

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now is the time for the Town of Clifton Park to 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.

Background & Purpose

There has been a shared sentiment for some time in Clifton Park that lands are being developed faster than remaining important open spaces are being protected.

Notably, the town has taken initiatives in the past to conserve open space and farmland, such as term conservation easements for open space, agricultural and historic properties, and has recently acquired some new open space – the Round Lake Reservoir property and an addition to Veteran’s Memorial Park.

The town maintains excellent recreational facilities for all ages. The town’s trails committee has been successful in developing needed pedestrian and bicyclist connections by securing transportation funding. Plus, local private developers have been contributing “green space” set asides and some internal trails and paths as part of the requirements for subdivisions.



The Mohawk River and Erie Canal are resources of local, regional, and national significance.

However, the town board and the community have been recognizing that while residential and commercial growth and new infrastructure investment has its immense positive benefits for the town and its individuals, the concern have heightened that the special natural and cultural resources that make Clifton Park an attractive, valuable community to live, work and play in, are at risk.

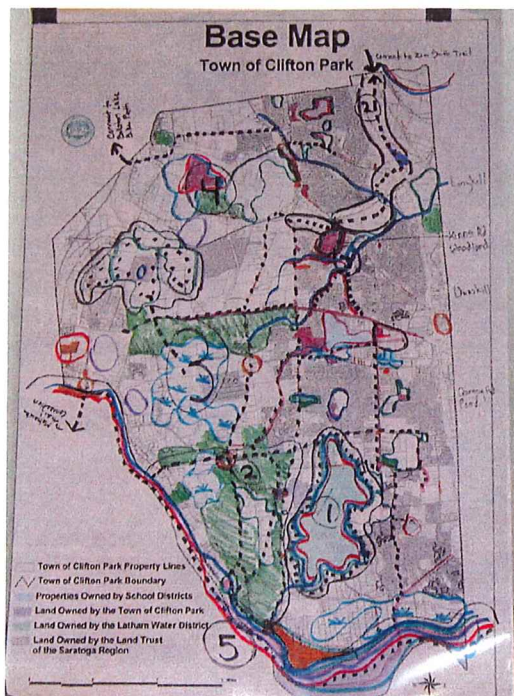
Thus with community support, in February 2001 the Town of Clifton Park Town Board embarked upon a focused, open space planning process in earnest by appointing an Open Space Committee to strategize the best concepts and approaches for future conservation efforts.

This Clifton Park Open Space Plan is the culmination not only of about two years of hard work by the committee and an intensive public participation process, but also, years of interest and efforts in a town-sponsored open space plan by citizens groups and individuals in the community for which the committee is grateful.

Overwhelming Public Support

The committee received an overwhelming response – a more than 30% return rate – to the first town-wide survey conducted in Fall 2002 mailed to all property owners. A total of 80% of the respondents said they would support the town making an additional investment to protect lands with open space resources. The second community survey enjoyed similar results: a 25% response rate. Further, respondents noted a willingness to increase local annual investment in open space protection by a median amount of \$29.00 per average household.

Concepts for Community Discussion



Town residents produced maps like this as part of the design charrette – the open space planning workshop held in early 2002.

This document can be used by citizens to learn more about the major elements of the plan. Further, citizens can show their support to the town board to take actions to implement the plan. It is recognized

that as projects move forward, the ideas presented in the plan will become refined.

As a preface to all discussion regarding land conservation for Clifton Park, the community should know that the town's philosophy is to work with property owners to find the best way to protect the resources on any particular property. It is the plan's intent that a balanced set of techniques be used to conserve the open space resources with values important to the community.

In fact, the plan concepts rely a great deal on continued stewardship of resources by private property owners. The development community has been a partner in open space conservation. Private and nonprofit conservation organizations have played key roles in the process. 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.

In all, the partnership approach is the most cost-effective, fair, and prudent way to achieve an open space conservation program.

