

MINUTES, Gardiner Open Space Commission, Monday Sept 9, 2019, 5- 6:30 PM.

Present:

Jean McGrane, Laura Wong Pan, Linda Geary, Kay Hoiby, Laura Rose, Rebecca Benner, Kellie George.

Quotes (Becca).

"One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between man and nature shall not be broken."

-Leo Tolstoy

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." - Albert Einstein

Opening Business.

1. Motion made by Linda to approve August minutes. Kay seconded, all approved August minutes.
2. Mandated Sexual Harassment Training: We each need to be certified.
 - Laura WP thinks we can complete this online; Jean to discuss options with Marybeth.
 - The Town will have a workshop as will surrounding Towns. Dates to be circulated.
3. Meeting Times: We agreed to begin at 5:30 PM, starting at our next meeting.
 - Our next meeting will be on October 7th, 2019, due to Columbus Day.
4. Jean broached the idea of establishing targeted small working groups and bi-monthly meetings. This was discussed but no decision was made.

2020 Budget Request.

Jean has asked that our budget of \$2,200 from last year be rolled over into this year.

We talked about ways it might be useful to spend money this year, including:

-Do we know how Shaft Road's baseline assessment will be paid for? Would it be useful for us to include a line for this? We know the Town is hiring WVLT to do the work; do we know if they've moved ahead with this plan and have their budgeting for the work organized?

-Are we ready to hire a person to help us use GIS data for digital mapping?

Are we clear about the scope of work we'd like them to accomplish?

We decided we should set goals for this work prior to hiring anyone.

The work would likely include helping us figure out which parcels we might want to target for preservation, based on the criteria outlined in the Open Space Plan.

- Should we use our budget in the future to pay for surveys of Town-held conservation easements, or Town owned properties that were given for conservation purposes? Should that be our responsibility? Jean said we'd need to tie any such request to specific estimates/written quotes.

Draft Agricultural Conservation Easement Template.

Laura WP has looked at this. We have the NYS Ag and Markets template to use as a basis.

However, she thinks we might want to include the input of local farmers before completing the draft.

Is there any sort of existing farm group or council specific to Gardiner? The Open Space Plan advocated for the development of an Ag Advisory Council.

We discussed our participation in the review of easements to date, identified challenges we faced in providing our review and comments, and what we have learned from participating in this process.

Writing a follow up memo to the Town was discussed, recommending that, as a follow-up to our presentation, the non-agricultural easement template we presented be officially adopted by the Town for use with non-ag projects moving forward, including Heartwood. Linda will write the memo.

We discussed whether it would be appropriate to grant Heartwood an agricultural easement, given the scope of the project.

Setting Priorities for 2020.

This discussion included:

1. Consider new initiatives, such as choosing a target property to work on preserving.

-Using digital mapping to help us choose was discussed.

2. Follow up on and continue the work accomplished in year one.

- Continue work on agricultural easement template; reach out to farmers for input.

- Look again at the priorities we set in our two group meetings designed for that purpose.

How much has been accomplished? Which of the goals already listed would work well in the near future?

- Present the database to the Town Board in the near future.

This presentation includes a summary of the elements of an effective municipal conservation easement program, and reinforces our presentation to the Town Board of our first year's work.

- Work on clarifying our role in the Town's planning process.

- Find out what tool the Planning Board is using to assess conservation values and consider if we have more to add to this evaluation.

Jean recommended that a qualified professional or firm be hired by the Planning Board, funded by monies provided by the developer of any proposed project. Identification and hiring of someone with this expertise should be done early in the process, shortly after the PB is informed that a conservation easement is being considered as part of a proposed development.

Jean believes that this would ensure that the requisite information needed to evaluate the conservation value of the property in question be collected in a timely manner, helping to ensure that an easement will be created with the maximum conservation value to the Town of Gardiner. It will also provide information to help properly design a conservation easement specific to the property in question.

This led to further discussion. Becca suggested we limit the number of conservation values, or maybe rate them, to help narrow choices down.

We discussed whether we want the Town to send all proposed conservation easements to us for review and comment. There were numerous questions posed regarding what such a review would involve. Laura WP asked: Review what exactly? The location of the easements? Restrictions? Surveys? Reports? Will we have a say in making changes to proposed locations? How broad, or limited, will our role be? There is a need for much more clarification before we accept any formal role in this process in the future.

We discussed figuring out a systems-changing approach instead, or in the meantime, as in, helping the town set up better systems for accepting and managing conservation easements moving forward. We have already done some of this work.

Also, we may need to review and change laws to support any change in our role.

The ECC is already supposed to be commenting on easements. Should both committees be charged with similar responsibilities?

A small group could review our role(s) and make recommendations.

Jean brought up organizing the existing GOSC files. We need to set up a drawer in Town Hall for them.

Laura R volunteered to help organize the files.

Other Ideas:

Shaft Road's first deadline for monitoring is coming up (October 1st.)

- Can we connect Andy with WVLT so he can accompany them as they do the baseline? Will they offer him training for annual monitoring? Is that monitoring going to be Andy's charge, or WVLT's?

- Mohonk Preserve offered to let Andy shadow their monitoring person, and help train him.

Becca to start a list of how we can and should prioritize information about what we want to conserve. She will look at how it was done in the past. Laura WP will join her in prioritizing.

Jean suggested we consider a public meeting, reintroducing the Town to the Open Space Plan.

Kay will look into stewardship funding, and ways other municipalities have accomplished this. She will also keep her eyes open for grants. Kellie to join her in this effort.

Next Meeting: Monday October 7, 2019, 5:30 - 7 PM.

Quotes, Kay. Snacks: Laura WP.