
FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE

www.cpopenspace.org

March, 2017

A “Shenendehowa Park” for the District

VOTE “NO” on 34 ACRE LAND SALE: April 4, 2017

First some history.....Just east of the Shenendehowa Campus, bordering Shatekon Elementary and the YMCA on one end and the Library on the other, is a 34 acre piece of land owned by the School District. *Today it is pristine open space—crisscrossed by trails and covered with towering trees.*

On December 6, 2016 the School Board presented the results of its Request for Proposal (RFP) to sell this land and then, without any public discussion or comment, *awarded the sale to BBL Construction.* FRIENDS immediately started a petition drive to collect signatures from 10% of the 50,000+ qualified district voters in order to force a public referendum up-or-down on this decision.

On January 4, 2017, FRIENDS delivered over 7,000 petition signatures requesting the referendum vote. And on January 24, 2017 the School Board *scheduled to a vote on Tuesday, April 4th.*

VOTE NO



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Frank Berlin, President

James Ruhl, Vice President

Susan Burton, Vice President

Margaret Catellier, Treasurer

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VOTE “NO”—Whether the Land Stays in the Public Domain, or Is Developed as a Park, Benefits Abound:

Acquisition Comes First, Planning Second, but some ideas:

- Complement existing parks in western Clifton Park with a generous open space in the eastern part of town.
- Create a possibly less rugged, more groomed park at the hub of town activity as a gathering point for town-wide commercial, civic and public events similar to Congress Park in Saratoga Springs or The Crossings in Colonie.
- Augment existing public facilities such as the School campus, Public Safety complex, Library, the Commons and Collins Park further west.
- Attract shoppers to the economic activity in the surrounding commercial entities.
- Encourage guests in the “Hotel District” to “stay awhile” and enjoy Clifton Park commerce.
- Improve property values with the area’s attractiveness.
- As this parcel is already tax exempt, no property is removed from the tax rolls.
- Establish an attractive Commercial, Civic and Public use “anchor” for Southern Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce promotional activities.
- Provide a needed walkable area retreat for future multi-use developments slated for this Town Center Zone.

Friends has made no secret of our desire to--eventually--see the land turned into a park. But unless this sale can be stopped, then there is no chance of that happening. Even if the sale is stopped, then the school could do nothing more with the land. In this case it would achieve another of our goals--to keep the property in the public domain. The school could even restart the process and make a similar decision.

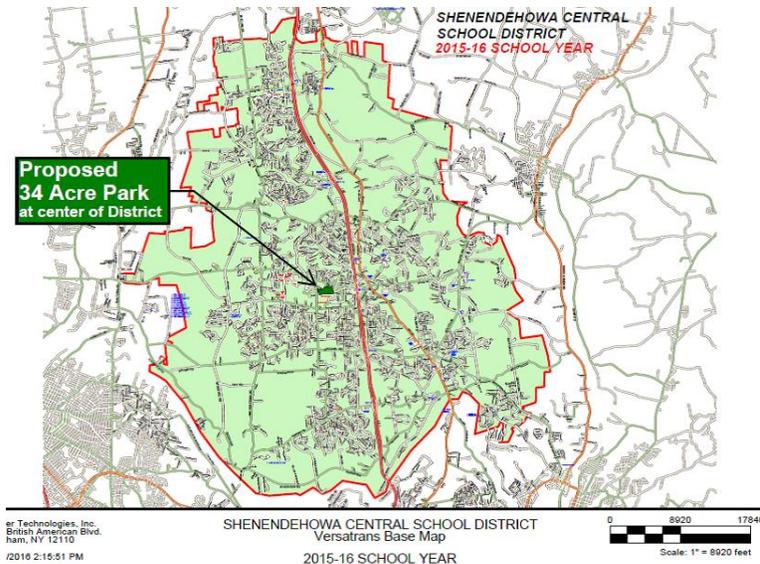
But, again, unless this sale is stopped then the land is lost forever, and none of these advantages will be realized

We see this vote as another step in a longer process toward our goal of a park for the benefit of the entire district. Happily, we have felt a great deal of support for our long-range goal. We will continue to work toward that goal....step by step.

