessments in place, to protect the land and also the Town.

Marybeth had asked Jean if there is a "nexus" between conservation and recreation in our current laws. Jean asked the group for comment. Linda was able to find this, as yes, it does exist, and will forward what she found to Jean and the group.

### **Review of our powers and duties as laid out in the Gardiner Open Space Law, 165-3.**

Laura WP read this section to the group and we discussed it in relation to our work to date and our goals.

### **Moving Ahead with Additional Goals:**

Becca brought up figuring out how we're going to choose a project to preserve. She talked about us coming to an agreement around the values we most want to preserve, ex. agricultural land, land along river corridors or land adjacent to other pieces already preserved.

She said we can either invite the public to offer land, and then evaluate each piece, or we can work with mapping to determine which pieces best meet criteria we determine, and then contact the owners to see if they have an interest in permanent preservation.

Becca said we should talk more about which approach we prefer.

She then talked about methods for ranking projects, and brought up the numbered rankings New Paltz uses to evaluate projects. She is curious about how they got to the numbers they chose for ranking, and will approach Cara Lee for more info on their process.

Kay said that Gardiner has numbered ranking already in place, in one of the Appendices in the Open Space Plan. Kay to circulate this. Becca also brought up using GIS data to develop layers on a map; if we all agree on numbered criteria, we can then layer a town map with those conservation values, and it may help us make choices.

She advocated for the idea of us hiring professional assistance to get this piece accomplished. Laura R said there are maps available to us for free that do this layering but they aren't that easy to manipulate, especially if

you're trying to see what's going on with the whole town. For an individual parcel, it's easier to layer the conservation values.

It could be helpful to have professional assistance, once we are clear about what we want to do.

Laura R brought up an interest in preserving Jacqueline Estates, before it is developed. Becca said that land that's already slated for development is expensive to conserve, and that the Nature Conservancy targets land that might be developed in 20 or more years from now. The discussion segued into funding resources, grants and figuring out what might be available to us.

Kay has been looking into funding. We talked about Scenic Hudson as a resource, Ag and Markets and also Dennis Doyle, the Director of Ulster County Planning. Should we be looking at the funding sources first, or should we choose a project and then work to get the funding for it? Consensus was that choosing the project first would be more manageable, but that it's also prudent to have some idea of what monies might be available.

We spoke briefly about the Gardiner Open Space bond that expired, and then about other towns that are using a transfer fee on real estate transactions to enhance their Open Space acquisition budgets.

### **Review of our goals and priorities.**

In October and November of 2018, we focused on our goals for this group, moving forward.

We reviewed our minutes from those meetings. We had identified 4 key goals, including:

1. *Develop a database of and conservation management plan for, the Town's conservation easements.*

We agreed this was our most pressing goal, and went to work on this. We felt it had to be done before we could work on our #1 goal, which was:

2. *Achieve new protection and public access.*

We agree tonight that we are now ready to start work on this goal.

Our other two goals were:

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

We have made contact this year with many area conservation organizations, and are well placed to continue to work with these contacts. We are also working with the Town.

4. *Education, including concrete suggestions for what interested parties can do to protect land.*

A year ago, 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 also agreed that it's an important goal for us, and we generated quite a few ideas around ways to educate the public around Open Space, and bringing our community into the work we hope to accomplish (see #2, above.) We are not up to this goal yet, but it remains on our radar.

**Next Meeting:** November 11, 2019 5:30-7 PM

**Quotes:** Laura Rose    **Snacks:** Jean McGrane