

OPEN SPACE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: January 22, 2021

Time: 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Facilitator: Tina Carton

In Attendance - Steering Committee Members

Present: Alane Chinian, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation | Jennifer Hunt Dempsey, Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) | Tom Denny, OSAC | Michael Horn, Saratoga PLAN | Dr. Michael Patton, Saratoga Springs School District | Steve Samuell, OSAC | Cheryl Smith, Saratoga Springs Recreation Commission | Susan Barden, City of Saratoga Springs | Tina Carton, City of Saratoga Spring

Approval of Minutes

The committee approved the minutes from the ^{Open} December 11, 2020 Kick-off meeting.

Mini-Visioning Session Discussion

Prior to the meeting, Tina Carton, city staff, distributed the individual survey responses as well as a summary of committee responses for review. During the meeting, Tina Carton went over the summary responses to the four questions in the survey:

- What types of open space do you value most in Saratoga Springs?
- What challenges do you see for open space in the City of Saratoga Springs (now and in the future)?
- What opportunities do you envision now and in the future?
- Identify your top 3 priorities for open space within the City of Saratoga Springs

Two types of open spaces in Saratoga Springs were valued most by the respondents – active recreational resources, that include both sports fields as well as trails, water access, and parkland, and passive open space for the protection of our natural resources, such habitat, our watershed, and wetlands. The term "programmed spaces" was introduced to refer to spaces used for organized sports and recreation. The committee discussed the challenges with acquiring new "programmed spaces" – the shortage of adequate acreage for recreational fields within city limits and the potential for having to acquire lands outside of municipal boundaries. Mike Patton and others questioned if land adjacent to the Weibel Avenue Ice rinks was available for purchase or use.

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The committee identified funding for the construction and maintenance of open space amenities, including parking, trails, and signage as one of the major challenges that the Open Space Plan should address. The committee also discussed the theme of multi-use trails, trail connectivity, and preserving opportunities to complete the Saratoga Greenbelt Trail. Mike Horn suggested distinguishing multi-use trails from primitive hiking trails when collecting feedback since the criteria differs. The committee discussed the role of sidewalks acting as connections to open space and adding this layer to mapping.

There are new opportunities for funding open space. Alane Chinian from the Saratoga Spa State Park discussed a potentially new funding stream through New York State Land and Water Conservation Fund. This funding is the result of the 2020 bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act mandating that the \$900 million a year now set aside for the fund must be tapped solely for conservation and recreation. The committee also discussed the per unit Recreation fees collected for new development projects and how this could be used for projects.

Open

The committee agreed that collecting and collating community input and getting the survey out to the public sooner than later will be critical to guide the Steering Committee's direction.

Defining Objectives

The committee discussed the need to define new goals for the Open Space Plan update. Working off the 2002 Open Space Plan, Steve Samuell had created draft goals for the plan update. Tina Carton had distributed these to the committee. (As the committee discussed these, Steve mentioned that he already had some ideas for revising his draft goals, based on committee discussion earlier in the meeting.) As “homework” for the next meeting, committee members were asked to create their own list of goals. Tina Carton will distribute a worksheet that displays previous plan goals as reference.

The committee also discussed branding of the Open Space Plan. Past Open Space Plans had centered around the theme “City in the Country” to describe the community character. This concept has since become the core vision for the City's Comprehensive Plan. While recognizing that the "city in the country" remains the foundation of the City's planning vision, the committee wants to explore whether additional concepts, ideas, and slogans may better communicate to today's residents the importance of conserving open spaces in Saratoga Springs. The committee recognized that engaging the populace in 2021 and gaining buy-in for strong open space policies and funding requires a message that resonates today. Among other issues, the committee discussed the impact of the pandemic on possible messaging.

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Introduction of the Conservation Analysis Tool

Tom Denny discussed MJ's Conservation Analysis Tool. As part of the Open Space plan, MJ will be creating a set of Conservation Values Maps summarizing key resources identified in a grouping of overlay maps representing conservation values within the community. The Conservation Values Maps are divided into four maps which group related resources. The proposed Conservation Values Maps are:

- Community Character & Historic Resources
- Recreation, Conserved Land and Connections
- Forests, Fields, and Wildlife Ecosystems
- Natural Water Systems: Streams, Wetlands and Natural Springs.

The committee discussed reorganizing/prioritizing the list. Tom Denny will distribute to the committee an update to MJ's version based on the discussion. The committee also discussed the role of sidewalks acting as ^{Open}connections to open space and adding this layer to the mapping in order to understand potential for access.

Next Steps

One of the interesting take-aways was the need to understand the community's vision for open space and if it has changed since the last update of the plan. The committee agreed that moving up a survey of the community to gather feedback on open space – priorities and needs should happen sooner in the process than currently outlined in MJ's schedule. The committee agreed that collecting and collating survey responses would be critical to guide the Steering Committee's direction.

The other ask was for MJ to move forward with an assessment of the available land for potential purchase in Saratoga Springs - undeveloped parcels and under developed parcels. This is fundamental in the understanding of remaining opportunities and will be essential prior to looking at the criteria for conservation analysis. It will answer the fundamental question of what opportunities remain. To this point, sorting by size of parcel is important. The recreation commission is looking for parcels of at least 20 acres for recreation fields that are relatively flat and not wet. The Open Space Advisory Committee has discussed the need for neighborhood pocket parks, which may be located on small parcels. In the inner district, these may be less than one acre while in the outer district it may be appropriate to look at larger minimum lot size. The Conservation Analysis tool that will give us clarity into the nuance of other opportunities.

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The Steering Committee also discussed collecting photographs for the new plan. Jackie Donnelly, John McMahon Tina Carton, Tom Denny, and Labella Associates took photos for the Natural Resource Inventory which are available, but additional photos of preserved lands such as the Pitney Farm, Saratoga PLAN preserves, as well as other potential lands for future conservation should also be collected.

Next Meeting

The committee unanimously agreed to hold meetings on the fourth Friday of each month at 3 PM since this seemed to work for everyone's schedule. The next meeting will be held on February 26, 2021 at 3 PM via Zoom.

Open