FACTS vs. FICTION: WHAT THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE 34 ACRES & THE APRIL 4th REFERENDUM, CLIFTON PARK VS. HALFMOON

FACT: THE PROPERTY IS GEOGRAPHICALLY IN CLIFTON PARK, BUT ITS USE IS FOR EVERYONE, INCLUDING THOSE WHO LIVE ELSEWHERE—IN OR OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

It is been mentioned in letters-to-the editor and other forums that only Clifton Park will enjoy the benefits of any potential park on the 34 acres and that other towns in the school district should not have to sacrifice money paid by the school district for Clifton Park residents alone.



But in looking at a map, you can see the 34 acres are nearly in the exact middle of the district. The property certainly resides on the very border between Clifton Park and Halfmoon—two of the largest towns in the school district. A case could be made that Clifton Park will have the expense of maintaining, patrolling and planning any services at the property while everyone else will have the easy enjoyment of it. Also worth noting, petition forms submitted to the School District January 4, 2017, show that many of the signers were from Halfmoon and included signatures from all the district towns.

FACT: QUALITY OF LIFE IS IMPORTANT AND THE VALUE OF KEEPING THE 34 ACRES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN CAN ALSO BE MEASURED FOR ALL DISTRICT RESIDENTS.

The Commons was once controversial but now it provides a place for our children to play sports, for the Community Players to perform, for the Ice Arena and the Senior Citizens Center. The central library is in Clifton Park as is the Southern Saratoga County YMCA, yet people from all over come to use these amenities. All residents benefit from such public spaces. Even if you don't use these facilities, places like The Commons also provide a strong economic benefit to all taxpayers as a landmark drawing visitors and outside groups to the area for sports events which increases the tax base and economic vitality of the entire area. These entities—like the quality of the school district itself—help underwrite higher property values for all residents of the district.

A potential park on the 34 acres will provide similar advantage. But if the 34 acres is lost to more development, then the quality of life in these towns will suffer

The district residents spoke in many public forums about their reasons for opposing more development on the 34 acres, the comments were strong and consistent about the need to protect the quality-of-life here:

- “Clifton Park is continuing to be built up with new shopping centers, hotels, and housing developments. We need something that will add enjoyment and leisure to the already busy community. “ A Murray, Clifton Park
- “These views are consistent with recommendations made by the Halfmoon Zoning Review Committee. “ F. Bahr, Halfmoon
- “Preserve the land before it is too late. A park can only improve the quality of life here, and increase property values. There are empty buildings now—let new businesses move into them.” R. Crocetti, Clifton Park
- “I would love to see this land developed into a park similar to The Crossings in Colonie. A beautiful place for the community to gather and attend social events. It's time for the town to give back to its residents. We need more recreational areas and less commercial and residential developments.” S. Rischert, Halfmoon
- “I used to walk on these trails in middle school and high school all the time. I also used to run on them when I ran cross country. They are awesome and I'd hate to see them go to businesses....” K. Garger Clifton Park

Furthermore, Quality-of-Life benefits pay year-after-year. A one-time purchase price only affects us a single time. If the Town of Clifton Park were to pay \$1M less than the current high bid, then with a district of 50,000 people that equates to \$20 each a single time. Isn't improved Quality-of-Life for all residents worth more than that?

Where the property is, is only geography. What these 34 acres of open space can provide—that's for everyone.

FACT: PEOPLE ACROSS ALL THE DISTRICT TOWNS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE INCREASING DEVELOPMENT, TRAFFIC AND CONGESTION IN THE MAIN BUSINESS DISTRICT—AND SO CLOSE TO THE SCHOOL CAMPUS

Throughout the petition drive, the FRIENDS message for keeping the 34 acres in the public domain—and away from more development— touched a very deep chord in people. They wanted to contain the increase in development and were anxious for their voices to be heard about this. On several occasions, we were impressed and heartened by the number of people who gathered signatures and how passionately they came forward to be heard. These concerns and frustrations allowed us to get over 7000 signatures in just 3 weeks.

