

Clifton Park Open Space Plan
APPENDIX C:

Town of Clifton Park Open Space
Resource Evaluation Model,
2002

TOWN OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE PLAN

RESOURCE EVALUATION MODEL

2002

A five-step, open space resource evaluation model was developed by Behan Planning Associates, LLC in collaboration with the Town of Clifton Park Open Space Committee and town planning staff. The primary purpose of the model was to provide a defined, written, logical process for developing the open space protection concept map for the Town of Clifton Park Open Space Plan 2003, and to ensure that the local community's values were comprehensively and carefully reflected in any open space plan or program. The model was also the basis for the resource maps generated by the Town of Clifton Park Planning Department included in the Appendix of the Town of Clifton Park Open Space Plan.

In addition, the resource evaluation model should be utilized in the future to assist in the performance of site-specific evaluation and prioritization of open space resources to be conserved in Clifton Park. The model will be a useful tool for the town to refer to in its open space program implementation efforts with respect to reviewing specific individual parcels for inclusion in an open space program.

STEP 1. IDENTIFICATION OF CLIFTON PARK'S OPEN SPACE RESOURCE VALUES.

Based on committee input and public input from the focus group meetings, charrette and the community survey, the significant open space resources that are valued by the community and that should be considered for inclusion in the development of the town's open space protection plan are:

1. **Drinking water resources**
 - a. Wetlands, streams, and lakes, and a buffer of adjacent lands
 - b. Water supply surface reservoirs, and a buffer of adjacent lands
 - c. Public water supply wellheads, and wellhead protection areas
 - d. Aquifers and aquifer recharge areas
 - e. Floodplain protection areas

2. **Significant ecological areas**
 - a. Lands listed in the New York State Open Space Plan – about 500 acres known as the Dwaas Kill Natural Area.
 - b. Unique natural areas and habitats and travel corridors for wildlife, such as mature forests, uncommon plant communities, wetlands, fishing-quality streams, significant shorelines, rock outcroppings, steep slopes, or open fields and meadows. Also, land that supports

known endangered or threatened species, including but not limited to Karner Blue Butterfly habitat and travel corridors.

- c. Soils of statewide importance and prime agricultural soils.
- d. Areas of wildlife observation

3. Working landscape: active farmland.

- a. Agricultural land under town term conservation easement.
- b. Agricultural land enrolled in agricultural assessment program.
- c. Farms that have scenic or historical significance.
- d. Farms that have environmental significance as a buffer or that include ecological or habitat areas.
- e. Farms that employ sound environmental management practices.
- f. Farms under threat of development pressure and conversion.
- g. Contiguous agricultural parcels and operations.

4. Distinctive Character - Cultural Landscape Resources.

- a. **Land with unusual scenic beauty or character, or that is part of a larger scenic viewshed.** Prominent scenic vistas, their viewing points, their viewsheds, and viewshed buffer areas. Include scenic vistas noted identified within the 1998 inventory. Include long or expansive views of Mohawk River and views beyond. Include highly interesting foreground of rolling farmland or old fields, or other interesting foreground landscape combined with an attractive long distance view.
- b. **Rural character corridors.** Corridors along roads where the landscape is predominantly characterized by one or more of the following: narrow roads, no shoulder, trees along roadway close to the road; or a mix of open fields, woods, rural land uses, some housing; or other noteworthy landscape, historic, and architectural features.
- c. **Large, undeveloped parcels – related to the distribution of open space throughout town.** Land that is of sufficient acreage that its development would in and of itself contribute to a loss of character of the town or a section of the town: less than 5 acre sites in denser parts of town; sites of 25 acres or greater in more rural parts of town.
- d. **Institutional landholdings:** public and private schools, libraries, public facilities such as the YMCA, firehouses, town hall, churches and cemeteries, etc. – whose landholdings contribute to the “open spaces” throughout the town.
- e. **Significant historical or archeological resources.** Lands that include properties listed on the state or national register or historic places, or are an area of potential archeological significance. Lands that are recognized as important local historical sites according to the local historical society. An area that is currently

under a term historic preservation easement with the town. Historic sites identified in the 1998 inventory.

- f. **Buffer lands in and around residential areas.** Undeveloped lands – open space areas that serve as buffers around residential areas and are valued for potential passive recreation or simply as desirable undeveloped green space. These areas could be small in size, but valuable for their proximity to dense population areas.
- g. **Gateways into town, and in and around hamlets and the town center area.**

5. Recreational, greenway, and trail resource opportunities

- a. Existing parks, trails, recreational areas, and golf courses.
- b. Publicly-owned land.
- c. Developable land for additional recreational opportunities: both passive and active recreational activities. (Lands with flat topography and accessibility to infrastructure for some types of recreational uses.)
- d. Access to areas with water-based recreational opportunities, such as land that is contiguous to the Erie Canal, Mohawk River, or Ballston Lake.

