

FCPOS Agricultural Meeting a Success

On Saturday, April 1st, Friends of Clifton Park Open Space hosted a meeting for large landholders in the town. The meeting was intended to foster discussion on issues of interest on farming, open space and land conservation. Three speakers presented and lunch was served, in part, with contributions from the Hannaford Markets. About 30 people attended and there were much interest and many questions.

Town Assessor Walter Smead was the first speaker.

Mr. Smead talked about the 1996 reassessment and its focus on primary sites for houses, but leaving little definition for residual sites. These could include farmland, wetlands, pasture, etc. He also clarified that NYS law calls for current use, not highest investment use. He praised the Town's Conservation Easement Program as one of the best in the state in that it takes valuation decision away from the assessor and relies on set values. Conservation Easement procedures were also clarified. Other issues discussed included agricultural new construction, barns as historical buildings, special use buildings, wetlands assessment and more. The Assessor was willing to review any conditions which are out of line for reevaluation.

Saratoga Couy Soil & Water Conservation District speaker, John Hamilton

Since Agricultural Use Assessment are based on soil types as

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Steering Committee:

Frank Berlin, *Friends of Veteran's Park*
Margaret Catellier, *Citizens Assn for Reasonable Expansion; United Civic Assns & Neighbors*
Bill Engleman, *Saratoga Cty Water Quality Committee*
Gil Kortz, *Clifton Park Zoning Board, past Chair of CP Environmental Conservation Committee*
Ray Seymour, *President of Board of Directors of Land Trust Of the Saratoga Region*
Clark Wilson, *Officer of Board of Directors of the Rexford Civic Association*
Greg Sundik, *Liason to Town of Clifton Park, ECC*



Town Applies for Open Space Grant

The Town of Clifton Park Planning Department applied for a NYS Department of State grant for \$65,000 under the Quality Communities Demonstration Program 1999-2000. They expect to hear about an award by the end of the summer.

The tasks the project intends to undertake include:

1. Inventory Completion: including meetings with the consultant, public, and open space committee, finalization of the resource maps including wetlands, streams, floodplains, agricultural district, historic areas, cultural resources, and recreational facilities, preparation of a narrative report and photos, and development of empirical data.
2. Goals and Objectives: including a survey of residents on Open Space values, defining the goals and objective, and meetings and presentations.
3. Conceptual Open Space Plan: the preparation of an Open Space Map and supporting narrative to be presented at public meetings.
4. Fiscal Modeling: the collection of data related to the school district and the Town, the development of a model analyzing the revenues, costs and benefits of an open space plan versus the costs of developed land and a final report for public presentation.
5. Final Plan: synthesize the information received during the public comment process, with input from Town officials, into a final Open Space Plan with a map and summary brochure to be used in promoting the Open Space Plan.
6. Adoption and SEQ: the development of an EIS/EAF and related documents leading to a determination by the Town Board and subsequent adoption and implementation of the Open Space Plan.

FCPOS intends to continue its work on these topics in conjunction with the town other groups with tangible steps to support the development of the best possible plan.

determined by Mr. Hamilton’s agency, his presentation was a natural follow-up to the assessor’s comments. Mr. Hamilton spoke about the 4 ag agencies in the county as well as federal, state and local programs.

The 4 agencies in the county consist of Soil & Water Conservation, Cooperative Extension, USDA Department Agencies and Aerial Photography. The USDA programs included in their administration are: Risk Management for larger commercial farms, Natural Resources Conservation District and the Farm Service Agency.

Federal programs include: Conservation Reserve Program which takes highly erodible land out of production, The Wetland Reserve Program which is applied to land farmed or drained in the past and now being restored—usually marginal land, too steep or wet to farm, the WHIP-Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program to preserve open space, trails, water pools, etc. and the Stewardship Incentive Program to preserve forest land. These last two programs are currently not funded. And finally the Farmland Protection Program which purchases development rights.

State programs include grants for Agricultural & Environmental Management, Tree & Shrub Program, Fish Stocking Program, Wetland Protection and Stream Corridor Management. Local programs include the School Participation Program for environmental testing of wetlands, soil, forest, wildlife, aquatics, etc.

American Farmland Trust Presents Additional Ideas

The last presenter was from the American Farmland Trust whose mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. The cost of

community services studies were outlined along with the benefits of farmland protection. Various methods such as right-to-farm packages, agricultural districts and agricultural conservation easements laws were presented. Also discussed were the pros and cons of Protection Program Planning Grants and Purchase of Development Rights. Other farmland protection tools such as tax relief, land use planning, agricultural economic development and estate planning were reviewed.