As one speaker said, “The Right Thing is to protect these 34 acres, preserve this last vestige of natural landscape at the demographic, geographic, economic, and civic center of Southern Saratoga County or, in Teddy Roosevelt's words as he established our most famous national parks, “For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People.”

FACTS VS FICTION: THINGS THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE 34 ACRES & THE APRIL 4th REFERENDUM, CONDITION & QUALITY: “DONATED” LAND

FACT—FRONTAGE: Very limited frontage for two new roads necessary to access new development on the property:

The School District has provided a map of the property with the proposed donation of land. One of the first details one notices is the very small frontage onto both Maxwell Rd on the east and Moe Rd on the west. For any development, new roads must be constructed in and out of the property. This is a requirement for emergency vehicles as well as traffic flow.

At Maxwell Road, the Board has apparently also provided an Addendum which stipulates an easement onto school property to facilitate this need—something which will also require further negotiation with the town for additional access onto town property to accommodate any new road onto Maxwell Road. Even an easement by the School for this road would make a substantial cut into the buffer displayed on the school’s map. It would bring the new development and its traffic even closer to the Shatekon school property and force more land to be lost forever to this construction.

At Moe Road, the new road will run the length of the proposed “donated” land to reach development on the east side of the 34 acres. It will cut the “donated” land in half making it both less desirable and less healthy. Not only will such a road make for a less desirable public park atmosphere, but it will also empty out directly across the street from the school campus exit. One must consider the impact of trucks and traffic along these corridors, into the new donated parkland, with more cars, trucks, tractor-trailers, etc., into traffic right across from the school campus.

FACT—SEQR (State Environmental Quality Review) has not been done on any portion of the land

Until a State Environmental Quality Review of the property is done, no one can know for sure the quality of the property within the parcel. However, Saratoga County Tax Records show that the property contains: 15.33 acres Primary land (buildable), 14 acres Residual land (unsuitable for development), and 5 acres Wetland.

<http://saratoga.sdgny.com/propdetail.aspx?swis=412400&printkey=27100000030390010000> (Parcel ID# 271.-3-39.1)

The primary land is higher ground and sits on the northern side of the parcel. This is where development would happen. The residual and wetland would be “donated” to the town. However, town planning codes would actually not allow development on these lands in any case. So it would appear they are more valuable to the developer if the property is no longer their property tax burden.

FACT—Storm Water Management Issues will only further reduce the quality of the “donated” land

The stream on the property runs through most of the donated acreage. And there are also DEC (Dept. of Environmental Conservation) wetlands mostly on the low lying land on the Moe Road side of the parcel. All the property is forested or open space today.

Once the property is developed, then many of the trees will be removed and almost half of the land—all on higher ground—will be covered with either buildings or parking lots. That means this land will no longer be able to absorb rainwater and storm water runoff. All that water from the higher, paved property will now flow south west into the proposed “donated” land making it substantially wetter, less attractive for recreation and even more attractive to mosquitos, and mosquito-borne illnesses. This would not be beneficial so close to the school campus or for any residents or visitors using the property for recreation.

See Also: http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/?page_id=585



FACTS vs. FICTION: WHAT THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE 34 ACRES & THE APRIL 4th PUBLIC REFERENDUM, OPEN SPACE AND THE IMPACT ON YOUR FINANCES

A “no” vote will not make the land a park. It is only a first step to a longer term, but beneficial goal, since the economic benefits of parkland are well-known and documented in these links:

<https://www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/economicdevelopment.htm>,
<https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/environmental/openspacepreserv10.pdf> (see pages 7-10)

Keeping the 34 acres in the public domain—regardless of who owns it—will have a positive impact on the taxpayer in several ways:

FACT: REAL PROPERTY VALUES ARE POSITIVELY AFFECTED

- The value of your home will rise the closer it is to public parkland. (see link above)
- Additionally, real estate people know that buyers will pay more for a home close to parks and open space over ones that are not.
- Having the 34 acres as public land maintains the value of homes nearby. That value would drop if the 34 acres are developed.
- If the 34 acres were enhanced with more amenities, then the value of those homes would increase even more.
- Just a 10% increase in home value for a \$200,000 home equates to \$20,000 in equity or sale value.
- The Town of Clifton Park bid response also noted these effects: “...*A park can contribute an estimated \$70,000 annually in incremental property tax revenues.*”

