



SARATOGA SPRINGS OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 23, 2020
5:00 P.M.

MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM

PRESENT:

Mr. Tom Denny (Chair), Tim Holmes, Dave Miller, Jennifer Hunt Dempsey, Samuel Cary, Maureen Roberts.

ABSENT:

John McMahon, Steve Samuel

CITY STAFF:

Tina Carton – Admin of Parks, Open Lands, Historic Preservation/Sustainability

OTHERS PRESENT:

Amy Durland and Maria Trabka.

RECORDING OF PROCEEDING:

The minutes are not a verbatim record of the proceedings.

CALL TO ORDER:

Tom Denny called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Maria Trabka praised Ms. Tina Carton for her excellent presentation of the Palmerton Ridge Project to the City Council at a recent City Council meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the Aug. 26, 2020 meeting had not been circulated, so approval was tabled until the October meeting.

NRI DRAFT REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

An update of the NRI was presented to the City Council on 9/1/20. There has been no response yet from the city Council. It is expected that a final draft will be presented to the council on 10/20/20. Ms. Carton will talk to the mayor before this meeting to see whether or not the Council would be ready that night to vote to adopt the NRI.



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Ms. Carton mentioned that the UDO Draft is now available on the City's website, and is open for public comments until 11/25/20. Ms. Carton suggested we share/distribute the NRI document to interested groups in the city, such as the Planning Department, Skidmore, etc.

OPEN SPACE PLAN UPDATE

In preparation for the meeting, OSAC members had completed a survey to evaluate MJ's proposed criteria for a Conservation Analysis tool for Saratoga Springs. The survey consisted of a table comparing MJ's criteria to three other important planning documents: 2020 NRI, 2002 Open Space Plan, and NYS Open Space Criteria. OSAC members voted between 1 (very important) and 3 (not very important) when evaluating the proposed criteria. They included: Parks and Recreation, Historic Significance, Community Educational Facilities/services, Potential wildlife greenways, Wetlands, Floodplains, Waterways, Groundwater and water resources, Forest, Biodiversity, Agricultural importance, Geology and steep slopes, Potential for future development, and the potential for light pollution/dark skies. OSAC responses had been collated into a summary table. This formed the basis for OSAC discussion about various topics in the survey, and their importance to committee members.

All agreed that climate change needs to be addressed. Ms. Carton mentioned that heat islands and their possible impact on the environment should be looked at.

Parks and recreation were highly valued, both active and passive recreational opportunities, and connectivity between green spaces and parks is crucial.

The 2002 Open Space Plan did not address historical significance, but the OSAC felt this issue is important, in that historical resources provide the distinctive character of our city.

- Wildlife greenways: we need MJ to dig deeper into Labella's mapping of these areas, and perhaps include "blue ways" as well.
- Groundwater: we need to delineate wellhead protection zones in the new open space plan.
- Wetlands: received a high ranking from most members. Buffers are crucial, and are included in the UDO.
- Floodplain prediction: MJ is using FEMA data, but a recent document prepared by Columbia Univ. professors and others looks at a "Flood Factor Tool", which is in use for rating homes for potential buyers, etc. We feel this may be a better tool than the FEMA data, and this will be discussed with MJ.
- Waterways: we need to look at recreational access also.



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- Forests: We discussed the best way to approach forests and preservation. Perhaps breaking it up into <or equal to 5 acres, 5-20 acres, and >20 acres might be appropriate for a city our size. We should also look at “microforests”, which are dense forests within an urban area.
- Biodiversity: We would like MJ to map out land cover and ecological habitats.
- Potential for future development: MJ may be thinking that this applies to land with easy access to city water and sewer, which would make it quite developable.
- Dark skies and the potential for light pollution: this was not included in the 2002 Open Space Plan. There was also nothing about scenic resources in 2002, and we would like this included in the 2020 plan.
- Mapping of viewsheds would be important, such as the viewshed mapping done for the Battlefields years ago.

NEXT STEPS: Outreach Ideas

A list was assembled including stakeholders interviewed by the U Albany graduate students for the NRI, the attendees at our NRI workshop in the library in Jan. 2019, and other city and county planning groups. We discussed distributing the NRI and the NRI Executive Summary to some or all of these people to increase awareness and keep them involved in the process going forward.

Ms. Carton showed us a study describing the increase in local citizens enjoying nature and the outdoors, especially during the pandemic. It would be ideal to reach some of these other people that have not been involved or going to meetings in the past, and get their input!

The committee discussed different ways to do this: a survey on the city’s website, social media posts (like selfies in the local parks), and #hashtag campaigns on social media. OSAC members, those savvy on social media, were asked to volunteer to work with Ms. Carton on this. Ms. Jennifer Dempsey volunteered.

MJ would like the OSAC to spearhead the outreach initiatives, so we brainstormed ideas on how to do this.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Maria Trabka brought to our attention a property located between Meadowbrook and the Bog Meadow Trail that is needed to complete a link on the future Greenbelt Trail in our city. The City turned



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down the acquisition of this property, and she feels we may need to get involved to try to reverse this decision.

Ms. Amy Durland commended the group on the quality of the NRI document. She discussed the importance of water resources, slopes, and fields. Fields are important for bird populations, which are currently threatened.

NEXT MEETING:

Next Meeting will be scheduled in person if possible.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, Mr. Denny adjourned the meeting at 6:33 p.m.