

Clifton Park Open Space Plan  
APPENDIX A:

**Public Participation**

Public input  
gathered from  
Fall 2001 – June 2002

# Town of Clifton Park Open Space Conservation Survey 2001

The Town of Clifton Park Open Space Committee needs your help creating a town vision for open space conservation. Please answer the survey questions below so we can shape a plan that reflects the community's values. Public input is vital to the plan's success. Please read the enclosure, "Support Clifton Park's Open Space Process," for more detailed information about what is open space and what is an open space plan.

The committee, appointed by the town board, is developing an open space plan with assistance from its planning consultants, Behan Planning Associates, LLC, the town planning department staff, American Farmland Trust, and Audubon New York. Residents and property owners are invited to attend an open space workshop on Saturday, January 19, 2002. In addition, public hearings will be held in 2002 on the draft plan. With public support, the open space plan will be presented to the town board in Fall 2002 for adoption.

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- 1.) How important is it to you to secure additional conservation of rural character and open space resources? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- 2.) How important is it to you to secure additional conservation of farmland and viable agriculture? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- 3.) How important is it to you to secure additional supply of local recreational parks, ball fields and playgrounds? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- 4.) How important is it to you to secure additional conservation of unique natural areas and habitats for wildlife? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- 5.) How important is it to you to secure additional supply of accessible trail systems and bike paths? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- 6.) How important is it to you to secure additional conservation of land in order to protect drinking water quality? **Check one box.**
- Highly Important     Somewhat Important     Somewhat Unimportant     Highly Unimportant     Don't Know/Undecided
- (Turn page over for more survey questions)    →    →    →



# TOWN OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE PLAN

## RECORD OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION INPUT FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Clifton Park Open Space Committee sponsored three focus group meetings in January 2002, and invited stakeholders potentially that would directly involved in or affected by open space protection efforts to discuss the development of an open space plan for the town. In addition, the committee sponsored a public workshop – design charrette in January 19, 2002 that generated substantial detailed input into the development of the open space plan. Below is a written record summary of the input obtained from all three focus group meetings held in January 2002, and from the public workshop – design charrette held on January 19, 2002, as collected and prepared by Behan Planning Associates, LLC on behalf of the committee. The public participation record is critical data drawn upon to inform the tone, direction, emphasis and in many cases – the specifics – in the development of the town’s open space plan. Public comments were carefully reviewed and considered for inclusion by the Clifton Park Open Space Committee and Behan Planning Associates, LLC in the development of the open space plan and map, and incorporated into the plan, as was determined feasible.

### 1. Focus Group Meetings – January 2002

**Key comments summarized and synthesized from all three focus groups:**

#### **CURRENT STATE OF OPEN SPACE RESOURCE PROTECTION IN CLIFTON PARK (successes, issues, concerns, and obstacles):**

##### **Concerns and obstacles for resource protection identified:**

- ’ Unintended consequences of government actions
- ’ Aspects of Clifton Park’s land use policies
  - Not enough planning and zoning decision-making is based upon evaluations of resource values
  - Zoning districts and code that misses the resource value base
  - Market acceptance/demand for more townhouses and condos types of housing development, BUT not a lot of zoning ability to create such housing supply
  - No opportunity to diversify housing without different planning and zoning process
- ’ Lack of public access to open space resources
  - Lack of access to Stony Creek Reservoir area (owned by the Town of Colonie for water supply for Latham). However, this is currently public water supply, so limitations are expected.
- ’ NYS DEC wetlands issue
- ’ Issues regarding property taxation of open space resources

