

# PART 1 INTRODUCTION & VISION

## **Introduction**

The Town of Clifton Park Open Space Plan is the outcome of a community-based effort and strong public mandate to guide open space protection goals with balanced growth to strengthen the quality of life for the town's residents. Clifton Park enjoys abundant open space resources that contribute significantly to the community's quality of life and also offer opportunities for new growth balanced with appropriate resource conservation.

Given current trends of land consumption associated with new development, the town may be "built out" as soon as within the next 20 years. The adoption and implementation of an open space plan will reduce development's impact on natural acres and habitats, working farmland, and other natural and cultural resources.

Prior to the formation of this plan, several key organizations, including the Friends of Clifton Park Open Space, Audubon New York, and the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region, among others, have been working to bring the open space protection issue to the fore. In 1996 the Friends of Clifton Park Open Space and the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region, assisted by Audubon New York and Behan Planning Associates, LLC, obtained funding to start a natural resources inventory of Clifton Park. In addition, over the past 25 years, the Town of Clifton Park also has shown leadership in its efforts to protect open space:

1. Recently, the town successfully acquired property at the Round Lake Reservoir, and doubled the acreage at the Veteran's Memorial Park.
2. Clifton Park offers term conservation easements to property owners granting tax relief for conserving agricultural, historic, and open space resources.
3. An agricultural district was established in town in addition to an existing agricultural assessment program.
4. The town supports an annual Farm Fest.
5. New trails are continuously being planned, with the town funding the majority of the trails. More recently the town has started tapping into New York State Department of Transportation funding.
6. Developers are required to set aside a small portion of subdivision lands for green space and must avoid developing along streams and floodplains, and in regulated wetlands in Land Conservation (LC) zones.

management, planning director time, staff support, and technical GIS mapping services in support of the committee's efforts. Also, the town board retained an open space planning advisor, Behan Planning Associates, LLC, to collaborate with the committee and the town with elements of the planning process and plan development including: developing the two community surveys, performing the public participation outreach, developing the plan concepts, preparing a concept map, drafting recommendations and implementation strategies, and preparing the final report.

To help guide the town in its budgeting for an open space program, Behan Planning Associates, LLC performed a fiscal study in 2002. The results of the fiscal model and analysis are included in Appendix E.

Although the town will pursue all possible sources of outside funding and maximize all existing planning tools, additional new dollars will be required to dedicate to an open space program. How much revenue will be needed to implement an open space program, and how that revenue will be raised by the Clifton Park Town Board is still to be determined – but the least burdensome approach to property owners will be the most important determinant in how any level of future open space program would be funded.

Successful development of future, new individual locations for open space access, trails, parks, and public access to land will require the following approach: site-specific planning, design and public input processes for working with all applicable involved and adjacent landowners and the community to ensure project support.

### **Plan Purpose**

Overall, the main purpose of this Clifton Park's Open Space Plan – text and map – is to:

1. Define the open space resources and assets, set resource conservation goals, and build consensus for resource conservation actions;
2. Encourage partnerships with stakeholders advocating open space initiatives;
3. Develop resource conservation acreage targets;
4. Recommend an action plan for conserving priority resources in the next two to five years; and,

5. Guide the town's prioritization and budgeting for open space conservation initiatives.

### **Clifton Park's Open Space Vision Statement**

Based on public comments from the survey, a design charrette workshop and focus group meetings, the Town of Clifton Park Open Space Committee developed the following statement to reflect the community's vision for open space protection:

"Clifton Park is a healthy, desirable place to live, work and play with new growth respecting the community's valued open space assets. Current and future generations enjoy a diverse mix of resources: rural scenery and unique spaces; land that sustains drinking water resources; farms, fields, forests, and wildlife diversity; riverfront and stream corridors; historical landmarks; and trails, parks and ball fields. Partnership and collaboration guide the town's long-term, sustainable land use patterns. Planned, preserved open space features add value to the community's developed areas."

### **Clifton Park's Open Space Goals and Objectives**

Based upon the public input received, the Clifton Park Open Space Committee developed the following open space planning goals and objectives:

**Goal 1: Ensure that resource protection priorities reflect the community's values.**

- Objective: By creating a unified, comprehensive definition and identification of the priority list of important open space features and components valued by and agreed upon by the majority of the local community.

**Goal 2: Establish an interconnected system of open spaces.**

- Objective: By establishing a successful, ongoing community-based dialogue and process for evaluating and making decisions about future land use choices in Clifton Park that balance community conservation and development goals, and consider land that is inbuilt and built upon to date.

- Objective: By improving the consultation process for private and public development early in the planning process
- Objective: By increasing the number of real economic choices for landowners and the community for achieving the desired future land use scenario.

**Goal 3: Strengthen the sense of community in Clifton Park.**

- Objective: By increasing community connections and building upon existing linkages.
- Objective: By linking land preservation with correlated development, and linking development with land preservation.
- Objective: By continuing with a program of installing planned, coordinated community trails and bike paths.

**Goal 4: Inspire new development and re-development that coexists with and respects the community's valued resources.**

- Objective: By providing community-based design guidelines for new development.
- Objective: By adopting additional incentives for open space conservation and new developments.

**Goal 5: Use affordable means and efficient mechanisms and policies to preserve the priority resources.**

- Objective: By tailoring the investment approaches for long-term, permanent protection of priority resources through the best means appropriate the types of resources.
- Objective: By creating public access and level of opportunities that relate appropriately to the types of resources and resource protection strategies.

**Plan Organization**

The plan document identifies the important open space resources, demonstrates the public support for open space protection in Clifton Park, and provides strategies for the successful implementation of open space program and projects.

Key sections for the reader are: Part 5 - which identifies the open space conservation plan concepts and recommended actions; and Part 7 - which outlines the town's existing open space protection initiatives, and itemizes the priority future actions for the town to take towards implementing the open space program.