



CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS OPEN SPACE RESOURCES 2002

AN UPDATE TO THE 1994 OPEN SPACE PLAN

SARATOGA SPRINGS OPEN SPACE PROJECT



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PREPARED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM
THE SARATOGA ASSOCIATES
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INTRODUCTION

The "City in the Country". This simple phrase captures the unique opportunity that the city's history and geography have provided our community. Originally a bustling small village within a rural town, both were incorporated as a city in 1915. Saratoga Springs is the fourth largest city in upstate New York in terms of its land area, yet has a population of just 26,000. The city is in the envious position of managing growth well outside of the urban center. Preserving the vitality and character of our award-winning downtown, and its setting within an unparalleled scenic landscape, is the essence of the "City in the Country" vision.

There is constant pressure to blur the distinction between city and country. In the past decade, residents have rallied to defeat proposals for sprawling suburban commercial development at Exits 14 and 15 of the Adirondack Northway. Over the last two decades, the downtown neighborhoods have lost residents, while the number of people living in the City's rural areas has increased by 44 percent. Opportunities to preserve important resources, such as public access to Saratoga Lake, have disappeared. The spectacular natural landscapes ringing the city are in danger of being transformed into typical suburban sprawl. The defining character of Saratoga Springs could be lost.

Recognizing the value of open lands to Saratoga's character, the City Council unanimously adopted an official Open Space Plan in 1994. Building on the important policy recommendations of that report, this update provides a blueprint and tools for furthering the community's vision of the "City in the Country."

THE PURPOSE OF THE OPEN SPACE UPDATE

- Augment and update the 1994 Open Space Plan;
- Provide the community with a detailed description of the remaining open space resources (e.g., agricultural lands, rural roadways, wooded areas, etc.) that require our stewardship;
- Demonstrate how these resources relate to one another, and how they can be linked to create a network of open spaces surrounding our vibrant urban core; and to
- Recommend appropriate actions that the City, the Open Space Project, and others should take to implement the vision of this plan.

The Open Space Plan aims to enhance and safeguard Saratoga Springs' economic and environmental health, visual appeal, and outstanding quality of life.

By encouraging compatible development in our historic downtown area, and employing smart growth techniques as an antidote to sprawl, we can conserve land, control future tax burdens, and create a valuable network of parks, trails and recreational areas for future generations.



THE POWER OF A PLAN

The 1994 Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs contains a series of twenty-five (25) policy recommendations. All of the twenty-five policy recommendations remain valid today, and they continue to form the basis for actions by the Open Space Project and the City. Many of the recommendations and opportunities identified in the 1994 plan have been implemented. Each has contributed greatly to the high quality of life that all residents enjoy in the City of Saratoga Springs.



Ramsdill Land Acquisition



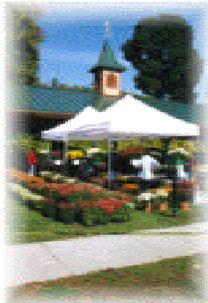
Urban Infill Development



New Spring Pavilion



Route 9 Gateway



Farmers Market



Spring Run Trail



New Sidewalks



Bog Meadow



**Saratoga Springs National
Golf Course Trails**



Railroad Run

For further information about the 1994 Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs, please see Appendix C (Background) at the end of this document.



THE SETTING TODAY

Saratoga Springs is known for its historic and vibrant downtown, its abundant cultural resources, its beautiful open spaces, and its excellent quality of life. It has been recognized nationally as a “Great American Place” and as the winner of the “Great American Main Street Award”. As thousands of tourists tell us each year, our community is a great place to visit; and as our residents know, it continues to be a great place to live. The challenge for Saratoga Springs is to continue to build on our success, and not to be a victim of it.

The inner core¹, and in particular the downtown, is and should remain the focus of our growth. The 1994 Open Space Plan strongly advocates for an increased emphasis on infill development



in our urban core. In fact, the first recommendation in the Open Space Plan is to “Preserve *the City* in the country.”