STEP 2. BASIC OPEN SPACE RESOURCE MAPPING CRITERIA.

- a.) Create a base map of all available undeveloped land for potential consideration for open space resource conservation. Use a tax parcel map to establish a database for ownership of the undeveloped lands.
- b.) Starting with the base map of available undeveloped land, map open space resources valued by the community. The approach for resource evaluation is to map these resources using the most current GIS data layers available through the town's planning department. The purpose of this exercise is to group data layers to evaluate land areas, not specific parcels. A later step will be to look more closely at identified potential open space areas to evaluate them on a parcel-level basis.

Within each of the resource categories identified in Step 1, specific important individual resources contribute to the value base of the land use. Individual resource elements need to be mapped showing approximate locations, and then organized with respect to their respective resource category.

Ecological and Water Resources Map

Most recently flown aerial photos - for presence of forested lands, potential habitat areas, and hydrology

- ’ Any existing data from New York State Natural Heritage Program to locate threatened or endangered species habitat
- ’ Lands in town’s open space term conservation easement program
- ’ All other lands under permanent conservation easements
- ’ Wetlands
 - State regulated wetlands
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’ National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps of hydric soils, and any known federal jurisdiction wetlands
- ’ NYS DEC Classified Streams (Ct and higher quality)
- ’ Land Conservation Zones (town’s LC zone along classified streams)
- ’ Floodplains (FEMA 100-year)
- ’ Shoreline habitat: undeveloped corridors 100 feet on either side of all mapped streams, wetlands, and lakes
- ’ Known aquifers and aquifer recharge areas (latest USGS data on this)
- ’ Location of town’s current water supply (where all the public water supply wells are located) and create a 500-foot buffer around these areas
- ’ Steep Slopes
- ’ Watershed boundaries
- ’ NYS DEC Habitat areas and known corridors (such as deer migration, etc., as available)
- ’ Publicly-owned lands and lands under permanent conservation easement

Distinctive Character: Cultural, Scenic, and Historical Resources Map

- ’ Publicly-Owned Land
 - State-owned land and federal-owned land, if any
 - Saratoga County-owned land, if any
 - Town of Clifton Park-owned land
 - School-owned land
- ’ Lands under town’s historic term conservation easement
- ’ Existing Focal Points: Waterfront Sites, Architectural Significant Sites, Historic Sites, Cultural Sites
- ’ Existing Linkages & Connective Areas: Greenways, Trails, & Canals
- ’ Scenic Resources
 - Scenic vistas from roadways (information from 1998 inventory)
 - Viewsheds – computer generated based on topography

Agricultural Resources Map

- ’ Most recently flown aerial photo – to see orchards and other farmland distinctive features
- ’ All of the town’s farms in county agricultural district
- ’ Farms under agricultural tax assessment
- ’ Lands with forest tax assessment
- ’ Farms under town’s term agricultural conservation easement program
- ’ High quality agricultural soils
 - Prime agricultural soils
 - Soils of Statewide Importance

Recreational, Greenway, and Trail Opportunities Map

- ’ Open Space Land Donated by Developers to the Town as part of Subdivision Requirements
- ’ Public & Quasi-Public Parks and Lands
 - Park District Land
 - Town-owned parks and town-owned land/existing recreational areas
 - County-owned land/existing recreational areas
 - State-owned land/existing recreational areas
 - Federal-owned land
 - Existing Trails
 - School district-owned land
- ’ All Residential Zoned Land and Undeveloped Land “Vacant” for tax purposes at greater than say, 25 acres.
- ’ Existing trails
- ’ Planned trails in progress
- ’ Existing public fishing areas
- ’ Slopes ($0 \geq 5\%$)

STEP 3: PERFORM INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS OF GIS MAPS – TO CREATE DRAFT GREENPRINT.

With the conservation priorities in mind, and the maps produced by the application of the mapping criteria, the committee and the consultant should review the maps and identify the lands of conservation interest. The maps from the previous section will be combined into several “overlays” to determine where resources overlap, or co-occur. The greater the number of co-occurrences, the higher is the resource value of the identified area for conservation priority.

The location of existing and proposed water and sewer lines should be reviewed to determine potentially more vulnerable identified open space resources. Some open space resources near water and sewer lines in highly desirable and

developable residential and commercially zoned areas may be more difficult to protect, and require more creative protection measures. Not all open space resources in highly vulnerable areas may be possible to fully protect. Need to decide how important it is to protect based on how important an open space resource the vulnerable area is. This will help to determine the area's priority.

