

Minutes, Open Space Commission Meeting, Hybrid format/ in Town Hall and on Zoom.
June 13-2022 6-7:30 PM.

Attendance: In person: Jean-Ann McGrane, Linda Geary, Laura Rose, Kay Hoiby, Tara Hoey
On Zoom: Laura Wong-Pan, Becky Fullam, Rod Dressel, Kellie George, Cari Watkins-Bates

Opening Business:

May meeting minutes approved. Motion by Kay Hoiby second Laura Rose. No objections.

July 11, 2022, 6 -7:30 PM next meeting, hybrid format, on Zoom and in person in Town Hall.

Tara Hoey to offer a quote for the next meeting.

Quote for this meeting brought by Kay.

"If I were to name the three most precious resources of life, I should say books, friends, and nature. And the greatest of these, at least the most constant and always at hand, is nature."
John Burroughs

Next: Cari -Bates from Scenic Hudson is presenting on Farmland Protection.

Topic: How farmland preservation works at Scenic Hudson.

What she said: Scenic Hudson is a non-profit. They have been working on farmland protection for 20 years. They have protected about 20,000 acres to date. They are working to sustain and expand their farmlands. Town of Red Hook is the model of farmland protection. They have a CPF. Their work has leveraged money from their bond, Dutchess Country program and federal grant program. Foodshed conservation plan brings a regional approach to farmland protection.

<http://www.scenichudson.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/foodshed-conservation-plan-web.pdf>

In 2012 there were 4,125 farms in the Hudson Valley. The Hudson Valley has seen increasing land cost and aging farmers. There are fewer farms today.

Cari discussed how farmland is protected using conservation easements:. A land trust, as a nonprofit organization, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements.

Benefits: A conservation easement is a legal tool, the land stays in private ownership, and it keeps land available for agricultural uses. It assists in farm growth and planning, intergenerational planning.

Agricultural conservation easements restrict the development of non- agricultural buildings. It may apply to all or some of the land. 99% of Scenic Hudson agricultural easements are not open to the public.

A conservation easement can be donated, or it can be purchased by a Town, Land Trust and/or other organization. The conservation easement stays permanently with the land. The granting landowner can sell their property and the conservation easement will remain on the land. It is less likely that land with a conservation easement can be sold at full market value. The landowner is paid a price that reflects the difference between the fair market value, and the change of value the easement creates. This is meant to help keep farms available to farmers.

- donated by landowner
- sold for full fair market value (“purchase of development rights” or “PDR”)
- partially donated (“bargain sale”)

Appraisals are land only. What’s the difference between the before and after values? What could they sell it for today on an unrestricted basis, without an easement in place? What’s the value after the easement is in place? The difference between “before” and “after” values determines the value of easement.

Leveraging Funding for PDR

- USDA NRCS Agricultural Land Easement program (“ALE”)
- NYS Dept. of Ag. and Markets Farmland Protection Program (“FPIG”) (They fund 1 out of 4 applications submitted to program)
- County funding
- Local/towns funding
- Private funding (Scenic Hudson falls here)

They see that conservation easements do not affect the assessed values in Ulster County.

Land Planning for conservation easements.

You can address other types of conservation within this tool. Places chosen are in the nerve center most flexible for buildings and farming. Woodlands, wetlands, waterways, opportunities for additional protections within the tool.

Foodshed conservation plan lists farms that are right for preservation. While their map shows Gardiner is the highest priority, Scenic Hudson doesn't have a list currently of what exactly is included in their data. We don't know which farms specifically they are referring to in our Town. They used many data sources and human reconciliation of these lists. It is not a conclusive list. They only looked at farms of 45 acres and above for the Foodshed Plan.

Questions to Cari: Do you partner with local municipalities? Yes, they will do it where their money makes the biggest difference. It helps if a Town has funds in place to leverage. As an example, having a local funding source in Dutchess County offering 50% in first made it more likely for Scenic Hudson to offer significant matching funds.

What are the priorities that SH looks at? Geographically, specific clusters where there are the best agricultural soil type and largest size, within the clusters. Where we can have the most impact with the funds we have.

We prioritize where we can use other sources to help support. Land trust partner. Example WVLT, preserved the Taliaferro Farm. They had local funding too.

Land Trusts tend to hold the conservation easement of these farmland protection grants.

Farmland protection

How do you choose the farm?

Are your grants ongoing?

What is the \$ amount funding within the last 12 months?

Preemptive purchase right. This tool is meant to help keep farmlands available for farming. Sets up an agricultural value to the land > Not within the farm family. You can only sell it for what it's worth for agriculture. Creates a Farmer to Farmer sale value. You get an appraisal.

Community land trust, new idea, access to land and ability to build equity in that farm with long term leases. Tompson Finch farm is a model of this. They get a 99 year lease, they don't own the land.

Accredited by the land trust. Reserve means to enforce conservation easement. A municipality needs to set aside resources for their monitoring and enforcement.

End of presentation by Scenic Hudson.

GOSC goals for 2022, Goals #3 and 4:

Kay discussed the public Farmland Preservation educational series, planned for the Fall, which will include:

Scenic Hudson - Conservation Easement

NY State David Behm - Grant info

How to lease your land to a farmer?

Conservation deductions presentation about nuts and bolts of the finances.

Could WVLT present this information?

Kay called Paul Colucci to see if local farmers are interested in webinars on farming land leases. He said, yes. Would benefit the landowners to partner.

Kay will put together a list of what public education is planned for the next meeting.

2022 Goal #1 update:

Jean reports that there's a draft of the CPP on the town's website. Public hearing is scheduled for July 12. Special Meeting to adopt the local law July 27.

Goal #2 update:

Town- held conservation easements, Town land owned for the purpose of conservation; establishing a monitoring program. Laura Rose will meet with WVLT's. Christie DeBoer on Friday June 17, 2022 to further review the contract.

Goal #3. Gardiner Day we will start planning after summer.

Other GOSC activity updates: Open Space drinking water protection committee. Got the results. The wells were sampled, 30 wells. There was a discovery that water monitors were put in 15 years ago. Monitors can still be used. New batteries will be installed in these and the town can start using new data. Water usage for the town has stayed the same but has gone up by Milk Street. More information about this at the next meeting to be shared by Linda.

The Gunks Climbing Coalition is asking for a parking lot permit in the SP zone. They will be disturbing the land to make this parking lot. Is this an Open Space Commission issue? Should we be weighing in on this as a group?

Who is it from the town that looks at the environmental impact?

Site Plan vs a special use permit.

Is the land they purchased a nature preserve or outdoor recreation business?

It's being processed as an outdoor recreation business.

Site plan review only? If it's site plan review only then ECC would not do a review. Planning board would do the neg dec SEQR at the meeting.

Special permit request would trigger ECC review and a public hearing.

We would have to do background research to weigh in.

Decided: the Open Space Commission will not weigh in on the parking lot.

Meeting ending 7:39 -