In just the last few years, several new appropriately designed buildings have been constructed, and existing buildings rehabilitated, in and around our downtown. Few downtowns of equal size in New York State, and even nationally, can boast of this level of private sector investment. Despite conventional wisdom which suggested the contrary, a local developer recently demonstrated the viability of new residential development (above ground floor retail and office units) in our downtown.

¹ The City’s Inner Core is generally bounded by I-87 on the east, West Avenue on the west, the city line on the north, and Spa State Park on the south.

A revival of downtown residential development bodes well for the long-term success of commercial enterprises, and should be a catalyst for continued infill growth in the heart of our community. It could also help diversify the available housing stock in our community, enhancing affordable housing opportunities for current and future residents.

The past decade has also witnessed continued suburban residential development in the City’s outer district. The plateau, the high ground between Lake Lonely and Saratoga Lake, is a prime example of this ongoing trend. Almost all of the available land on the plateau has been transformed into housing subdivisions. While it is fortunate that Saratoga Springs had the land capacity to grow our housing stock, it is unfortunate that many opportunities for securing public access, safe bicycle routes, and recreation areas along the lakes have been missed. Few opportunities remain.

The suburban residential growth in the outer district of Saratoga Springs is symptomatic of similar growth patterns throughout



Saratoga County, the Capital District, the state, and the nation. These patterns are based on an over-dependence on automobile transportation, and land use policies and practices that favor the conversion of greenfields to sprawling development instead of more compact forms of development and infill. Generally speaking,

low-density suburban development consumes land at a rapid rate, ignores natural features of the landscape, and demands the separation of people and activities.

Saratoga County’s primary growth corridor for the last thirty years has followed the Adirondack Northway (I-87) from the City of Albany through the towns of Colonie, Clifton Park and Halfmoon to Wilton and even Northumberland. Results from the recently completed 2000 census indicate that this trend is continuing. Northway community towns led the way in population increases during the 1990’s: Halfmoon added 4,595 people, Clifton Park added 2,878, Malta added 1,296, and Wilton added 1,885 persons.

During the 1990’s, the City of Saratoga Springs added 1,185 residents, an increase of almost 5%. During the same period, approximately 950 new housing units were created in the City. Most of

this residential growth was outside of the urban core. In fact, according to the 2000 census, all of the population increase in the City was in the outer district. During the past decade, the two census tracts that generally comprise the outer district increased in population by 1,454 persons (18.8%), while the four census tracts that together form the inner district decreased in population by 269 persons (-1.5%). This continues the trend that occurred throughout the 1980’s.

The population growth within the City’s outer district is not surprising. As an established community, much of the inner district is already developed. Despite opportunities for infill, most new residential development is expected to extend outward from the inner core. However, the current pace and pattern of residential development in the outer district will quickly consume the “country” portion of the “City in the Country.”

| Area | 1980 | 1990 | Change 1980-1990 | 2000 | Change 1990-2000 | Change 1980-2000 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Inner District</i> (4 census tracts) | 17,598 | 17,283 | - 315 (- 1.8%) | 17,014 | - 269 (- 1.5%) | - 584 (- 3.3%) |
| <i>Outer District</i> (2 census tracts) | 6,378 | 7,718 | 1,340 (21.0%) | 9,172 | 1,454 (18.8%) | 2,794 (43.8%) |



The sharp distinction between City and country that our community cherishes is becoming increasingly blurred. Much of the most easily built upon land in the outer district has already been developed. Opportunities for protecting our natural resources and conserving some of the open spaces that contribute to the unique character of our community are fast disappearing.

A recent analysis of the City's outer district showed that there are approximately 3,000 existing housing units in this area. Under current zoning about 2,000 more housing units could be constructed (City Planning Department, 2001). If Saratoga Springs wishes to retain its "City in the Country" character, more must be done to preserve critical open space resources and to ensure that the design of new developments does not contribute to urban sprawl.

