

CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE PLAN SUMMARY

January 2003

Introduction

The Town of Clifton Park Open Space Plan (January 2003), published separately, is the culmination of two years of work by the town's open space advisory committee. The process included extensive public participation. Citizens' groups and individuals have dedicated many years of interest and effort toward a town open space plan – for which the committee is grateful.

Plan Purpose

This plan is an educational and community discussion piece. The committee seeks continual community involvement in terms of feedback, support, and help with implementing the plan.

Partnership Approach

The philosophy of the plan is to work with landowners to find the best way to protect open space resources on any particular property. The partnership approach is the most cost-effective, fair, and prudent way to achieve an open space conservation program. It is the intent of the plan that a balanced set of techniques be used to conserve the open space resources with values important to the community. The plan relies upon continued stewardship of resources by private property owners, including the development community, and private and nonprofit conservation organizations.

Public ownership of land, if required, will be recommended to further enhance the quality of life in the town and expand the utilization, in a sensitive manner, of the town's open space resources. **If public ownership is sought, it will be based on a "willing buyer—willing seller" basis.**

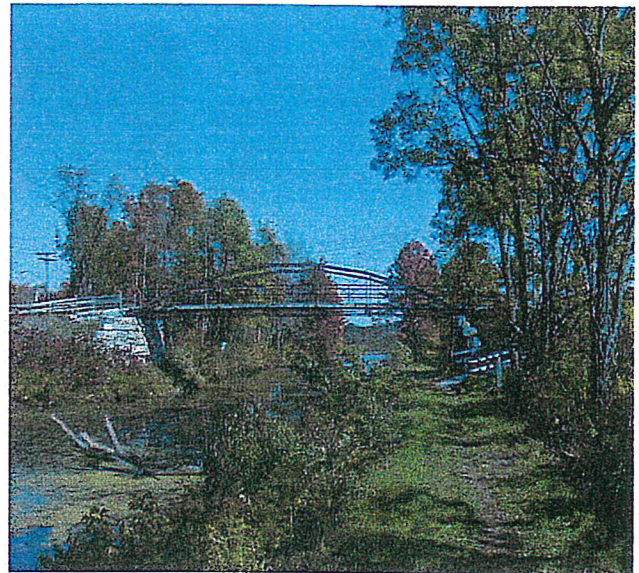


Local farms and orchards provide learning opportunities for children. (Photo credit: Isabel Prescott)

Background

The town has taken open space conservation projects in the past. This plan sets the stage for an even stronger open space initiative.

The town board and the community recognize that while growth and new infrastructure investment has its immense positive benefits for the town and its individuals – special natural and cultural resources that make Clifton Park an attractive, valuable community to live, work and play in, are at risk. With community support, in 2001 the town board appointed an open space committee to identify the best concepts and approaches for future conservation efforts.



The restored Whipple Bridge and the Erie Canal at the Vischer Ferry Historic & Nature Preserve are records of important local, state, and national history.

Public Support

The committee realized an overwhelming 30% return rate to the town-wide open space survey conducted in Fall 2001. About 80% of the respondents support the town's additional investment to protect open space resources. A second survey, conducted over the summer of 2002 was also well received. Approximately 3000 responses were tallied (25%)—a significant response for a mailed questionnaire. The survey results showed strong support for increased investment in securing open space resources by the town. The median response regarding a potential increase in local open space investment was approximately \$29.00 per household.

Plan Concepts

Five major plan concepts with enhanced protection for drinking water resources are proposed. Alternative acreage targets were considered with the "moderate" range 5-year target of approximately 1,350 acres selected. The elements of the plan include:

Special Note on Drinking Water Resources

- Protect key well sites (acquire land around well heads for municipal water supply).
- Protect secondary water supply sources.
- Protect Stony Creek Reservoir.



Stony Creek Reservoir

1. Wildlife Nature Preserves & Watersheds

- Create a "Dwaas Kill Natural Area" and stream corridor greenways. Aim to protect 300 to 600 acres in the next 2 to 5 years.
- Obtain additional lands near the Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve near water supplies. Aim to protect 50 to 100 acres in the next 2 to 5 years.
- Protect Stony Creek Reservoir and its watershed.
- Obtain smaller nature preserves accessible to all neighborhoods.