Pittsford, New York outside of Rochester was discussed as a community profile with fiscal impact studies and a “greenprint” for the future. Other broader ideas for making a town “farm-friendly” were outlined for consideration.

The meeting was highly interactive and several attendees attached suggestions for further consideration and agreed to be contacted to discuss their ideas and concerns. We thank everyone who attended and hope to make good use of the information shared. Anyone interested in receiving a copy of the meeting minutes or slides used by the Farmland Trust can contact Greg Sundik at 383-1627 ♦

Wildlife Biologist Speaks

At our March 16th meeting we were fortunate enough to have Kathy O’Brien of the NYS DEC Endangered Species Unit Invertebrate Specialist bring a slide show about the Karner Blue Butterfly. Attendees who braved the rain were rewarded with a fascinating slide show detailing the life history of the Karner Blue Butterfly.

The Karner Blue is declining primarily due to human activities like agriculture and urbanization. New habitat is not being created by fire as had once been the case under natural conditions. Instead, blue lupine—a necessary food—is replaced by the growth of aspen and locust which spread forming shaded area and suppressing the lupine’s growth.

This rare butterfly has disappeared from many states. Its stronghold in NYS is now Saratoga County. Ms. O’Brien showed sites near Exit 10 where the Karner Blue has survived due to “accidental” management that favored the growth of blue lupine. The most important of these sites is along Wood Road that FCPOS has already named a Special Place in our February newsletter. More to come on this topic next issue.

Kathy ended her presentation with a plea for greater use of native sandplain plants in residential & commercial landscaping. These plants thrive in sandy soils and unlike grass and non-native ornamentals, require little watering. She shared information about local nurseries which carry these species.

For a list of native plants available for landscape use, or copies of other handouts depicting the Karner Blue and discussing its life cycle and habitat needs, contact FCPOS at PO Box 821, Clifton Park, 12065 or call Bill Engleman at 877-5024

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

FCPOS GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING

PLACE: SHENENDEHOWA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
TIME: 7:30 PM, THURSDAY, JUNE 15TH
7:30 PM, THURSDAY, JULY 20TH

CLIFTON PARK TOWN BOARD MEETINGS

PLACE: TOWN HALL
TIME: EVERY MONDAY NIGHT, 7:00 PM
JUNE 5TH, 12TH, 19TH

CLIFTON PARK PLANNING BOARD MEETINGS

PLACE: TOWN HALL
TIME: EVERY 2ND & 4TH TUESDAY NIGHT, 7:00 PM
JUNE 13TH AND JUNE 27TH

HUDSONIA’S BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT MANUAL WORKSHOP

PLACE: NYS MUSEUM, ALBANY
TIME: FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2000 2:00-4:00 PM
CALL (518) 474-5812 FOR MORE INFORMATION

JUNE 15TH MEETING AT SHENENDEHOWA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Our monthly meeting will take place on Thursday, June 15th at 7:30 PM. We will again be reviewing our progress on the Open Space document to be presented to the town for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.

Most importantly, we will be discussing projects for the summer and fall to expand the reach of our efforts and the inclusion of new groups in our discussions. Suggested programs include additional educational meeting with such groups as the farmers, developers, recreational groups to share ideas.

The National Audubon Society has selected Clifton Park as a pilot community for smart growth. They can help with grants and other funding sources and can facilitate our involvement with other constituent groups such as those mentioned above as well as the Farm Bureau, Builders Associations, DOT, etc. to build consensus processes on open space plans.

Please join us with your ideas.

Friends of Clifton Park Open Space
PO Box 821
Clifton Park, New York 12065

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Special Places Considered in Earth Day Celebrations

On Sunday, April 30th the Friends of Clifton Park Open Spaces sponsored a walk in one of our designated "Special Places" in honor of Earth Day. This walk took place in the State Forest Preserve—a 90.7 acres tract of land located along Ushers Road near English Road. This is publically-owned and accessible land with diverse woods and forested wetlands. It is one of the 3 sites identified in 1998 by FCPOS as a "Special and Threatened Places".

A second designation for made for the 62.5 acres tract owned by Shenendehowa Schools east of Moe Road near Exit 9. This site includes the Arongen Elementary School trails and connects to Collins Park, the main Shenendehowa campus and the Hannaford market area.