- Unfair agricultural assessment practices
- \$10,000 income exemption minimum for agricultural exemptions
- STAR tax program not so helpful
- ’ Farming economics issues
  - Need to help farmers with the competitiveness of farming
  - Need to assure continued profitability of farming, or else public may need to provide subsidies to support continued existence of local farming
  - Long-term agricultural viability
  - Need to balance private property rights. Families need to maintain options for future use for their land.
  - Farm families’ inheritance – is the equity tied into land
  - Farmers need ability to generate income in the present
  - State of today’s agricultural markets
  - Larger global state of agricultural economics
- ’ Scale of trail development in areas of nature preserves (people don’t want to see major transportation systems cut through nature preserves)
- ’ Timing. Clifton Park’s open space is running out of time – need to raise public awareness in a timely fashion, before resources are lost
- ’ Fragmentation/parcelization of resources
- ’ Cultural issues
  - Need to recognize the realities of the auto-centric setting we live in
  - Lack of cultural support for agricultural/farm culture and landscapes
  - Youth/Next generation and their values for open space (or lack thereof): Estate Issue
  - Perception of separate communities within the town. People identify themselves by hamlets, such as Rexford, or by housing subdivisions. A question is how to create a sense of unity within the town?
  - Lack of mixed ages within the town (due to lack of affordable housing issue)
- ’ Financial Costs Issues: Private Compensation and Investment Returns
  - Fair compensation for private property owners of open space resources: public needs compensate private landowners for stewardship services
  - People need to see returns on investment in open space
  - Hidden costs for developers trying to donate open space to communities (can cost them large fees) to donate land to a town: so, may need homeowners association or a

land trust or government subsidy to pay for and administer the long-term management of open space

Management of Open Space Resources

- Cost of long-term management of open space
- Need to manage wildlife on land set aside for open space protection, including for fallow farm fields (otherwise contend with wildlife damage)
- May need some additional infrastructure for landowners to be able to manage their open space

Need for Increased Communication and Education

- Need to address improving information exchange/public communication about farming and open space resource protection issues
- Lack of public awareness for farming/agricultural realities and economics

Residential Development issues

- Land trust is too often called in too late in the development process – the site planning for open space set-aside and long-term management is an afterthought instead of well-thought out
- Clifton Park has the housing choices that people want: Maybe not everyone wants or is seeking in Clifton Park, a “sense of community” or “walkability”
- Some people are looking for size of house, not community feeling
- Lack of affordability of housing (such as, for people just starting out and for the elderly, and for people of less economic means)
- Residential developments are islands – developments are not connected
- Not enough open space is set aside in subdivision developments
- Open space set asides are too often merely clippings of leftover land and not considered in sound conservation design

Environmental and Ecological Issues

- Permanence of open space “protected”
- Not enough protection for streams
- Citizens are frustrated in achieving protection for endangered species located in developable lands.

Recreation

- Not enough playing fields to serve community – that fields do not get a chance to “rest” and recover from high, constant usage

Trails

- Don't like new trail along Moe Road – would prefer trails set back further away from high-volume, high-speed traffic

**IDEAL STATE – WHAT IS THE VISION FOR OPEN SPACE RESOURCES AND PROTECTION EFFORTS IN CLIFTON PARK (Desired attributes of open space resources and related features):**

Recommended Approach to Open Space Protection should include:

1. Integrated approach to change and the myriad of resource values and issues
2. Balance of land use/private rights and public needs
3. Incentives and options vs. more regulation of land use
4. Flexible future land use system
5. Have a plan for protected open space
6. Ensure that public areas and public access are defined in town's open space plan and programs
7. People need to retain their property rights (and options for future land use)
8. Voluntary participation/process in any town open space programs
9. That the public will take ownership of the plan; and that the plan and actions for open space resource protection will garner long-term government support.
10. Community Identity
11. Clifton Park as a "destination community." Would like to have people experience and see the town, not just sleep here.
12. Diverse land uses
13. Create an "identity" for the Town of Clifton Park
14. Agriculture
  - All local agriculture is viable
  - That farmers can make a living from farming, and do farming as a full-time job (and not need to hold down other jobs)
  - Farmers will supply many more direct farm products to consumers
  - Increased agri-tourism
  - That people can get experiences of working on a farm
15. Historic. Protect/preserve historic buildings and seek funding
16. Steps for the future: take the idea of mitigation for wetlands with the concept for wetlands mitigation banking, and maybe apply this for open space – set up "open space mitigation banks" Might be most effective for the town or a land conservation organization to own any open space and manage it ...