Due to this influx of population, it is appropriate to pause and ascertain how our remaining open space and recreational resources can be preserved. Toward this end, this update to the Open Space Plan seeks to add to the 1994 Plan, set forth a sound vision for the future of our community, and present strategies for reaching this vision. It supports smart development consistent with our community's special character.



SARATOGA SPRINGS' OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

There are approximately 7,000 acres of open lands left in the Outer District of Saratoga Springs. These lands are privately owned in parcels of 10 acres or more. They include parcels that are completely vacant and unimproved, lands that are predominantly vacant (for example, a house on a 20 acre lot), and agricultural land.

Of these 7,000 acres of open space, approximately 3,200 acres consist of wetlands, stream banks, or very steep slopes. These lands have very limited potential for development.

The remaining 3,800 acres of fairly flat and dry open lands are more suitable for development that contributes to the community while preserving and enhancing the rural character and key open space resources of the Outer District.

Floodplain, forests and meadowlands, hardwood groves and farmland, wetlands and springs, stream banks and ridgelines - all contribute to the spectacular rural landscapes, which ring the City.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION RESOURCES MAP

The centerpiece of the Open Space Resources Plan 2002 is the *Open Space and Recreation Resources* Map. The map identifies critical natural and recreational resources, and the remaining open lands that require our careful stewardship. (See Appendix A for a full size map)

The *Open Space and Recreation Resources* Map is organized around seven categories of open space resources in our community:

- Agricultural Heritage
- Environmentally Sensitive Lands
- Recreational Facilities
- Rural and Scenic Roads and Vistas
- Signature Gateways
- Waterfront Access
- Trail Connections

The *Open Space and Recreation Resources* Map illustrates how these various resources relate to one another, and how they can be linked with trails to create an inviting network of open spaces surrounding our urban core - an interconnected greenbelt for Saratoga Springs.

The *Open Space and Recreation Resources* Map is a useful tool for the Open Space Project and the City of Saratoga Springs in the following ways:

1. It updates the "City in the Country" vision.

The 1994 Open Space Plan created the first vision identifying and recognizing open space values in Saratoga Springs. Since that time, opportunities have disappeared or new opportunities have emerged to implement the 1994 policy recommendations, all of which remain relevant today. This map, therefore, identifies the remaining open space and recreational resources, and illustrates the potential to achieve the "City in the Country" vision.



2. It assists City review boards in the evaluation of development proposals

The map provides the planning board, potential developers, and city residents with improved knowledge about a site that will be developed: What are the open space resources on the particular site? Where are these resources located? And how do they relate to the larger open space and recreational vision for the City? This information can be used to guide the project design and approval process in ways that are more sensitive to the unique features present on the proposed development site.

Under the City's adopted comprehensive plan, the Planning Board will soon have, for the first time, a tool for ensuring that these resources are considered in the design of future subdivisions within portions of the City's outer area. The Conservation Development District (CDD) provides flexible area and bulk standards and requires that open space resources be preserved through creative site design during the development process. It ensures that new subdivisions will preserve significant open spaces without sacrificing development potential. The *Open Space and Recreation Resources* map will be used to guide the selection of conservation lands in these subdivisions.

3. It helps identify lands appropriate for an open space protection program.

The *Open Space and Recreation Resources* map will be an important tool to help identify lands that should be protected for recreational and open space purposes through the purchase or donation of land or easements from willing landowners in accordance with Local Law No. 5 -2001, the Environmental, Parks and Open Areas Protection Act of 2001.

