

MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission Meeting, via Zoom.

Monday December 14, 2020, 5:00 PM.

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

Quotes (Jean)

"Only if understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help.

Only if we help, shall all be saved." Jane Goodall

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

Mahatma Gandhi

" I believe in God, only I spell it Nature." Frank Lloyd Wright

Opening Business.

Approval of November minutes: Motion made by Jean, Becca seconded, all approved.

No changes to agenda.

Next regular meeting planned for January 11, 2021, 5 PM - 6:30 PM.

Sexual Harassment Training.

New Paltz Chamber of Commerce offered an online training that Kay, Kellie, Jean, Laura WP and Laura R participated in today. Brief discussion of the training.

Linda was also registered but is just out of the hospital.

Real Estate Transfer Tax for Open Space:

Becca is in the process of contacting Carter Strickland for more info on how New Paltz achieved success. We discussed if we should invite him to our next meeting.

We discussed others involved, including Neil Bettez, Christie DeBoer and Cara Lee.

We decided to invite Carter, Cara Lee, and Dave Dukler from the Town Board to our next meeting to further the discussion of considering a similar ballot initiative for Gardiner.

Planned Town Updates to the responsibilities of the ECC; proposed addition of a CAC.

Jean McGrane has urged our group to review the Town Board's proposed changes of the Town's law regarding the Environmental Conservation Commission.

Jean previously submitted her personal comments and suggestions about the elimination of the ECC and the addition of a CAC to the Town Board.

Our group was sent Jean's draft before submission, and some of us weighed in, but we didn't complete a full group analysis.

We will work on one. Jean to draft, group to edit and submit comments on behalf of GOSC prior to the next Town Board meeting in January.

Jean asked that we discuss the important points that should be included in the comments.

Discussion included:

Laura WP compared proposed CAC responsibilities to the ECC's, side by side.

Much is the same in each.

Differences include a change to the group's relationship with the Planning Board.

We discussed that it is important for the Planning Board to work in cooperation with the ECC, and removing that connection isn't an idea we support. We think the problems that exist in the current relationship need to be explored openly and that this might lead to a better outcome in terms of full protection of sensitive land, ecosystems and aquifers, than severing or diminishing the relationship.

Jean suggested that the Town consider issuing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the purpose of identifying an outside consulting firm who specializes in biological diversity and conservation value assessment.

Such a firm would be available to the Planning Board, Town Board, ECC and other Town commissions when needed to identify and evaluate conservation issues on a specific project. The expertise provided by such a firm is different from the majority of environmental engineering firms.

Laura R said she doesn't see a reason to disband the ECC and substitute a CAC.

Instead, whatever issues the Town is having need to be honestly addressed.

The ECC is a form of a CAC; it isn't a different type of group.

Jean said there are more people being interviewed for the group, and perhaps expanding it will help. She also said Laura Walls has proposed a 5-year term, instead of 7 for ECC members. Laura Walls felt that the 7-year term was excessive and deterring the recruitment of new members.

Jean said that terms, and the sizes of each Commission in the Town, could be a standard size/ large enough to make things happen and small enough to be able to regularly achieve a quorum. We are functioning well with 5 regulars plus 2 alternates.

Jean also thinks the leadership position should be rotated more frequently than every 5 years.

We discussed that while this isn't exactly what we've been asked to weigh in on, that we would like to see an update to the responsibilities of all of the Town's environmental organizations, including ours. For example, our Commission was formed, in part, to spend a bond that no longer exists. We think that spending the bond could be removed from our stated mission.

And we discussed the ECC's leadership role in developing the NRI. Becca asked whether it should be their responsibility to get the maps digitized, based on their listed responsibilities, rather than ours, as we have been planning.

Linda Geary had helped Laura Walls identify duplication and overlap of duties currently in the Gardiner Local Laws regarding the Environmental Conservation Commission, and the Open Space Commission.

We think that the responsibilities of Gardiner's Open Space Commission should be clearly separated from those of the ECC or CAC/ whichever name the group lands with.

We are fine with picking up the exclusive responsibility of maintaining an inventory of the Town's open space.

Moving ahead with an Open Space/ Conservation Easement Acquisition Program:

Laura WP circulated a draft proposal for the group to review via email about a week before this meeting. We discussed questions asked and comments made about the draft.

-Agreed to use the acronym GOSC to describe ourselves and distinguish us from the Open Space Conservancy, which is active in this area.

- Agreed that we should be accepting land donations as well as conservation easements. Brief discussion of advantages and disadvantages of this choice.

- Agreed that our Nov. 30th experiment with using the NRI maps with the scoring criteria our group has been working on showed that we wanted to make further changes to it, including expanding the biodiversity categories.

Laura WP to cite the scoring criteria as "evolving" in the proposal and Laura R to work on updating it.

- Discussed that the ranking criteria is advisory and not the entire basis for any decision.

-Agreed to remove any size limit for acquisitions.

- Agreed to identify surveys, permanent marking, baseline assessments, reporting, legal fees, ongoing monitoring and enforcement as potential costs when accepting any land donation or conservation easement, while not assigning responsibility for those costs.

Instead, cost will be addressed on a project by project basis.

- Discussed the potential role of volunteers in the monitoring process. Jean said: It could be nice to incorporate volunteers in this process, and, at the same time, it would be problematic to rely on volunteers for regular monitoring.

Laura WP to update and circulate the draft, based on our discussion and comments.

Parcels we have been asked to review.

Referred by Andy Lewis: SBL 93.1-4-46 Pioneer Lane .39 acres

Referred by Supervisor Majestic: SBL 93.8 - 2-3 Forest Glen 1 acre

Our group had a special session on November 30th to score each of these, crossing our draft scoring criteria list with each parcel as depicted on the NRI maps.

This scoring put the Pioneer Lane parcel as higher priority than the Forest Glenn but also revealed that we need to work further on the scoring criteria.

Also, that having the stacking of those maps digitized could lead to faster ranking.

To get more information about the Pioneer Lane parcel, Laura Rose called Dianna Negrotti, the owner, last week. Laura conveyed some of the conversation.

Dianna lives in Connecticut. Her husband bought the land in the 1960's. They'd planned to build a cabin there at some point but he has passed and she is up in age. She belongs to an Open Space Commission where she lives, and is considering donating the parcel.

Dianna was interested in learning a procedure, and also in learning the current market value of the property. She expressed being torn and preferring to sell instead if it's worth more than a few thousand dollars. At the same time, she said she'd sell for less than market value, if the parcel were to be purchased and preserved as a public park or other open space.

Laura offered to schedule a follow up conversation with more members of GOSC to give her more information on a potential donation procedure. She asked if Dianna has a survey, which she does.

Laura Wong Pan will reach out to the owner of the Forest Glen parcel.

We discussed the location, the lack of a road to it, its proximity to the Smith parcel, and the group of adjoining parcels that also haven't been built on. This parcel, on its own, ranked quite low in our scoring criteria but that doesn't mean it is a bad idea to preserve it.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Next Meeting: Monday January 11, 2021 at 5 PM.