17. Need to educate taxpayers on the cost for open space protection/conservation
18. Need to assure taxpayers about the permanence of open space that they may pay for.
19. How much open space should there be in the town?
  - More a question of where, not how big, or how much exactly
  - Should infill open space areas be within developed parts of town
20. How much public access will there be?
  - Should make sure there is adequate compensation for open space in undeveloped areas of town.... BUT will people pay/be willing to pay to compensate landowners holding open space?
21. New town concept
  - Improve walkability; create a sense of walkability
22. Create public transit options, so people could drive less
23. Create type of public walking trails such as prevalent in England
24. Increase the variety of types of open space [cultural, recreational, trails, visual]
25. Increase the amount of interconnected open space and trails, particularly between residential developments
26. Create a "Norman Rockwell-type of character" for the town
27. Build more playing fields to serve the community
28. Open space set-asides in subdivisions should be larger areas and better connected open spaces
29. Create better ways to get around Clifton Park – increase alternatives to transportation by car
30. Increase connections among living spaces and places of activity
31. Carefully guide and limit new utilities expansion

**Potential Solutions & Ideas: HOW TO ACHIEVE OPEN SPACE VISION FOR CLIFTON PARK:**

1. Expand partnerships for open space protection efforts
  - a. Partner with adjoining towns, county and the state on open space efforts
  - b. Increase partnership with private land trusts
    - i. Improve housing development policies
    - ii. More clustering of housing
  - c. Increase residential subdivision densities (right now smallest s.f. is typically 15,000 s.f. lots); could go to 10,000 s.f.
2. Ensure fair and equitable property tax assessment
  - a. Work with town tax assessor to decrease assessment on unusable farmland (wetlands, swamps, etc.)

3. Provide fair compensation
  - a. Give private property owners "credit" somehow for holding undeveloped land that serves to protect water quality (such as wetlands); private landowners holding/protecting public assets
4. Revisit town's conservation easement policy
  - a. Maybe offer a shorter/more flexible term conservation easement
5. Consider discussing purchase of development rights (PDR) program
6. Help farmers from many different angles:
  - a. with economic development assistance
  - b. Town to help as best as possible with marketing: help with marketing/promotion of local agricultural products
  - c. Seek state and federal assistance and funding to help local farmers retool for changing; need to assist with education and investment in changing farm operations
  - d. Utilize farm staff resources of Saratoga County
  - e. Allow farmers total flexibility (no regulations or restrictions on their farms)
  - f. Do something for the few farmers in town (incentives/options or something)
  - g. Work more closely with farmers seeking assistance; then building on and promote these successes
  - h. Help farmers and large landowners retain their rights
7. Perform more education on open space planning; do more public process
8. Pursue land acquisition
  - a. Target landowners/major players that own high acreage (such as in the western parts of town, Grooms Road, Appleton, Knott Rd.)
  - b. Town should collect properties where large landowners are tax delinquent
9. Reconsider and revise town's land use policies
  - a. Government should look at and perform future land use decision-making based on resource value; resource value basis for decisions
  - b. Look at successful models from other communities on how they protect open space
  - c. Integrated approach
  - d. Create bonuses and incentives for more open space
  - e. Identify transition zones for higher density (for townhouses/condos) or for more mixed-housing residential development
  - f. Decrease footprints to increase open space
  - g. Simplify planning and zoning to achieve diversity of housing
10. Add/quantify numbers of acres set aside in recent subdivisions in town
11. Will residents be willing to pay for open space and deal with the long-term impacts of land off the tax rolls

12. Town is different developments
13. Show/tell costs for NOT doing an open space plan...
14. (John Behan) Consider that sometimes open space not close by to people can also be highly used: consider the Bog Meadow Brook Trail on Route 29 in Saratoga. The trail is located in the middle of nowhere – but it is always in use.
15. Enhance existing open space areas. Identify the most enticing open space spots (such as Vischer's Ferry Preserve) and enhance use with increased parking and accessibility
16. Increase tax incentives to support farmers and agriculture
17. Consider a transfer of development rights program so that subdivision set-asides for open space could be located off-site as an option
18. Increase open space requirements for residential subdivision developments
19. Increase the required amount of open space to be set aside for commercial developments as well
20. Revise town's comprehensive plan to include the importance for and set the direction for open space protection
21. Involve land trusts earlier in the development process. Work out long-term management of open space set-asides earlier in the site planning process.

### **Considerations for Improving Open Space Protection**

- Enhance existing open space areas. Identify the most enticing open space spots (such as Vischer's Ferry Preserve) and enhance use with increased parking and accessibility.
- Increase tax incentives to support farmers and agriculture
- Consider a transfer of development rights (TDR) program so that subdivision set-asides for open space could be located off-site as an option
- Increase open space requirements for residential subdivision developments
- Increase the required amount of open space to be set aside for commercial developments as well
- Revise town's comprehensive plan to include the importance for and set the direction for open space protection
- Involve land trusts earlier in the development process. Work out long-term management of open space set-asides earlier in the site planning process.
- Ensure that the town obtains and includes all the tools available for open space protection

### **Role of Town**

- Will need to convince average taxpayer that the cost of open space protection is worthwhile.
- Need a plan to put in front of voters.