FACT: MUNICIPAL REVENUES ARE INCREASED

- Saratoga County Sales Tax is an important revenue source for both Clifton Park and Halfmoon. The Exit 9 business area generates a large portion of those revenues.
- Having the 34 acres as public land or seeing it enhanced with amenities will bring more economic activity to this area. Guests who stay in the many hotels around Exit 9, visitors who come to shop from both all the towns in the school district as well as others in southern Saratoga county will stay and enjoy the park and take advantage of what the many shops and stores in the Exit 9 area have to offer. All this means more sales tax revenue.
- Sales tax revenue for Clifton Park in 2016 was over \$11.9M. Just a ½% increase in sales tax receipts would mean over \$500,000 in revenue. Halfmoon’s finances are undoubtedly similar. Most importantly—this is revenue that comes in year after year after year.
- Your individual tax burden could be lower. Other town taxes and fees could be reduced or off-set by increased sales tax revenues.

FACT: AFFLUENT RETIREES ARE ATTRACTED AND RETAINED

- Nearly 1 in 4 Americans will soon be 65 or older. Happily for America, this population tends to be healthy and wealthy when compared to other countries. Furthermore, this affluent group of people is often looking to reduce their housing footprint while adopting an active and outdoors lifestyle. Leisure and recreation as important to these taxpayers. Additionally, they bring expendable income into the community while often using fewer services and usually add no children to the school system.
- The 34 acres can play a vital role in providing for this segment of our population. Attracting these people is important to the vitality and resources of any town. Their presence provides a wealth of knowledge and volunteer service for the entire population.
- Again, the Town of Clifton Park bid response spoke to phenomenon, “...*If 100 retired households come to a community in a year, each with a retirement income of \$40,000, their impact is similar to that of a new business spending \$4 million annually in the community.*”

FACT: KNOWLEDGE WORKERS & TALENT ATTRACTED TO LIVE & WORK IN PLACES WITH AMENITIES

- Keeping our towns vibrant and attractive to our own children and maintaining an educated and productive workforce concerns us all.
- In order to draw this kind of population, we need to provide the environment which will attract them. We already have good schools and safe streets. But these alone are not sufficient.
- The millennial population prefers places with a diverse range of outdoor recreational activities, walkable places, and healthy spaces. The Clifton Park Town Center plan speaks to these needs. And the 34 acres are the ideal space to expand these desired virtues.
- All our towns need these professionals who will, in turn, put money back into the local economy through jobs, housing and taxes. Our towns stay vibrant, solvent and healthy. Our taxes stay low and our property values expand.

These benefits are indirect but they are real and they impact all taxpayers in a positive way, particularly in the towns of Clifton Park and Halfmoon. However, all communities in the school district will feel the positive financial impact for their citizens of parkland in this burgeoning hub of activity for all of southern Saratoga county. See Also: http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/?page_id=612

FACTS FOR THE PUBLIC TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE 34 ACRE REFERENDUM:

CIVIC FORESIGHT PAYS OFF WITH CLIFTON COMMON: WILL HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF WITH THE SHEN LAND VOTE?

On April 4, taxpayers in the Shen School District will vote on the fate of 34 acres of land in the heart of the commercial center of Southern Saratoga County. The vote about this land is reminiscent of another controversial land acquisition in Clifton Park. Almost 35 years ago in 1983, Clifton Park made a decision to invest in 71 acres of land adjacent to the Town Hall.

The town recognized the need for playing fields for youth sports as well as the potential for other community facilities such as a new Town Hall, library, and pool. They saw the property's central location as ideal and cited the importance of the acquisition to future generations. By 1986 it had officially become "Clifton Common".

With the input from a Citizens Advisory Committee, the Town eventually built baseball, softball, and soccer fields. It also installed outdoor basketball courts, a playground area, an outdoor stage for the performing arts and two indoor skating arenas. The Adult Community Center was also located in the Clifton Common.



