

MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission Meeting, via Zoom, July 13, 2020 4- 5:30 PM.

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

Quote: (Kay)

“The ultimate test of man’s conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard.”

—Gaylord Nelson, Wisconsin US Senator & Governor, Founder of Earth Day

Opening Business.

Motion made to approve minutes from June by Kay, Becca seconded, all approved.

Agenda: two items to be added; using our budget to hire a GIS consultant and discussion of a meeting with the New Paltz Community Preservation Plan's orchestrators.

NRI Update (Jean)

Planned presentation to the Planning Board didn't occur on June 23rd.

The Planning Board asked it be rescheduled in a joint session with the Town Board.

Discussed when and whether we will need a full set of printed maps; it was agreed we should ask the DEC if they're planning to print out one or more sets for the Town.

Prioritizing Conservation Efforts and Scoring Criteria Update (Becca and Jean)

At our last meeting, we discussed whether public outreach should be part of our process in preparing the scoring criteria.

Becca reached out to Cara Lee to see if New Paltz engaged the public when they prepared theirs. They didn't; they used Behan to inform and create their criteria and have revised it as they have used it but didn't have any formal public or expert review.

Jean reached out to Warren Wiegand about Gardiner's process when scoring criteria was prepared for the 2004 Open Space Plan; he said there was minimal public involvement and no outreach in the decision-making process.

Will we seek public input? Discussed the difficulty of doing so at this time.

Becca suggested that once we are ready to start to soliciting land for open space preservation we can present it to the public and then get feedback on the whole project idea, including the scoring criteria (rather than rely on public input prior to completing a plan.)

Also discussed: using a discussion of scoring criteria as part of a general public outreach effort to help educate about and engage the public in future conservation efforts, including voluntary conservation.

Heartwood Baseline Inventory (Jean)

Jean reported that Warren Wiegand reached out to Kelly Dobbins re asking her to create a baseline assessment for the Town to review. Kelly is making sure there's no conflict between her current employment and agreeing to do this before saying yes.

Linda Geary asked: is it OK for the Town to hire her without calling for bids via a request for proposals? And should we bring this up to Warren?

Jean agreed that we should mention it, that Warren would then be able to consider whether or not a request for proposals should be made public. *(Jean to contact Warren.)*

Jean said that it has been challenging to find viable names for competitive pricing of this service. WVLT was asked first but hasn't followed through to complete the work.

Laura WP asked what scope of work Kelly has been given. Heartwood has produced their own baseline inventory. Laura would like to confirm whether Kelly is being asked to review the existing baseline, or if she is starting from scratch.

We all agree it should be a separate, independent inventory.

Jean to reach out to Warren to confirm.

New Paltz Community Preservation Fund (Laura R)

Cara Lee and John Orfitelli are part of the group working on getting a Community Preservation Fund onto the New Paltz ballot in November. Their proposal calls for a 2% tax on all real estate purchases. They asked Laura Rose to listen to, and give feedback on, the presentation they were preparing to give at a Town meeting. Laura's frame of reference was of interest to them, as she is a real estate broker as well as a member of this Commission, which advocates for the preservation of open space.

Laura found it interesting that the tax would exclude the first \$250,000 of any real estate transaction. Cara and John talked about how the # was arrived at, and the amount of money that would likely be generated, based on an analysis of sales data over the past several years. They talked about how the revenue could be spent. Laura asked if it would be used for upkeep or monitoring, and Cara said it will be for acquiring new preservation only.

They want their community to be a place that shows it values its open space.

They said it makes it a more attractive place to live. They used the positive experience of Warwick NY with this tax as a model.

Our group discussed whether such a tax would be appropriate for Gardiner. We discussed differences between Gardiner and New Paltz; our open space preservation bond expired, while they still have one. They process more real estate transactions each year. If we were interested in pursuing this, it would be important to analyze the numbers to see if it would

even make sense here. Laura R discussed the expected reaction of the real estate community, (Ulster County's Board of Realtors has been opposed to this tax, to date) and said that strong educational outreach, over an extended period of time, would likely be needed for buy-in. We may discuss this again if New Paltz voters approve their proposal in November.

Hiring a GIS Consultant (Jean)

Jean wants to use this year's budget to hire a GIS consultant to take the data that has been accumulated in making the maps for the NRI (Natural Resources Inventory project/ being completed in conjunction with the ECC and the DEC) and developing a way to manipulate and layer them, so all of the values of any given parcel in our town can be easily checked for its conservation values, and ultimately, its conservation scoring.

Sections of the town can also be reviewed this way.

Laura WP asked why this is necessary. Each map already gives us information about conservation values. We have developed scoring criteria. Using the whole set, one can create scoring without digital assistance.

Jean said it can help us see patterns better and would make us more efficient in scoring.

Becca said having the data in GIS will allow for better prioritization. She cited the experience of New Paltz in choosing lands they hope to protect. With the existing maps, we can score parcels that come to us but it's much harder to know their value relative to all other options. This data will also help us actively seek lands to protect.

Laura R, (who has agreed with Laura WP in this regard when this topic has come up before in our group) said: It might help us target parcels that have values that are high enough that it will be worth the costs associated with conservation.

We discussed pricing a consultant. We also discussed if a motion should be made to not exceed a certain amount of our budget for this consultant.

Motion made: We support identifying a consultant who can help us with mapping and manipulating GIS data, and getting a price for that work. Becca made the motion, Kay seconded, all voted in favor.

Our Next Steps:

We discussed: How are we going to "launch" ourselves into the community?

What can community outreach look like for us now? (We had envisioned hands on and face to face.) How will we begin to engage, reach out and educate?

And are we ready to begin to encourage voluntary conservation?

Laura WP expressed an eagerness to get this started.

We talked about creating a public meeting online, and what it would include.

Laura WP and Kay to work together to sketch out a plan for the group to review.

Laura R would like to invite Andy Lewis to a meeting soon, to follow up on his progress in monitoring town-owned properties and the town's conservation easements, and to offer our assistance in doing this, as needed.

Next Meeting: August 17, 2020 at 4PM - 5:30 PM via Zoom

Quotes: Laura R.