Plan Concepts

Overall, a five-year goal of securing an approximately 1,350 acres of additional permanently-protected land has been established. The plan outlines five major concepts with enhanced protection for *drinking water resources* proposed. The plan concepts include:

1. Protection of *wildlife nature preserves and watersheds*;
2. *Farmland protection* program;
3. Enhanced *recreational parkland and ballfields*;
4. A town-wide, comprehensive *trails and pathways* system; and,
5. A *scenic roads, cultural resources and historic preservation* program.

Special Note on Drinking Water Resources

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



Stony Creek Reservoir is a water supply for neighboring Colonie.

1. Wildlife Nature Preserves

- a. Create a "Dwaas Kill Natural Area" and stream corridor greenways.

- b. 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.
- c. Protect Stony Creek Reservoir and its watershed.
- d. Obtain smaller nature preserves accessible to all neighborhoods.
- e. Overall, aim to protect about 500-1,000 acres as nature preserves.



Wooded nature preserves protect wildlife and offer quality of life benefits to visitors and neighbors.

2. Farmland Protection Program

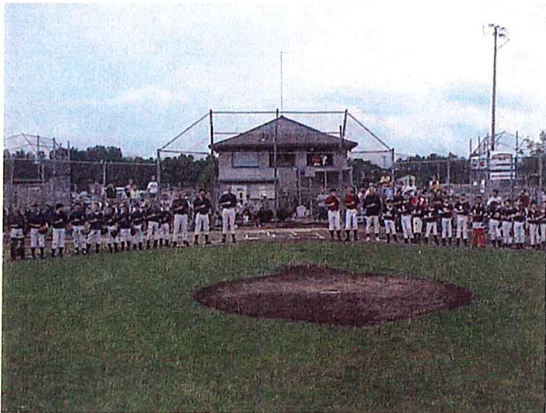
- a. Focus on active farmlands currently in agricultural programs, such as the agricultural district.
- b. Support and enhance the town-sponsored term conservation easement programs.
- c. Partner with state and federal grant programs to obtain permanent conservation easements.
- d. Protect the most valuable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



The town should prioritize helping farmers already enrolled in an existing farm program with permanent protection assistance.

3. Parkland and Ballfields

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



New parkland for ballfields will be needed in the future for the town's growing population.

4. Town-wide Trails and Pathways

- a. Develop various types of town connections such as multi-purpose paths and nature trails.
- b. Provide access across communities (neighborhoods) for walkers, hikers, and bicyclists.
- c. Create a trails and recreational map and signage system.

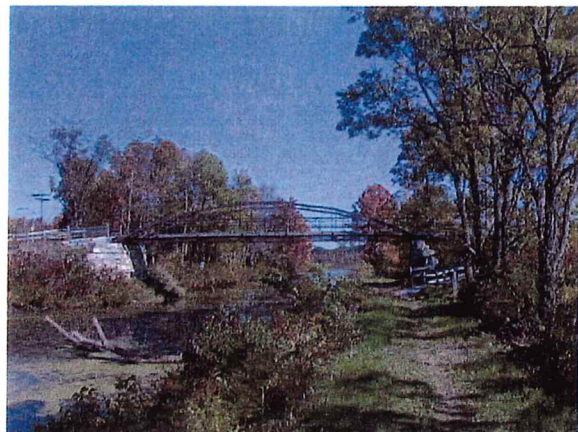
- d. Update trail master plan.
- e. Goal of 6 to 10 miles over next 2 to 5 years.



As an alternative to motorized vehicle travel, pedestrians and bicyclists need additional paths and trails to connect across town.

5. Scenic Roads, Cultural Resources, and Historic Preservation

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



This scenic view is of Whipple Bridge and the Erie Canal at Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve.

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 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 incentives 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.

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.



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

Conclusion

Each of the different types of open space resources identified is a critical element of the community's comprehensive natural and cultural heritage. With this plan as a guide, coupled with community action and local investment, many of these resources will be conserved and passed on to the next generation. With continued and strengthened community support, Clifton Park's open space resource legacy will enrich the lives of the town's current and future generations.