The [Open Space and Recreation Resources] map provides the planning board, potential developers, and city residents with improved knowledge about a site that will be developed



STRATEGIES FOR OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION IN SARATOGA SPRINGS

While some think that the only way in which to conserve open space is to strictly limit, or freeze, development, there are varieties of methods to use that continue to allow for a balance between open space preservation and development. Whether it is through the regulatory process, outright purchasing, or partnerships, open space and recreational resources can be preserved in a manner that the sum of the parts creates a meaningful system that directly contributes to the City's high quality of life.

Nationally, there are numerous communities that are dealing with these very same issues. Through research conducted across the nation and northeast the following strategies for conserving the City's open space resources have been defined:

- Creative Site Design During the Development Process
- Purchase or Donations of Land or Easements from Willing Landowners
- Partnerships with Organizations, Businesses, Institutions, and Government Agencies

CREATIVE SITE DESIGN DURING THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The City Council adopted revisions to the city's comprehensive plan in July 2001. The revised comprehensive plan establishes a new land use designation -- the Conservation Development District (CDD). This new designation includes most of the undeveloped land in the city's outer district by combining areas that were previously designated in the plan as Resource Management and Rural Residential-1. Within the CDD, a

certain portion of land must be set aside and remain undeveloped as part of the development process, which is accomplished without changing the actual number of homes that may be constructed in this part of the city.

The goal of the CDD is to achieve a balance between well-designed residential development, recreational development, meaningful open space conservation, and natural resource protection.

Within the CDD, the plan recommends that residential development correspond to the following provisions:

- The base density for the area should remain as currently zoned with 1 home per 2 acres of unconstrained land
- Lot sizes may vary, and other area and bulk requirements should be made more flexible
- Homes must be clustered (using a Conservation Subdivision Design approach). In subdivisions served by public sewer, all constrained land and 50 percent of the unconstrained land must remain undeveloped and permanently protected through the use of a conservation easement (the required open space is less if public sewer is unavailable).
- Density bonuses are available as an incentive for the provision of public access and assistance with trail development in the open space.



The Conservation Subdivision Design approach begins with the identification of open space resources present on the site to be developed (agricultural land, historic or scenic views,



Conventional Subdivision

Source: Center for Rural MA

significant woodlots, etc.). The Open Space and Recreation Resources map will guide the Planning Board, applicants, and the public in understanding the open space resources present on individual sites. This information will form the basis for designating conservation lands for new subdivisions in the Conservation Development District. Once conservation lands are identified and designated, areas where development would be most appropriate are identified. Homes (the number based on allowable density for the district) are then designed into the development areas of the site in a creative fashion. The flexible lot sizes and area and bulk standards facilitate this creativity. Identifying road alignments and lot lines are the final steps in the conservation subdivision design process.

Randall Arendt, in his book *Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks* (1996), provides excellent guidance in the use of this approach to subdivision design. Conservation easements are the legal mechanism used to ensure that conservation lands set aside as part of this process, remain permanently protected.

The comprehensive plan states that there are several advantages to the approach outlined for the Conservation Development District. They include:

- Open space conservation, recreational development and natural resource protection guide the subdivision design process. Because the area and bulk regulations used for conventional subdivisions are not applicable, the design process is creative and not driven strictly by arbitrary minimum lot size requirements.
- Significant networks of open land are created through the development process – the value of homes within these subdivisions are enhanced as are the value of the surrounding neighborhoods, and the quality of life of all city residents is improved
- Developers can provide different types of housing on a variety of lot sizes in response to market demand. This allows for a more diversified housing stock to meet the needs of our changing society.



Conservation Design

Source: Center for Rural MA



Since adoption of the revised comprehensive plan in the summer of 2001, the City of Saratoga Springs has started to implement the plan's recommendations. As part of this effort, a Zoning Ordinance Review Committee has been established to recommend revisions to the City's zoning and subdivision regulations. The revisions are intended to bring these regulations into conformance with the comprehensive plan, which includes the establishment of the Conservation Development District. The Committee's recommendations should be forwarded to the City Council for review and adoption during the summer of 2002.