For residents of the area, it is difficult to imagine Clifton Park today without the Common.

- It is a central hub for recreation and athletes from across Southern Saratoga County have taken advantage of the sports programs and camps conducted on the property.
- Over 1800 athletes from the area participate in youth softball, ice hockey, soccer, and baseball programs.
- In addition, the Common soccer fields have served as a contingency site when the School District's fields are unavailable or a game must be played at a neutral site.
- Likewise, the ice rink serves as the Shen hockey team's home during the season.

Arts and culture also have a home at the Common.



- The outdoor stage is the scene of six summer concerts by local performers as well as two weekend performances by the Clifton Park Players.
- There are also five children's shows.
- Residents throughout Southern Saratoga mark the birth of our nation by attending the Town's July Fourth Celebration. In addition to live entertainment, there are amusement rides and a large fireworks display.
- And, the Adult Community Center provides a wide variety of activities and services for seniors including organized games, arts and crafts, public speakers, tax assistance, meals, dance instruction, and many others.

The Clifton Common is clearly an indispensable resource for the community and one that is unique within the Capital District. If the sale of the Shen School District property for more development is voted down by taxpayers on April 4, then the opportunity for a Shenendehowa Central Park is still alive. See Also: http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/?page_id=626

How You Can Help

1. Be sure to vote!! **VOTE NO**
 - **When:** Tuesday, April 4, 2017
 - **Where:** Gowana Middle School
 - **Time:** 7:00 AM – 9:00 PM
2. If you will be away, you can get an Absentee Ballot
This is a two-step process for most people.
First you will need to complete and application for the ballot and mail it to the District Office at:
3 Chelsea Place, Clifton Park NY 12065
The application is a pdf file on our web site at:
http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/?page_id=506
Then the District Office will mail you the application which you can return in the envelope they provide. **VOTE NO**
3. **Talk** to friends & neighbors about the vote: **VOTE NO**
Help **distribute** our flyers in your neighborhood
Help **distribute** our flyers at school events
Post information on any social media you use—Facebook, Next Door, HOA's, etc.
4. Attend one of our **Walking Tours** of the property
The next one is scheduled for Sunday, March 26th.
See our website for more details:
http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/?page_id=506
5. Consider putting one of our **“Vote NO” lawn signs** on your property or business.
6. Write a **“VOTE NO” Letter-to-the-Editor** to the local papers;
Community News: cnews@saratogian.com
Daily Gazette: opinion@dailygazette.com
Times Union: tuleters@timesunion.com
7. Make a **Tax-Deductible Donation** to: Friends of Clifton Park Open Space <http://cpopenspace.ipage.com/>

We Would Have You “VOTE NO”, But THE OPPOSING SIDE HAS MUCH DEEPER POCKETS TO COUNTER OUR VISION

YOU HAVE PROBABLY EXPERIENCED THEIR TACTICS WITH PHONE SURVEYS, ROBO-CALLS AND FULL-PAGE NEWSPAPER ADS—This is NOT us

THESE ARE OUR IDEAS: HELP US ACHIEVE THEM TODAY:

- Land surrounded by Private, Public, Semi-Public Entities
 - Two schools
 - Multiple Shopping Plazas and Hotels
 - Clifton Park Halfmoon Library
 - Shen Campus
 - Public Safety Building
 - Southern Saratoga County YMCA
- Currently is wooded with a mature growth forest
- Existing trails meander through these woods connecting the schools with the Library and the main Shen Campus

IMMEDIATELY:

- Existing trails and path network on the property
- Short term opportunity for immediate use,
- No major town development expenditures.
- Existing character of the parcel has wooded amenities **BEFORE** development takes place.

LONG-TERM:

- Town “green” with amphitheater for concerts and events that could attract town-wide
- Suburban gardens with park benches that offer a chance to catch glimpses of sun or relax in the shade.
- Interactive water feature where children could play and cool down in the summer
- Paved paths for bikers, handicapped-access, joggers, strollers, etc.
- Some tree clearing for more manicured space with lawn

The important next step now is: STOP THE DEVELOPMENT!!

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: www.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 donation