
FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE

www.cpopenspace.org

April, 2012

Friends Finishes “Green C” Study with Siena College

FCPOS Has Made Presentations to the Town Board & Open Space, Trails, and Riverfront Advisory Committee

FRIENDS has done the initial work on a *Greenbelt Study* within the boundaries outlined by the Town Board in its Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) of Western Clifton Park. One objective of this project was to identify the natural resources in Western Clifton Park and to determine the natural resource value of these lands. This project was initially contemplated to work in conjunction with the Town’s own assessment of the development potential of these land parcels, and to be a tool for the Town Planning Board as it evaluated both the development and open space criteria of parcels in proposed projects.

There are, however, two important aspects to this study's objective. First, the study determines the natural resource value of land in Western Clifton Park, and that is done independently of the development values of these lands.

The second driving force of this work was to quantify the potential for a Greenbelt throughout the area to protect water, habitat and woodlands, and agriculture throughout a contiguous stretch in the western part of town stretch in the western part of town.



What Do We Want You To Do With This Information?

The answer to that question covers several areas:

- *In both Town acquisition and Town review of development projects, use it as an indicator in the review and planning process.*
- *Use this information to avoid isolated islands of Open Space. Protecting our Water, our Woodlands and our Agricultural resources requires an eye to keeping these resources together and contiguous as much as possible.*
- *Remember, we cannot go back. Once these properties are taken over for other purposes, they are likely gone as an open space resource for a long time. It does not make sense to have the same pattern of development in western Clifton Park that we have in eastern Clifton Park unless we want to make our town be the same as some of the other more densely developed towns around us. There is a reason why Niskayuna and Colonie may have active trails or historic groups, but no group—governmental or citizen—actively looking at open space options.*
- *Consider a broader, strategic approach to Open Space protection in all its forms rather than a piecemeal approach. Broad view, proactive planning is vital for striking the best balance between protection and development and keeping the Town of Clifton Park the best place to life in Saratoga County.*
- *Let’s keep the “Park” in Clifton Park. Our town is unique and that is a valuable resource in itself. Let’s protect it.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Frank Berlin, President

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Together We Can Keep the Park in Clifton Park!

Some Background.....

The Town's Own Steps

Conceptual development of this endeavor by FRIENDS grew naturally from the results of surveys conducted by the Town of Clifton Park in November, 2001 and February, 2007 which showed that residents of the Town would like to balance the extensive residential and commercial development with the preservation of open space. *

* <http://www.cliftonpark.org/townhall/openspaceresults.asp>

Given this objective of the public, and recognizing the many benefits of open space, the Town Board and FRIENDS are acting independently to appropriately protect open space.

The Clifton Park Town Government, in its Open Space Plan of 2003, has a broad umbrella for open space including five public values:

1. natural resources/water quality,
2. farmland,
3. active recreation,
4. trail connections and,
5. scenic/cultural/historic values.

Other groups in the town have been actively involved in several of these public values for some time, e.g. the trails committee, the historical society, etc. In this study, FRIENDS is specifically interested in the first two values.

Study Data....

It is important to note that this study used generally available data, specifically geospatial information from data clearinghouses such as the NYS GIS Data Clearinghouse as well as the Clifton Park Planning Department. Some data was collected in the field and then converted to geospatial format. More information on the Data Resources used in this study is included in the Final Report, January, 2011.

The findings are not conclusively definitive, and there are areas of study that require more precision. However, the maps created from this data are particularly useful in outlining broad categories of resource availability and we would urge all parties to review them.

FRIENDS Sets "Anchor Points"

FRIENDS had two goals in mind for this endeavor:

1. First, to understand the feasibility of developing a Green Belt in Western Clifton Park
2. To evaluate land parcels for their inclusion in that Green Belt.

Statistically, FRIENDS applied the Natural Resource Value Score in the study to consistently apply this focus to each land parcel in Western Clifton Park. Parcels were scored in each of these 3 categories—water, habitat, agriculture—and then the overall score was tallied. In this tally, water and habitat were given twice as much weight for their "natural" resource value than agriculture was given. The overall intention was to include those parcels with the highest value in the creation of a Greenbelt given other land considerations. These three categories—water, woodlands/habitat, agriculture—defined the factors to be considered in any Greenbelt configuration; or factors which could be used to help define what part of, or what portion of properties under consideration for development should be designated in any required Open Space set-asides.

Furthermore, FRIENDS included proximity to some specific, large parcels for calculating the Natural Resource Value Score of each parcel. This seemed to us a natural correlation and extension of actions taken on the part of the town. The Clifton Park town government has taken specific actions in recent years that have laid a conceptual groundwork for a potential Greenbelt.

- First, the Town has acquired the 140 acre [Veterans Memorial Park \(Anchor #1\)](#) off Mac Elroy Road.
- Second, the Town has established the 154 acre [Garnsey Park \(Anchor #2\)](#) off of Route 146.
- Third, the Town authorized and funded the Generic Environmental Impact Study for Western Clifton Park which, among other important actions, identified a [Future Town Preserve \(Anchor #3\)](#) off of Appleton Road.
- Fourth, the Town has purchased permanent conservation easements on the [King Crest Farm and Riverview Orchards \(Anchor #4\)](#) in the southern part of the area of interest.

The Town has shown by its actions that these locations meet their open space values.