**Additional Discussion:** How can the open space plan process help create an identity for the Town of Clifton Park? And increase opportunities to connect neighborhoods, connect open spaces and developed places; connect town's commercial center to neighborhoods and other destinations?

## **2. Public Workshop and Design Charrette, January 19, 2002 – Synthesis**

### **CURRENT STATE:**

#### **Concerns, Issues, Obstacles**

- Ongoing Development Pressures and Issues:
  - Town is becoming highly built up
  - Residences/townhouses near commercial district (near Maxwell Road) are being crowded by commercial development
  - Proposal for a new bridge over the Mohawk River at/near the hamlet of Vischers Ferry. Opens up potential for primarily agricultural southwest quadrant to become more highly developed.
  - Potential for expansion of municipal water system infrastructure to the western part of the town
- Is the creation of an open space plan a “taking” of private property?
- Let's not make this an issue of East vs. West in town.
- Town Center
  - Lack of town center
- Commercial District at Exit 9
  - Existing commercial district at Exit 9 is unfriendly to pedestrians.
  - Need to create a way to get across 146 without using a car.
- Scenic roads and vistas are vulnerable
  - Concern about the razing of trees along roads
  - Moe Road was cited as an example of bad road design – not to be repeated in town
  - Grooms Road has scenic qualities, but it is a heavy commuter road that is vulnerable to expansion. Concern that expansion would result in the ruination of the scenic qualities.
  - Developers clearing all mature trees on development sites when they were supposed to leave some.
  - Need to protect wooded areas within current subdivisions.
- Concerns about sensitive environmental areas and habitats
  - Protection of wetlands – important
  - Concerns about loss of remaining Dwaaskill watershed lands
- Trails Issues
  - Residential subdivisions have overgrown or non-existent trails and accessible open space. Need to restore these trails.
  - Traffic speed and volume an issue along roadways also used by pedestrians and bicyclists.
  - Need for trail safety and security for trail users, and for adjacent landowners

- Vulnerability of locally-important historic sites and potential historic districts
- Existing Open Space and Recreational Facilities
  - Park districts operating as islands; lack of coordination and connection among separate park districts. Separate park districts cause confusion and issues in terms of park administration and maintenance.
  - Residential subdivisions have overgrown or non-existent trails and accessible open space. Need to restore these trails.
  - Make sure no existing protected open space lands, in particular state lands, are disposed of.
- Stony Creek Reservoir
  - Lack of assurance that the open space is permanent. Concern that the Latham Water District may dispose of property some day if it is no longer needed as a public water supply source (or backup source as it is apparently currently used for).
  - Lack of public access to Stony Creek Reservoir (also known as Latham Reservoir lands) that are fenced in and inaccessible because it is a back-up surface water supply for Latham Water District.

**IDEAL STATE: (big picture ideas at town-wide scale)**

- Aim to protect as much of remaining open spaces as possible within the more developed parts of town (northeast and southeast)
- For more rural areas in the western part of town, conserve agricultural lands, protect environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife habitat areas, and create connections/resource linkages
- Create a town center in the vicinity of the YMCA and public library area. Overlap the town center concept with reinvention of the commercial center of town in the vicinity of the Northway's Exit 9.
- Increase connectivity from many angles. Create trail connections and destinations for trail users. (Make sure trails are not like Moe Road.) Connect the community both within the town (east-west, north-south, and all-around). Connect the town's trails to county-wide trails and to neighboring communities' trail systems. Connect open space lands near the Northway (and create pedestrian access under Northway to reach Round Lake.) Build a bridge over Route 146 to connect the shopping on north and south sides of the road.
- Create trail destinations, including but not limited to the following:
  - Clifton Commons
  - Vischer Ferry Preserve
  - YMCA/library area
  - Commercial district at Exit 9
  - Local schools
- Protect areas with multiple open space values – as highest priorities