Woodlands provide habitat and enhance quality of life.

2. Farmland Protection Program

- Focus on active farmlands currently in the term easement program, agricultural district or agricultural assessment programs.
- Support and enhance the town-sponsored term conservation easement programs.
- Partner with state and federal grant programs to obtain permanent conservation easements.
- Protect the most valuable working farms – aiming for 300 to 600 acres in the next 2 to 5 years.



Farmers need flexible options to keep farming. (Photo credit: Isabel Prescott)

3. Parkland and Ballfields

- Update the town's park and recreation master plan.
- Obtain one large new town recreation park (+/- 150 acres).
- Obtain 1 to 2 small-moderate sized town parks (10 to 20 acres).
- Access to water-based recreation at Mohawk River and Ballston Lake.



Ballfields are reaching maximum use levels.

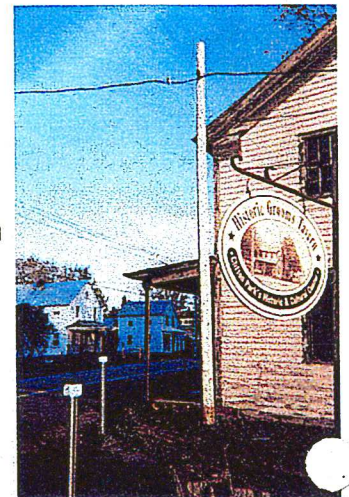
4. Town-wide Trails and Pathways

- Develop various types of town connections such as multi-purpose paths and nature trails.
- Provide access across communities (neighborhoods) for walkers, hikers, and bicyclists.
- Create a trails and recreational map and signage system.
- Goal of 6 to 10 miles over next 2 to 5 years.



5. Scenic Roads and Cultural Resources

- Recognize and celebrate bounty of scenic country roads.
- Help preserve historic sites, hamlets, and landscapes.
- Create "Scenic Roads of Clifton Park" system of interpretive signs and roadside conservation design guidelines.
- Goal of interpretive programming for 4 to 6 roads/historic sites in the near term.

