

## **MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission Zoom Meeting, Monday October 12, 2020.**

Meeting opened at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Laura Wong-Pan (Acting Chair,) Linda Geary, Kellie George, Kay Hoiby, Laura Rose, Rebecca Benner. Excused: Jean McGrane (Chair.) Minutes taken by: Laura Rose.

### **Opening Business.**

September minutes approval: Motion made by Laura Rose, Kay 2nded, all approved.

### **NRI Presentation Update:**

Head count taken for planned attendance at Planning Board Meeting tomorrow at 7.

The first part of the meeting is to introduce the NRI to the Planning Board and ZBA. They will be walked through using the maps to establish the conservation values of one or two parcels. Laura Rose will open the presentation and introduce the DEC.

For the second part, Laura WP will be training the Planning Board in using the conservation easement template the Town Board adopted.

Brief discussion of the last meeting of the NRI group. Mostly it was prep for the presentation. Nate Nardi-Cyrus was given a copy of our scoring criteria checklist, with the understanding that it's still in draft form. He will probably use it in preparing his presentation, which should result in helpful training for us in using it.

### **Planned Town Law Updates for the ECC and GOSC.**

Linda Geary reached out to Laura Walls to volunteer to assist with the Town Board's interest in sorting out the responsibilities in the local laws for the ECC and GOSC.

*Linda will stay in touch with Laura Walls.*

Briefly discussed Town's decision to reverse the decision to disband the ECC.

**Jacqueline Estates update:** The selling realtor reached out to Laura Rose and said the new owner might be interested in preserving the land rather than developing it. Laura R asked the group if she should reach out to the new owner. It was agreed that she could, letting the new owner know that we are here, and offering us as a resource for learning more about conservation easements, voluntary conservation, or answering any other questions she may have. *Laura R to reach out.*

We discussed whether we know anything about the conservation values of this property (we have a few ideas but the NRI could help us with a better assessment.) This led to the planned next topic, of reviewing the scoring criteria for open space protection that Kellie, Becca and Laura Wong Pan had worked on, and that we have discussed over several meetings.

**Scoring Criteria review:** Minor changes to the current version were discussed. Clarify reference to the SP zone, reorder categories. Discussed if we should add a score for connectivity/ as in, property touches something already preserved. Agreed it's sufficiently addressed by the large forest bloc scoring, and also can be added under discretionary points.

Rebecca said conservation values are not only about expanding the size of a current protected area but rather about the landscape configuration of the protected parcels, ex. can we create connected corridors between protected lands? This should be given value.

We are almost ready to adopt this. A score for climate resilience will be added.

Becca offered language for climate resilience, based on the NRI map.

Laura WP to make the updates, and we can vote to adopt as early as our next meeting.

*Laura WP to circulate the updated document to the group when ready.*

**Blue Chip Farms:** Kay was unable to get more info about the rumored change in ownership. All seems status quo there for now and Laura R reported that the County record doesn't reflect a sale. Since it's over the line and in Shawangunk, it's beyond our purview, but we are interested in any changes that might occur.

#### **Education Plan Update:**

Kay shared an updated plan for our group to schedule presentations.

These will target educating others in our Town about conservation easements, and present the outline of a potential conservation easement acquisition program.

The plan includes tomorrow night's scheduled Planning Board training as part of our outreach effort.

We scheduled a possible date for an event on December 3rd, a Zoom conference for the public to learn about our group, conservation easements in general and easements that exist in our town. This will be our group's first "for the public" outreach. Laura Rose to present and the American Farm Trust to be invited to speak on costs and tax benefits associated with voluntary preservation.

A third educational session is proposed, to begin the call to action for voluntary preservation, and/or announce the start of a conservation easement acquisition program.

The first part of the session would be presented by our group. Speakers to be invited for the second part: Possibly the Walkkill Valley Land Trust or Linda's colleagues at Rhodenhausen (George and Victoria.)

**Moving ahead with a conservation easements acquisition program:**

Jean and Laura WP plan to sit down with Marybeth Majestic, and maybe Laura Walls, to discuss whether the Town wishes us to move forward with this goal. We need to know if the Town wishes to hold additional conservation easements, given by the public and solicited by the Open Space Commission, which aren't part of subdivision proposals.

There is also the question of whether the Town has money or person-power available to monitor new easements, and enforce their terms. This is a commitment the Town will be making in perpetuity.

There are additional costs of voluntary preservation, which were discussed at our last meeting, including surveys, visible, permanent marking of boundaries, the preparation of baseline documentation, appraisal, title and legal fees. The Town may or may not have funding available to put towards any of these costs.

Laura WP prepared a list of the possible costs, so we can discuss them with the Supervisor and begin to organize what we will tell the public about these. Owners will likely have to contribute to, or cover, the costs of their own easements. They should be given an idea of what it could cost when the idea of permanent preservation is presented to them by our group.

It will also be important to share information about the tax implications of a conservation easement donation.

Grants were mentioned as a potential option for absorbing some of the costs, but no specific plans were made to seek or pursue any.

Meeting adjourned at 6:15 PM.

**Next Meeting:** Monday November 9, at 5PM

**Quotes:** Kay