Once the zoning and subdivision regulations are updated, the City of Saratoga Springs will have, for the first time, a practical and reliable tool for achieving open space conservation and recreational development through the planning process. *The Open Space and Recreation Resources* map, developed as part of this Open Space Plan, will become an integral part of the development design and review process for lands in the city's outer district.

**PURCHASE OR DONATIONS OF
LAND OR EASEMENTS FROM
WILLING LANDOWNERS –
ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OPEN
SPACE PROTECTION PROGRAM
FOR SARATOGA SPRINGS**

The City of Saratoga Springs should establish a dedicated source of funding to purchase lands (fee acquisition), or interest in lands (conservation easements), for permanent conservation or recreational purposes. In all cases, acquisition must be from willing sellers. An open space protection program would give landowners an alternative option to conventional development.

In order to implement an Open Space protection program, our community must make a commitment to funding this activity. Many communities, through a careful analysis of their fiscal situation, have found that their investment will actually cost less in the long term than it would cost to provide services for new residences that might instead be built on the open lands under consideration for protection.

Here in Saratoga Springs, a fiscal analysis of potential build-out and land



conservation scenarios revealed that a modest conservation program, including bonding to purchase land or easements, will not cost taxpayers any more in the long run than if we simply allow development to continue with no conservation alternatives in place (*Behan Planning Associates 2001*).

Communities have paid for open space and recreational programs in various ways. One method is to simply set aside funds on an annual basis using the budgeting process. Other communities have dedicated a small percentage of their sales tax or real estate transfer tax for this purpose. A third option, and the one that is probably most appropriate for Saratoga Springs, is to issue revenue bonds to spread the cost over a period of years.



The City Council passed legislation in 2001, which established the Environmental, Parks and Open Areas Protection Program. This law enables the city council to set aside funding for the purpose of protecting, preserving, enhancing, and improving environmentally sensitive, recreational and scenic land. It also enabled a referendum on bonding for open space protection. The "Coalition for the City in the Country" is working to place a bond initiative for open lands protection before the voters of Saratoga Springs at the November 2002 elections.

It is recommended that the City Council establish the Advisory Committee, called for under this new legislation, to develop criteria for open space and recreational projects. Similar to the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Committee, the selection of projects by the Advisory Committee would still require final approval by the City Council.

To facilitate the Advisory Committee's work, a set of criteria should be established for the selection of candidate open lands protection and recreation projects. The Open Space and Recreation Resources map could help guide this effort. Other criteria might include the willingness of the landowner to sell the property (or development interest in the property) at a "bargain" rate, or factors such as development pressure on the land in question.

Negotiations with property owners and the development of protection projects that meet both the needs of the landowner and the goals of the program are often lengthy and detailed. The Advisory Committee will need assistance to formalize arrangements with individual landowners for each of the projects that it

decides to pursue. It is recommended that the City Planner, or the newly created position of administrator for the Office of Parks, Open Lands and Historic Preservation (City Charter Revision approved in November 2001) provide staff support to the Advisory Committee.

In addition, partnerships can be formed between the City, the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project, and the Land Trust for the Saratoga



Region to allow these not-for-profit organizations to lend their expertise to the City's staff and the Advisory Committee. These types of arrangements are not uncommon. For example, the City of Albany and the Town of Wilton partner with The Nature Conservancy for the technical aspects of their wildlife and open space protection initiatives, and several towns on the east end of Long Island work with the Peconic Land Trust in the same fashion.

Specifically, the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project and the Land Trust for the Saratoga Region could be utilized as partners to:

- Conduct community outreach and public education efforts on program goals and operations,
- Follow-up with landowners who may be interested in participating in the City's program,
- Negotiate the often complex details of a particular project,



- Administer the project and manage it through closing. This may include identifying and securing outside sources of public and private funding (matching grants) to enhance the City's investment, managing survey and appraisal work, preparing and monitoring project budgets, and coordinating legal work through closing.
- Generate the legally required "baseline" of information about a property (description, survey, photos, maps) to ensure that, if a conservation easement is used, the terms of the easement agreement are followed.
- Monitor lands protected through the program (especially those under easement) on a regular basis to fulfill the City's enforcement and stewardship responsibilities for these lands.