Besides their intrinsic natural resource value, these Anchor Points are located serendipitously in a North/South pattern in Western Clifton Park and provide locations from which to expand and fulfill the "contiguous" functional of any Greenbelt. These existing Anchor Points would form bases for the Greenbelt and therefore, parcels in close proximity to the Anchor Points are given extra weight in the evaluation criteria.

Protection of this Open Space is important for MANY reasons:

1. Open Space is Low Maintenance." It does not demand the infrastructure and tax expenses of development. At the same time open space does generate property tax revenues. (See NEWS from the Office of the New York State Comptroller, Released 3-25-2010, page7-9 "Open Space Preservation and Municipal Revenues")

2. Open Space enhances the "Quality of Life". The natural resource benefits of Open Space are prodigious. The quality-of-life dimensions of Open Space are a hallmark of Clifton Park. Plant (flora) and animal (fauna) life are not only a pleasing aesthetic aspect of our town but also are very functional factors.

3. Open Space provides clear financial advantages to towns as outlined in Controller DiNapoli's Economic Benefits of Open Space Report** of March, 2010. He cites such validated results as:

- Open Space industries like agriculture generate money and economic development to towns & regions.
- Financial benefits to local government for open space reduce costs for public infrastructure and lessen the need for property tax increases.
- Ecosystems such as wetlands can reduce municipal costs for water treatment facilities.
- Drainage and storm water runoff from impervious surfaces are eight times that of open space thereby reducing municipal water treatment costs.
- Open space reduces flooding, reduces erosion, increases groundwater recharge and improves water filtration for less pollution and better stream health.
- Open space that remains on municipal tax rolls can produce a net profit for municipalities.

** <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/press/releases/mar10/032510.htm>

4. Open Space provides Natural Buffers between differing land uses which are not only visually pleasing but also provide sound buffers and areas for water—especially storm water—to naturally and slowly seep into the Town's water courses while re-charging its many aquifers.

5. Open Space Natural Resources are used by many "species." The most important species is, of course—us. The recreational opportunities in Clifton Park vary from intense competitive sports (e.g. soccer, baseball, football) to passive, low density nature-based activities (e.g. hiking, skiing, birding). The former activities require significant amounts of flat, dry and open fields while the latter activities require larger but much more varied terrain.

6. Plant and animal diversity is a product of large tracts of Open Space. These areas of undisturbed plant and animal life provide the spaces and corridors so necessary for the propagation of many interdependent species.

- Endangered wood turtles cannot survive without clean wetlands,
- Trout in the Dwaaskill cannot survive with too much warm water from summer asphalt run off,
- A red fox in your backyard is still a thrill to most of us.

7. The Town of Clifton Park has become a very desirable place to live—among other things because of its efforts in Open Space preservation and protection initiatives. Pressures from the development inherent in the Global Foundries project will only increase as more people and businesses come into the area—and our town—to serve the needs of this project. It is important to take stock of our Open Space resources as developmental pressure mount so we can make the best decisions about preserving all the values our town has to offer. We do not want to become another Colonie or Niskayuna without the kind of water and watershed protection, open space vistas and habitat, and viable agricultural economy we enjoy today.

It is the Western part of the Town that still has the large tracts Open Space and Natural Resources to foster the plant and animal diversity so valuable and important to the Town's biodiversity. And it is to the western part of Town to which this study addresses its concerns and evaluations.

FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE.....WHO WE ARE

Friends of Clifton Park Open Space (FRIENDS) is a private citizens group dedicated to the following goals:

- Define what natural resources exist in the community
- Maintain an independent force for advocating protection of those resources
- Publicize how open space is valuable to our economy as well as our quality of life
- Investigate what is possible and what has been done in other, similar towns
- Be a creative force—generating ideas for consideration by the town and other groups
- Communicate those ideas to the community and facilitate a broad discussion of ideas
- Solicit active participation by the public in Open Space protection

Our work in the Town of Clifton Park started in 1996 with representatives from various grassroots organizations sitting down to talk about open space planning possibilities. In 1998 the entity, FRIENDS, was awarded \$3000 from the Rural New York Grant program and hired a planning consultant to prepare a report documenting some of the ecological, recreational, agricultural, and historical assets of the Town. Since then we have continued our work with the Town and with the public on issues ranging from the Open Space Plan and hiring of the Open Space Coordinator, to commentary on building requests, development projects, zoning code development, open space planning tools, etc.

FRIENDS is not the Town of Clifton Park Open Space Committee. We existed before and exist independently now as a 501C3 non-profit corporation. This work has been contracted for by FRIENDS and is not a town project.

This latest endeavor is intended to be a long-term project dedicated to the identification, preservation and protection of water resources in the western part of town, the potential for a contiguous greenbelt along this area, and the encouragement of agriculture as a non-natural but valuable open space resource.

FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE would like your **financial help** in sustaining our research and outreach efforts. If you would like to help in this way, please detach, complete and mail the form below with your check made out to: **FCPOS, P.O. Box 821, Clifton Park, New York 12065**

--Or—Go to our website: cpopenspace.org and make a contribution directly from there.

Thank you very much for your support!

Yes, I want to help Friends of Clifton Park Open Space in their work to preserve the “Park” in Clifton Park

I would like to contribute: \$10 \$20 \$30 \$40 \$50 \$75 \$100

Other \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please make checks payable to: Friends of Clifton Park Open Space—or—FCPOS

Friends of Clifton Park Open Space is a 501C3 corporation and Contributions are fully deductible as a charitable contribution

Natural Resource Value of Land in Western Clifton Park, NY