This land has interesting walking trails through woods, fields and wetlands. Protected and uncommon native woodland wildflowers and sandplain flora are found here. This large green space near the business district provides such services as air purification, noise buffering, recharge, surface water filtering and sprawl containment. This site is near part of the headwaters of the Stoney Creek watershed. Walks also took place here more recently.

The third designation is the endangered species habitat along both sides of Wood Road. This area near a sandy hillside, or dune, hosts significant population of the federally-endangered Karner Blue butterfly along with its wild blue lupine food plant. It is a critical resevoir of rare biodiversity in Clifton Park. Other rare wildlife species and a pitch pine barren are also part of the area's ecosystem. The specialized habitat type supporting this community of species has been seriously degraded and fragmented in Clifton Park and is now nearly gone from the town.

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Malta Considers Buying Development Rights

Stephen Williams, Reporter
Malta eyes open space

With its open spaces dwindling and under development pressure, Malta is considering setting up a program to buy the development rights to agricultural land. Such a program could be expensive because the town would be offering to pay nearly as much money as a developer would, but for the opposite purpose—to keep the land from being subdivided into building lots. Despite the financial implications, town officials at least want to take a closer look at the idea.

“We’d like 50 years from now for Malta to be the premier place to live. The way to do that is to adopt policies now that preserve what we have,” said Town Supervisor David R. Meager. The Town Board meet with Saratoga County Planning Director Lawrence D. Benton, who said his department can help the town research the issue. “The object is to try to create a mass of open and protected land,” Benton said. “Studies show the benefit over the long term is much more in keeping land as open space.”

The county has a farmland protection plan, and generally supports the preservation of agricultural lands as a public good, Benton said. Malta was predominantly agricultural 30 to 40 years ago, but having three exits on the Northway has made it attractive to developers, and much of the farmland has been lost. The threat to remaining open space has been highlighted recently, town officials said, by a developer’s plans for a dense housing development on part of an East High Street dairy farm. Those plans are expected to be rejected by the Town Board.

Farmers’ participation would be voluntary. Meager said he knows of at least one farmer who has expressed interest in selling his development rights. Purchase of development rights (PDR) programs are very rare at the local level, probably because of the cost, but the state has had a program for about five years. Two years ago, it contributed \$238,000 toward the cost of preserving 250 acres across the road from Saratoga National Cemetery in the town of Saratoga. But the state’s PDR program, operated through the Department of Agriculture and Markets, is swamped each year with applications for the \$10–15 million which is usually available. “We’d have to get in line for the state money,” Meager said. “But it’s a lot of people competing for a little money.”

No other towns in the Capital Region have local PDR programs. Suffolk County, however, has run a PDR program on eastern Long Island for many years, and the town of Pittsford, outside Rochester, also has a local program. Meager said extensive study would be needed, and he would expect a public referendum on borrowing money to buy development rights, but no until November, 2001. The studies would attempt to detail the argument of planners and agriculture supporters that new development, by putting demands on town services, is ultimately more expensive than paying to preserve open space.

The Pittsford program relies on money the town agreed to borrow at public referendum, and Meager said Malta would probably follow the same strategy. “I would want to reassure the public that ultimately they will decide,” Meager said.

A purchase of development rights is permanent, meaning the land could never be used for anything other than agriculture or open space. But the farmer receives much of the benefit of selling the land, while still being free to farm it. “Certainly, this helps farming, it preserves and protects it. Farming is important for the country’s future,” Meager said.

Generally, the development rights are worth about 75% of the land’s value on the open market, but an actual purchase would involve land appraisals and extensive negotiations between town and landowner.

In addition to the outright purchase of development rights, Town Board members said they could consider an open space program similar to Clifton Park’s, which offers a tax abatement for a set number of years in return for a commitment not to develop the land for that many years. Either way, the town would be looking to slow sprawl and the negative effects of uncontrolled growth, including more traffic, noise and air pollution. Or the town could adopt both strategies, and possibly others, depending on particular situations. “It would be done as part of an overall plan to preserve open space, and PDR would be part of it,” Meager said.

Reprinted from the Gazette Newspapers.

***CONCERNED ABOUT CLEARCUTTING OF
TREE IN THE NORTHWAY MEDIAN AND
ALONG THE I-87 RIGHT OF WAY?***

Call Dan Moore, Director of Design for these projects and
NYS Department of Transportation, Region 1 at (518)
474-3015 to express your objections and ideas you may
have about preferable alternatives.