- Protect rural character and scenic views: roadway views (rural character) and special vistas.
  - Value trees and rural landscapes. Maintain tree-lined streets and roads.
  - Restore impacted roads and streets.
  - Maintain a green buffer along major roadways.
- Increase opportunities for waterway access and transportation
- Protect historic sites and historic districts; promote and maintain cultural and historic sites
- Create design guidelines for hamlets and for commercial areas
- Consider installing utilities underground

**Specific, Identified Open Space Opportunities (specific areas or sites to consider)**

- Consider creating a town center in the vicinity of the YMCA and the library
- Commercial Area at Exit 9. Improve pedestrian access throughout the town's commercial center at Exit 9. Establish safe pedestrian crossing of Route 146 to enable shoppers to park once and walk to both the north and south of Route 146 shopping areas. Turn the malls inside out: put parking behind buildings, not out in front. Create more shared parking lots. Create interconnections for walking, bike trails, etc. Establish a place for a farmers market.
- Protect the Dwaaskill watershed/natural area. This area may be a potential location for an environmental education center.
- Maintain permanent protection of the Stony Creek Reservoir. Create public access opportunities in the future, if possible, at the reservoir. Create a trail system around reservoir; create viewing points and green buffer around the reservoir; consider the establishment of an educational center such as at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar)
- Protect lands in northeast quadrant near Northway (connect both sides along Northway)
- Protect lands in the Van Patten/Pierce Road area
- Protect lands in a north-south swath of open space in the center of the northwest quadrant – this open space could be a buffer between eastern and western developed areas.
- Protect “triangle” of key agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive lands in the southwest quadrant (see Monica's town-wide map)
- Expand the Vischers Ferry Preserve area and enhance this existing resource (more trails, waterway trails, etc.)
- Establish that the golf courses be maintained permanently as open space (some have blue bird habitat areas)
- “Pumpkin Patch” at Moe Road near 146 intersection, just south of town park
- Increase public access at southern end of Ballston Lake. Reclaim junkyards near Schaubert Road. Create fishing and public access here.

- At a potential commercially-zoned area at the intersection of Routes 146, Blue Barns, and Glenridge Road. This is a potential commercial area that backs onto school property.
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Park – at Miller, Tanner and Route 146. This area is already congested and development should be capped. Preserve vistas here.
- Creek alongside Tanner Road just off Route 146A – is a great spot for public access, near an existing pull-off area.
- Protect MacElroy Road area near existing park. Park could be expanded and connections could be made to Ballston Lake, such as a bike path.
- Develop trail easements throughout the western part of town
- Public access to the Mohawk River (trail along Mohawk River from Vischers Ferry to Rexford and likewise to Waterford)
- Protect Waite Road woodland area
- Vistas/"the view from the road" - Protect rural character and scenic views.

Examples:

- End of Hubbs Road and Schauber Road facing west at Broken Arrow Ranch
- West on Route 146 at a rise in the road, just beyond Miller Road. Great views facing west. Near 21<sup>st</sup> Century Park.
- Bradt Road looking west toward Glenridge Road.
- Ashdown Road and Route 146a facing west.
- Engelmores Road
- Riverview Road. (Restore trees that were removed.)
- Areas along Grooms Road.
- Opportunities for environmental education
  - Vischer Ferry Preserve
  - Near Shenendehowa school properties
  - Kinns Road Park
  - Round Lake Reservoir
  - Historic Sites Taurusa at Grooms Road
  - Stony Creek Reservoir
- Trail opportunities
  - Restoration/rebuild existing trails
    - In individual neighborhood park districts
  - Expansion/Creation of extensions or altogether new trails
    - Moe Road Trail
    - Vischer Ferry Road Trail (near Van Vranken Road)
    - Shenendehowa Campus trail system
- Improvements/Enhancements of existing recreational/open space areas
  - Collins Road/Kinns Road Park
  - Vischer Ferry Preserve
  - Other existing parks

### **POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND IDEAS: Policy Improvements from Public**

- Don't tax open space the same as developed property
- Increase developers' requirement for open space in subdivisions from 5% to 40-50% of the land should be set aside as open space. Make sure that the open space set aside is not just "clippings" or unusable land in development – but that it is a planned open space, designed for as other infrastructure.
- Establish a cluster design requirement along with conventional designs for the development approval process.
- Consider an area-specific moratorium on building.