The purpose of the synthesis is also to have an opportunity for a more flexible, subjective inclusion of resources. The resource maps should be reviewed to determine whether additional, unquantified but interpreted, "place value" resources are included, and if not, ensure their inclusion. The following are suggestions for further review, and are in addition to the analysis and prioritization of the mapping criteria already discussed. This is not intended to be a complete list, but rather, to provide illustrative examples to "jump start" a discussion and free exchange of ideas.

a.) Review and compare public input data

- Review charrette data and charrette mapping, and compare the public data to the resource maps.
- Review other public focus group meeting input, and compare maps to results of community survey.

b. Review and interpret GIS maps and ask the following types of questions:

Water Resource Protection.

- Are areas identified adequate for protecting or buffering water quality and supply?
- Do areas provide aquatic ecosystem protection?

Significant Ecological Areas.

- Are there areas that town residents know have unique or valuable flora or fauna?
- Are there areas that animals use as part of their daily routine?
- Are there any other areas that the residents value ecologically that have not been included?
- Habitat Corridors. Does the area serve as a viable linkage that potentially increases contiguity and provides opportunities between existing or potential open space and habitat?

Corridors, Connections, Linkages

- Areas for additional trail systems and bike paths. An area that helps to close existing gaps in a developing open space or recreational network, or help to connect population centers with public lands, public parks, or historic sites.

- Which areas serve as connectors that potentially increase contiguity and provide opportunities between existing potential open space and habitat?
- Are there any other areas of existing or potential trails or connections that have not been included?

Distinctive Character - Cultural Landscape Resources.

- Does the area contain any historic, archeological, or cultural resources?
- Identify all the significant hamlets or development centers within the town. Focal points, people-attractors.
- **Areas that are gateways into the community.** Identify significant entry areas where people enter through the town's boundary or enter a hamlet. Are there open space areas near hamlets and gateways that would be relevant and logical to include for open space conservation?
- **Scenic, rural character (scenic landscapes).** Land with unusual scenic beauty, or that is part of a larger scenic viewshed, and which, if developed, would contribute to a loss of the town's rural character. Does the area hold scenic views, vistas, or character reflective of the town's rural heritage? Does the site exhibit an "outstanding arrangement of natural or man-made features that provide positive stimulation, hold interest, and command attention of the viewing public, and/or contributes to the public enjoyment and appreciation of any established scenic resource?"
- **Are there any other areas that the residents value that have not been included?**

Working landscape: active farmland and viable agricultural lands.

- Are the agricultural resources identified -- viable, vulnerable and visible? Vulnerable farmland is rented land, and land lacking next-generation farmers.
- Has farmland that is highly visible been identified and included?
- Are the areas with an historic tradition of agricultural production?
- Have all the farms with high soil quality, of a significant size and in proximity to other farmland been identified?

Additional recreational, greenway, and additional trail building opportunities.

- **What areas** contain natural, scenic, or open space resources that are unique, rare or of local significance? What areas have potential for public access?
- **What areas** serve to link existing stream rights or are adjacent to a stream or waterway with commercial or sport fishing potential?
- What lands offer potential for environmental education or learning center opportunities, such as land with public access opportunities in and amidst wildlife habitat.

- **Additional land for recreational uses.** Does the area contain relatively flat area for the development of athletic fields and recreational facilities? Is the area within walking distance (5 to 10 minutes) of a dense residential area?
- **Water-based recreation.** Does the land contain the potential for public waterfront access – for swimming or for boating?
- **Trail Corridors.** Do areas identified offer connections between open space areas and open space destinations within town?
- **Areas for additional trail systems and bike paths.** An area that helps to close existing gaps in a developing open space or recreational network, or help to connect population centers with public lands, public parks or historic sites. Areas that have potential feasibility for development as a trail or path system. Areas that have multiple co-occurrences – intermix of ecological, recreational, and cultural resources along potential corridor areas – increases the potential variety of activities for these areas.
- **Distribution of recreational space within town.** Does the site support the equitable distribution of recreational opportunities within town?
- **Buffer lands in and around residential areas. Are there key undeveloped parcels, or portions thereof** – of open space areas that could serve as buffers around residential areas?
- **Large, undeveloped parcels, and distribution of open space throughout town.** Land that is of sufficient acreage that its development would in and of itself contribute to a loss of character of the town or a section of the town.

STEP 5: DEVELOP PROTECTION RECOMMENDATIONS AND DRAFT GREENPRINT MAP.

- A. Create draft Greenprint map synthesizing the results of the above four steps to create a map of the most important valued open space resources to conserve.
 - i. Show areas of existing, permanently protected community open space resources
 - ii. Show proposed areas for open space resource conservation.
- B. Calculate acreages recommended for full protection and partial protection measures.
 - i. Areas recommended for full protection
 - ii. Areas recommended for partial protection
 - iii. Areas recommended remaining as open space/using other management techniques.