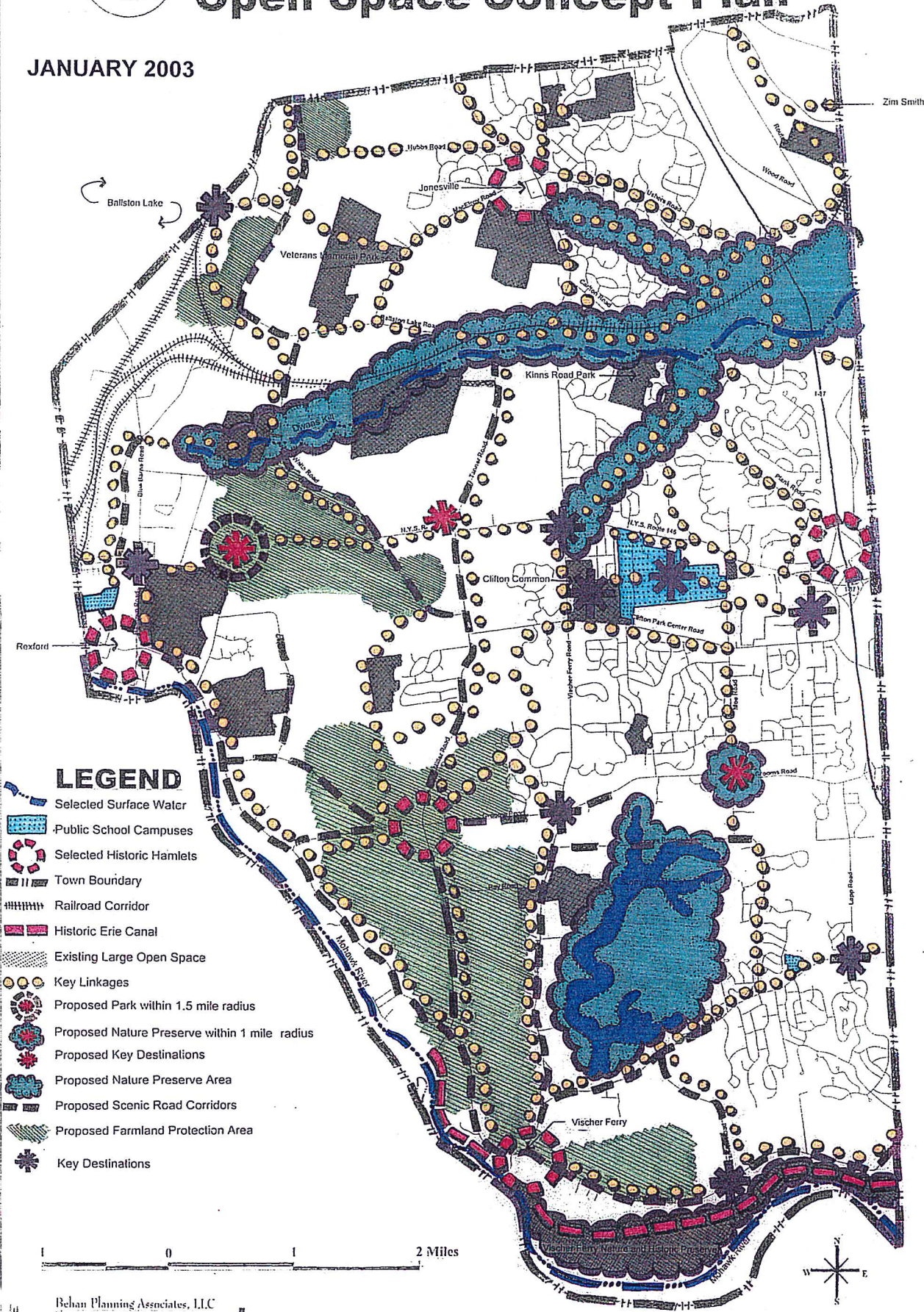


The town has initiated protection of historic Grooms Tavern.



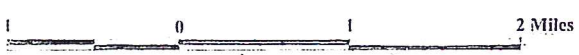
Town of Clifton Park Open Space Concept Plan

JANUARY 2003



LEGEND

- Selected Surface Water
- Public School Campuses
- Selected Historic Hamlets
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Corridor
- Historic Erie Canal
- Existing Large Open Space
- Key Linkages
- Proposed Park within 1.5 mile radius
- Proposed Nature Preserve within 1 mile radius
- Proposed Key Destinations
- Proposed Nature Preserve Area
- Proposed Scenic Road Corridors
- Proposed Farmland Protection Area
- Key Destinations



Implementation

In order for the Town of Clifton Park to meet the initial open space conservation program targets in the next 2 to 5 years, the major specific actions to implement are:

1. **Make a local financial commitment**
2. **Hire open space project coordinator.**
3. **Actively seek all available, additional outside state, federal and private grants.**
4. **Strengthen public and private partnerships and agreements.**
5. **Partner with developers to promote enhanced resource conservation-based design for new development.**

Potential local funding sources in the short-term for the town to evaluate are:

- a) Direct budget appropriations in the annual town budget;
- b) An open space capital reserve fund;
- c) Municipal bonds; and,
- d) The creation of a town-wide open space district.



Participants discuss the location of important open space resources during the public charrette workshop in early 2002.

By coordinating the implementation of the plan as described herein, the town's open space conservation goals can be achieved in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Conclusion

Each of the different types of open space resources identified is a critical element of the community's comprehensive natural and cultural heritage. Now is the time to move forward and determine the appropriate funding strategy and implement the program.

By acting now, the Town of Clifton Park can take focused steps to conserve selected open space resources in order to "keep the balance right" between attractive, valuable new development and important local open space resources that in turn add value to development and enhance the community's quality of life.

The open space plan for Clifton Park has been a positive example of collaboration and community involvement. Contributors to the plan, too numerous to mention here, have come forward from a wide variety of interests to advance a common cause; securing the natural and cultural legacy for future generations. The plan sets forth a clear vision that balances future needs for resource conservation and smart growth. By continuing to work together, this open space vision for the Town of Clifton Park can move off the drawing board and root itself firmly into the landscape of the town.



Horse farms are of growing importance in the town.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact Jason Kemper, Director of Planning, Town of Clifton Park at 371-6054. Check the town's website at www.cliftonpark.org.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME & INTEREST!