

MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission, March 9, 2020, 7-8:30 PM.

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

Quotes: (Jean)

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter. -Rachel Carson

"The environment, after all, is where we all meet, where we all have a mutual interest. It is one thing that all of us share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become." - Lady Bird Johnson

Opening Business.

Motion made by Laura R to approve February 10, 2020 minutes. Kay seconded, all approved.

Activities Since Our Last Meeting:

- **Hess Easement:** Jean has been reaching out to Dawn Haight of OSI for a status update as to whether or not OSI is still planning to transfer stewardship to the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, but Dawn has not responded. In the interim, monitoring is the responsibility of the Town of Gardiner, and Andy Lewis has this property listed as one of his current targets.

Laura R suggested reaching out to other contacts we made at the Open Space Institute, maybe Bob Anderberg: randerberg@osiny.org, to see if there has been any forward movement in making a transfer. If the Town of Gardiner is able to begin to monitor its own conservation easements, the current arrangement becomes less of a concern.

- **Files Update:** Kay is continuing the work of going through the old Gardiner Open Space Commission files. She found a rating guide for choosing open space parcels that has more detail than the one we've already found. She will share this with the group.

Kay is culling doubles from the files, and reading about prior open space meetings, including an event that was scheduled for local farmers. She has found potential funding sources in the files too.

Laura Wong Pan suggested scanning in all the files; Kay said the volume would be prohibitive but she is scanning in what seems relevant to our work around prioritization. Becca said that we each have a wealth of files at this point, and that it might be good to come up with a system for organizing, storing, accessing and sharing them as a group. Becca has volunteered to look into how a Google Drive file system might work for us.

- Conservation Easement and Town-Owned Property Monitoring Program:

Jean followed up with Andy Lewis, our Building Inspector, re his progress. He's met with Ed Pestone, of Mohonk Preserve, for training, and has monitored one property so far. Ed joined him in this walk. As there's no baseline for the property (it's the Town-owned fishing access off of Old Ford Road,) Andy tried to figure out how to address its absence. He wants to share the work he's completed thus far with our group, including his photos and reporting, to be sure everything we're looking for is included.

We discussed inviting him to our next meeting, and continuing to work routinely with him on this program.

- Baseline Inventories:

Progress hasn't been made yet in getting the baseline assessment organized for Shaft Road.

The Heartwood Easements are also in need of baselines that haven't been ordered.

Jean said the Heartwood people said they were having problems getting in touch with the Wallkill Valley Land Trust.

We discussed if we should intervene and try making contact ourselves. We also discussed offering the names of other people who can also produce baselines, and developing a procedure for a three-bid process.

We agree that we (the Town) should be the ones offering the names of those who will produce the baseline, rather than allowing developers to hire professionals we haven't vetted. There should be a list of approved baseline inventory providers that developers will hire and pay.

Laura R to reach out to Meme Hanley Borin of the Land Trust Alliance for additional names, Jean to reach out to the Orange County Land Trust.

Re Shaft Road, we discussed if an RFP (Request for Proposal) should be sent out to potential completers of this baseline. If so, the Town would have to authorize the request.

We had suggested the Town use WVLT to complete the Shaft Road baseline, however as of now, the contact hasn't been made. This may be because their organization is going through restructuring. They may not be the best choice for this project right now, and so perhaps shouldn't be the only option we offer.

We had also talked about asking WVLT to become involved in monitoring the Shaft Road easement. Laura R's question: if we're going to ask them to monitor, shouldn't they also do the baseline. Jean responded that the Town, at the moment, is scheduled to do the monitoring for this easement.

A question that came out of this discussion is: will we by default be giving the opportunity to monitor conservation easements to the WVLT / assuming they want them and also, assuming funding is available?

Can we gauge the capacity of the Town to do this job instead, for this easement or for new ones? How many new ones will the Town be able to take proper care of?

Since our monitoring program is barely off the ground, Laura R argued for outside assistance where ever possible. Laura WP wasn't sure we should be a pipeline for projects for an outside organization. Further discussion of this and a plan is needed in our group before we approach the Town, through education and outreach, about offering properties for voluntary conservation.

- **Review and Revise Town Law:** We will wait on this agenda item until after the NRI is completed.

- **Update on Town Board Discussion:** David Dukler proposed a \$10 voluntary contribution per Air BnB rental, for Gardiner conservation projects.

New Business:

- Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) update:

Laura R gave an update about the last meeting with the ECC and the DEC.

13 beautiful maps have been produced to date. The NRI group went over each and made corrections at the last meeting. The DEC, who is producing the maps, has been very good at listening, and being responsive.

Partially because of our inclusion and input, many of the maps correspond with the criteria already specified in our Open Space Plan for choosing parcels, and they should be very helpful to us when they're completed (and we have finalized our plans for how we wish to make choices.)

A full-sized copy of each map will ultimately be printed for our group, with parcel boundaries included. We may see these as early as May.

The DEC has made clear that they're interested in having as much of the Town as possible familiarized with the Natural Resources Inventory, and involved in its completion. The Planning Board has been approached, and the NRI is expected to be introduced at their April meeting.

This idea of Town inclusion led to a discussion of how our group can use the maps as an educational tool, to introduce ourselves and our mission to the Town. We all agree that looking at maps of where we live might be both fun and popular.

Jean also shared that we'd discussed naming un-named local streams at the NRI meeting, which could also be an engaging community activity, along with correcting omissions.

We talked about being closer to being ready to engage the community, and create an educational program.

A discussion followed re whether the system in the current Open Space Plan for measuring the desirability of parcels to be conserved is obsolete, and it is agreed that we will review the scoring system before moving forward. The NRI should offer new and better data to work with. We also discussed if available funding should be applied as a category, and worth a few points.

Do we need a clear idea of our scoring criteria before approaching the public through educational engagement? Or can we engage first, and offer the idea of voluntary preservation at a later date?

- *New Agricultural and Conservation Easements:*

Jean asked if we think the conservation easement templates we've offered to the Town should be adopted by them in a resolution, to encourage their use. Laura WP said that some organizations that will fund an easement may come into it with their own template, so flexibility will be important. Mandating the specific template may be problematic. It might be possible to create a resolution that includes the expectation that a template be used, without requiring a specific template. Laura WP to look at wording such a resolution.

- *Proposed Steps to an Easement Acquisition Program:*

Laura WP put together an action proposal through which we can structure moving towards the acquisition of new conservation easements. This proposal is comprehensive, and includes the full sweep of where we are now, though acquisition.

Items discussed:

To start, we can use the NRI to help us work on developing the scope of our program, and discussing what our goals and priorities are. We need to do this before engaging the public.

Land must have specific conservation values to be worthy of the time and expense involved. This is true for both paid for, and donated, easements. Donated easements will cost money to develop baselines for, to monitor. Potential enforcement funding will also be needed. We need to be clear about costs involved.

If we are going to be advising around conservation easements, we need to be very clear about what we're advising. We should recommend resources people can refer to for more information on tax breaks, rather than give direct advice.

We can begin to look at the priorities listed in the Open Space Plan: do we agree with these? Do they remain relevant? Are there additional factors to consider?

Becca to help go through the number rankings at our next meeting. Jean to ask Ingrid about current DEC prioritization strategies. We can look through other towns' scoring options, and also the more extended prioritization options for Gardiner that Kay found in the files.

- **Agenda:** Jean asked that we submit agenda items for the next meeting.

Next Meeting: April 6, 6 PM, Town Hall

Quotes: Kay **Snacks:** Laura R