

MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission Meeting, via Zoom, June 8, 2020, 4- 5:30 PM.

Present: Jean McGrane, Laura Wong Pan, Linda Geary, Kay Hoiby, Kellie George, Laura Rose. Minutes taken by: Laura Rose.

Quotes: (Kellie)

"The earth will not continue to offer its harvest except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations."
- Pope John Paul II

"To me a lush carpet of spongy grass or lush pine needles is more welcome than the most luxurious Persian rug."
- Helen Keller

"A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people."
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Opening Business.

Motion made to approve minutes from May by Kay, Laura WP seconded, all approved. Jean asked if any modifications were needed for the agenda; all agreed none were.

NRI Update (Jean and Laura R.)

We all now have access to the maps and other material related to the project.

Kay added the link to our Google Drive.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HTLna231WbY0omd4NNNOwfJcR_M3Ztm9

The draft version of the maps is finished. Work on the report comes next. The draft of the full report is scheduled for completion by September.

A presentation of the work to date is to be given to the Planning Board on June 23rd. Jean will be present if it's a Zoom meeting. Laura R offered to be available if it's in person. A shorter presentation will be scheduled with the Town Board for July. A webinar for the public is planned for September-ish.

Jean said: The material used is outstanding. A real effort has been made to compile all of the information available. Data was pulled from files and older, detailed reports that may have been lost to obscurity otherwise.

Becca spoke with Ingrid and Nate. They discussed purposes for the maps, and how they could be useful to stakeholders like the Planning Board or Town Board. Uses include:

- Informing decisions around conservation easements presented by developers,
- Offering more information than can be included in an application checklist, and
- Highlighting the assets the Town already owns and holds easements on.

GOSC can make use of the maps to help determine the natural assets on any parcel of land that is being considered for preservation as open space. The ECC and other groups will also use these maps to help evaluate the Town's natural resources.

Discussed: will the Town and PB have access to the maps prior to the presentations to them? We should make sure they do have the Google Drive link in advance.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q2z0xJaXF3BGXOF1wccPRDB5kidTzaKS>

Prioritizing Conservation Efforts and Scoring Criteria (Laura WP, Becca, Kellie.)

A draft of an update to this prioritization was prepared by Laura WP, Becca and Kellie and presented to the full group for review prior to this meeting.

To date, GOSC has pulled quite a few versions of scoring criteria from various towns. To create the update, it was decided to mainly focus on the existing Gardiner Open Space plan scoring, comparing it with New Paltz's version.

Laura WP gave us a presentation about the process used to arrive at this draft. She said the goal of scoring criteria is to quantify the values of lands we will want to work to preserve moving forward. It is to help us make choices about what to preserve, and evaluate the benefits of protecting specific parcels. It is meant to be objective, and focus us on the right factors when reviewing potential conservation easements.

The main categories for scoring used include those in the existing Gardiner Open Space Plan, but there have been additions and some changes to the subcategories.

Main categories:

1. Biological diversity and Ecological Resources
2. Water Features and Water Resources
3. Scenic and Cultural Resources
4. Agricultural Land and Working Farms
5. Community Support and Project Feasibility
6. Recreation and Public Access
7. Discretionary Points (to capture values not covered in the previous categories.)

Laura WP explained the categories and the subcategories included for each of the above. She described what had stayed the same from the existing Gardiner Open Space Plan, and what had been updated and why.

A maximum # of points an application can receive is 165.

Scoring is meant to be a guide, rather than the final factor in making choices about what to work to preserve.

Becca talked about the NRI maps, and which ones correlate to which category.

It was agreed that these maps will be useful for identifying many of the categories, when scoring a parcel.

Linda asked if input from local farmers would be useful for agricultural scoring, since none of us are farmers.

The group discussed that maybe a creating an advisory committee that includes farm representatives, along with others with experience in some of our other scored categories, would be a good way to gain useful information for, and feedback on, the scoring. It could also generate community interest in our work and conservation in general.

Jean said she would check with Warren Weigand about whether the scoring in the Open Space Plan was vetted by people with backgrounds in either the categories included or in scoring calculations.

Becca will check in with Cara Lee to find out more about the New Paltz vetting process.

Linda asked: isn't this part of a public process, and not just for our use? The results will be FOIL-able and may bring up sensitivities. We need to ask ourselves when and how this will be utilized.

If we use this form to help us vet a project, what additional due diligence will be required? How were projects vetted in the past?

Laura R asked if a 100-point system, or a 200-point system, rather than 165, could be put into place as the numerical result would be easier to understand.

She asked a subcategory be added to give points to land that is adjacent to an existing conservation easement, or Town-owned conserved property.

Laura also asked why Agricultural land received more points than Biodiverse land.

Becca said that there is a greater risk of subdivision of land in the valley that isn't on a steep slope.

Also, agriculture is a key part of the community and an economic driver for the region.

Laura WP said there is community support and grant money available to preserve farms.

Becca asked whether a risk factor map for build-out of Gardiner has been developed as part of the NRI, and what relationship the 100-year flood plain may have to the buffer areas that are around the streams on the Water map. She wants to know if the DEC has worked on a "Resilient and Connected" map. Becca is to ask Ingrid and/or Nate for input.

Next Steps: Finalize the draft, using the group's input.

If anyone has additional ideas or more input, this should be forwarded to Laura WP soon.

Once the draft is finalized, Linda will work on creating an advisory committee.

There was further discussion about who to include in this committee. Large landowners, maybe someone from Climate Smart Gardiner, as well as farmers would be good choices.

Laura WP said we could consider developing an application for landowners who may be considering voluntarily conserving their property.

Next Meeting: July 13th, via Zoom, at 4 - 5:30 PM

Quotes: Kay