In addition to acquisition of land or easements using local funding, there could be other elements to the City's Open Space Protection Program. For example, the City should consider:

- *Leveraging other sources of funding.* Once the City has established its program and created a dedicated source of funding for it, the City will be in a very strong position when it competes for grants to supplement City investment in open space and recreational resources. The local community's commitment to the plan and to its implementation weighs heavily on the decision to fund grant applications.
- *Providing tax incentives for shorter-term open space conservation.* Term easement / tax abatement programs, used by several communities in New York State, provide tax abatements in return for term easements on particular parcels of open space or farmland.

As the name implies, a term easement is written to last for a period of years, most commonly for 5 to 20 years. Tax abatements are usually calculated on a sliding scale with larger tax abatements for a longer term easement. If the protected lands are converted to development prior to the expiration of the term, the tax benefit must be returned and a significant penalty paid. This concept could be an additional element of the City's Open Space Protection Program. It could be used to help landowners while permanent solutions are sought for the desired development and conservation scenario, or to conserve additional parcels that do not quite meet the criteria for permanent acquisition.

- *Educating landowners about the many options available to them.* For example, a landowner can choose to donate a conservation easement on all or part of his/her land. Income and estate tax benefits may accrue to the landowner from such a donation.



**PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS,
BUSINESSES, INSTITUTIONS, AND
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

The City of Saratoga Springs is home to a number of strong organizations, important institutions, and creative and talented individuals. The City should continue to foster partnerships between itself and:

Land conservation organizations such as the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project and the Land Trust for the Saratoga Region

As described above, these organizations have considerable expertise in the technical aspects of land conservation. With knowledgeable staff and talented and dedicated board members and volunteers, these organizations are in a position to work with City government to implement the community's conservation goals.

The local development community

The local development community includes homebuilders, developers, realtors, businesses, the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, and the Saratoga Economic Development Corporation (SEDC). All of these entities have contributed to, and have a strong interest in, the continued success of our community.

The development community seeks predictability in the development approval process. In an ideal world, it would be simple to provide this predictability – “good” projects would be quickly approved, and “inappropriate” proposals would be swiftly rejected. Of course, defining what is, and what is not, appropriate is not simple. However, over the past few years, a

remarkable degree of consensus about what constitutes appropriate development for Saratoga Springs has emerged in our community. For example, several well-designed mixed-use buildings have been developed in our downtown. Unlike so many development proposals in the suburbs, these downtown development projects met with significant public support. As a result, the approval process for these projects was not overly cumbersome. The community is proud of these new or rehabilitated buildings and the contribution that they make to the character and prosperity of our downtown. As the community becomes increasingly clear about its vision for the future, and articulates this vision in the Comprehensive Plan and the Open Space Plan, the City should seek cooperative relationships with developers and development interests that can assist the community in achieving its vision.

A recent example includes provisions for land preservation and trails that were included in the development of the Saratoga National Golf Club.

Land-owning institutions such as the Saratoga Spa State Park, New York Racing Association, Yaddo, and Skidmore College

These institutions control a large amount of land and contribute enormously to the open space character of our community. The location of these institutions at the edges of the City's inner core has been a critical factor in our successful efforts to maintain the distinction between the community's urban center and its still somewhat rural outer district. The continued stewardship of these lands is of tremendous interest to the City. The City must work in partnership with



these institutions to ensure that their interests and the community's interests are achieved.

