

Notes from Gardiner Open Space Meeting

Date of meeting: February 10, 2020

Attendees: Laura Wong-Pan, Rebecca Benner, Jean McGrane, Kay Hoiby, Linda Geary, Kellie George and special guest Nate Nardi-Cyrus

Quote (thank you Linda): But human beings, at our best, are so inventive and creative and ingenious and I think that when we use love and compassion as our guiding principles, we can create, develop and implement system of change that are beneficial to all sentient beings and to the environment. Joaquin Phoenix

Introductory Comments

- Becca motioned to approve last meeting minutes; Kay seconded; all approved
- Jean introduced Nate Nardi-Cyrus from DEC who came to help us understand how a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) can be used to help advance a plan that would be the basis for what could be funded by a Community Preservation Fund (the CPF is a municipal land conservation fund that funds protection and stewardship of prioritized parcels)

Summary of Nate's Presentation

These notes are not meant to be exhaustive of what Nate covered. He shared the presentation with the GOSC and that is the best record of what was covered at the meeting. These notes represent some highlights from the presentation and discussion.

Nate started out describing the process for creating a prioritized map which would form the map by which parcels would be eligible for protection and stewardship through a Community Preservation Fund.

First Step: NRI

- Natural Resources Inventory aims to put all known information about an area's natural resources in one place
- Can be a variety of information – e.g. geology, soils, habitats, water resources, cultural resources, climate, etc and this can be combined into maps to generate an NRI
- An NRI can then form the basis of an open space plan's maps if these are showing the resources a place wants to protect
- Hudson Valley mapper is an NRI but at a large scale. Town NRIs can bring in more relevant local information

Second Step: Prioritize

- Prioritizing the NRI can lead to an Open Space Index (OSI)
- An OSI is a prioritization that has been accepted by the town and approved by legislation

- An OSI is simply a map with parcels on it that will “count” as being prioritized for investment – this will form the basis of the parcels that would be eligible for preservation using the community preservation fund
- Generating an OSI requires public input – Nate talked a lot about what Blooming Grove did:
 - First they generated an NRI
 - Then they got public input on places in Blooming Grove the community felt important (the community literally came and drew circles on the map)
 - Next the CAC (Conservation Action Council) in Blooming Grove with a contractor assigned values to the NRI based on this input and the underlying science
 - Then they hired another contractor to develop a GIS map with ranked clusters of parcels
 - This became their OSI
 - This OSI became their prioritization for their CPF (Community Preservation Fund) plan

Step 3: Plan, protect manage

- Open Space plans often do more than simply identify natural resources but also include the how a community might protect or conserve them
- After the prioritization is in hand (note: Gardiner Open Space plan maps could serve as the basis for our prioritization or a base layer from which we could get community input) the last step is how to execute on it

What is the CPF?

- Municipal land conservation fund that funds protection and stewardship of prioritized parcels
- Can be funded by a real estate transfer tax subject to State legislative approval - Ulster county fought to get the transfer tax eligibility for the whole county so every town is now eligible in Ulster to have a CPF – need to pass it as a town referendum
- The CPF needs to be guided by an approved plan (town approves the plan)
- Way the tax works:
 - Can be set a variety of ways – town decides how it is set
 - E.g. can be up to 2% on anything above a particular house value (e.g. median house value)
- Referendum is still hard to pass – generally good to have some \$\$ for a political campaign given the outside interests
 - Blooming Grove is aiming to pass the referendum in 2021 – have all the plans in place

What does this mean to Gardiner

- Our open space plan could get public input and become a Community Preservation Plan which could be the basis for the CPF
- We could update the open space plan with better data from the NRI or could just proceed with it as the base for public input
- We could use their ranking criteria to develop a prioritization if we learn more
- Definitely need to engage the public and start outreach as this will require community buy in
- NRI we are creating has many uses in and of itself beyond just the prioritization – e.g. we can use it to advise on development proposals for easements, etc
- Can use the NRI to get some idea of impacts of climate change – e.g. can look at data from previous floods and areas that are riparian buffers
- We don't yet have prioritized clusters

Next Steps we discussed post presentation

- Not yet ready for a CPF
- Do think it's time to start outreach – will revisit Laura W-P proposal at next meeting
 - Laura will send out sketch of a proposal for a program before our next meeting for review
- Becca will call John Behan to understand the ranking criteria to see if we want to use these alongside our new NRI maps to help prioritize
- Jean will reach out to find various ways other communities incorporate Open Space Plans into Town Law as well as conservation easements templates such as what GOSC has provided to the Town.