For example, the Saratoga Spa State Park occasionally purchases land adjacent to its current holdings to better protect and/or manage significant resources. Such acquisitions are consistent with the Open Space Plan. Many of the resource areas and trail connections identified on the *Open Space and Recreation Resources* map are in, or adjacent to the park. Partnerships with the park could greatly enhance the City's ability to meet its conservation goals.

Agencies at the county, regional, state, and federal levels

Numerous public agencies can assist the City in attaining its conservation and recreation goals. Since Saratoga is the fastest growing upstate county, the county may develop mechanisms to encourage towns and cities to enact open space protection programs. At the state level, there are numerous matching grant programs, administered by the Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Department of Agriculture and Markets to name a few.

The NYS Department of Transportation could play a significant role as partners in the development of our community gateways. The NYSDOT, the Saratoga Spa State Park, and the City have already partnered to improve the southern entrance to the City along Route 9. The installation of planted medians, decorative lighting, curbs and sidewalks, and a bicycle trail along Route 9 near the entrance to the park greatly enhances this gateway to our community. NYSDOT and the City are

planning a similar reconstruction of Route 50 (downtown to Exit 15) in the near future. Cooperation with the NYSDOT, combined with funding from the federal government's TEA21 "enhancements" program, could help the City complete the trail network proposed in this Open Space Plan.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has partnered with the Town of Milton over the years to enhance the fishing resource of the



Kayaderosseras Creek. Through fish stocking programs and the development of fishing access points along the stream, the creek's importance as a fishery has been well maintained and enhanced. The City of Saratoga Springs could work with the DEC to provide similar opportunities in our community. Access for fishing and for non-motorized boat launching within Saratoga Springs would improve the recreational value of the Kayaderosseras to residents of the City and County.

There are also a number of potential opportunities to partner with Saratoga County to help achieve our open space conservation goals. For several years, Saratoga County has proposed construction of the Zim Smith Trail -- a multi-use trail along the County Sewer District right-of-way (the former Delaware and Hudson rail line) from Ballston Spa to Mechanicville. Construction of this trail is underway in the Town of Malta, and additional segments should be completed in coming years. The City should



work with the county, and the Saratoga Spa State Park to complete a second phase of the Zim Smith Trail that would travel north from Ballston Spa to the Saratoga Spa State Park and into downtown Saratoga Springs. This trail connection is shown on the Open Space and Recreation Resources map. The County Planning Department and the Saratoga County Heritage Trail Committee have already completed some preliminary planning for this trail extension. The trail would be a tremendous recreational resource for residents and tourists. It could also be a significant economic resource for the City and the village. The trail would provide another wonderful family oriented activity that tourists to our region could enjoy all year long.

Another potential partnership with the county could be through the county's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board. The AFPB has supported municipal applications to the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for funding to purchase development rights on agricultural land in the county. As mentioned



earlier, there are still a handful of farms in Saratoga Springs.

One or more of these may be a good

candidate for state funding under the state's Agriculture and Farmland Protection program. There has also been increasing interest at the county level for open space protection. The City should encourage the county to explore the creation of a county fund to conserve

agricultural land and other important open spaces.

Neighboring municipalities

As mentioned above, over the last few years there has been an increasing interest within our fast-growing county for open space conservation. Two of the communities that adjoin Saratoga Springs -- Malta and Wilton -- recently proposed the creation of dedicated funds for the acquisition of important open space resources. Although voters did not approve the Wilton bond initiative, and Malta pursued a less ambitious program for now, the fact that open space conservation was on their agendas at all would have been hard to imagine just a few years ago. Other communities in the county, including Clifton Park and Milton are also exploring their options for open space protection. All of this interest in open space conservation in communities bordering ours is good for the City. It supports the City's goals and it allows each community to learn from the others.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS (BY RESOURCE CATEGORY)

Defining a set of strategies is an essential first step to defining a broad approach to conserving open space and recreation resources. The challenge, however, is in the practical application of the strategies to specific elements of the City's open space system. To help accomplish this task, seven categories of open space resources in our community were defined and illustrated on the Open Space and Recreation Resources map (see Appendix A) Whether through creative site design, purchase or donation of land or conservation easements from willing landowners, or through partnerships, the following discussion describes how the specific types of resources can be conserved for future generations.

AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

The City of Saratoga Springs has a rich agricultural heritage, with some farms still operating today. In other places the City's agricultural past is evident in the landscape where old farm buildings and fallow fields remain.

Recommended Actions:

In order to provide retiring farmers an option for their land other than development, the City should seek to conserve some of its remaining agricultural heritage. In particular, the following areas are identified on the Open Space and Recreation Resources map: the Pitney Farm, the Ashgrove Farm, the Seaman Farm, and smaller agricultural areas along Gilbert Road, on Lake Avenue near its intersection with Weibel Avenue, along Old Schuylerville Road, at

Hickey's Corners, and along Kayaderosseras Avenue East.

A primary option for conserving Agricultural Heritage lands is through some form of easement. In the case of agricultural lands, the City should seek to Purchase Development Rights (PDR) from willing landowners. Funding for this type of acquisition could come from the proposed Open Space protection program and/or state funds through a variety of grant sources. In fact, if an Open Space protection program were established, the City could use the funding to leverage other sources.

The cost of PDR depends on the specific parcel. It is calculated by determining the current appraised

value of the property, and its appraised value as open or



agricultural land without development potential. The difference between these two numbers is the value (the cost) of the development rights that will be purchased. Conservation easements are the legally binding document used to ensure that, once the development rights are purchased, the land remains undeveloped in perpetuity. The land remains privately owned and on the tax rolls (with assessments reflecting restricted use).

In some cases, it is possible for the community and individual landowners to combine the PDR approach with a landowner donation. Under a "bargain sale," the landowner agrees to sell the



development rights at a cost below appraised value. Under such an arrangement, the community benefits by paying less than the full value of the development rights (saving money in the process). The landowner, who still receives cash, may agree to this for conservation reasons, but may also be able to benefit through reduced capital gains taxes and/or by using this charitable contribution for tax deduction purposes.

In situations where agricultural lands will be developed, a second option for conserving some of these resources exists. Using the creative subdivision design process outlined for the Conservation Development District in the City's comprehensive plan, agricultural heritage areas could be protected even as development takes place.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

Saratoga Springs contains an abundance of environmentally sensitive lands. The most prominent, and perhaps the most sensitive of these are its wetlands. There are approximately 3,200 acres of freshwater wetlands identified and regulated by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation within the City. Wetlands are indicated on the Open Space and Recreational Resources map. A large portion of the City's wetlands are part of a massive ecosystem located to the east of the Adirondack Northway that includes the Spring Run and Bog Meadow brooks, Owl Pond, Lake Lonely, and the Kayaderosseras Creek. Among other benefits, wetlands provide valuable habitats for fish and wildlife, control storm water runoff and floods, and water purification.

Numerous stream corridors traverse the landscape of Saratoga Springs. There are approximately 30 miles of streams and waterways within the City. Stream corridors, including a 100 foot buffer from each bank, are indicated on the Open Space and Recreational Resources map.



These streams provide numerous ecological and recreational benefits. In addition, because all (except for Fish Creek) ultimately drain into Saratoga Lake, they are a potential source of drinking water for our community. Saratoga Springs is currently considering the use of Saratoga Lake as a public water supply. At the same time, the Saratoga Lake Protection and Improvement District (SLPID) is completing an intermunicipal study of the Saratoga Lake watershed.

Steep slopes, for the purposes of this report, are areas that have a slope of 25% or more. In other words, the ground elevation changes at least 25 feet over a horizontal distance of 100 feet. Development on steep slopes is discouraged due to the potential for soil erosion associated with the removal of vegetation from these slopes. There are several areas of steep slopes around the City of Saratoga Springs, and they are all shown on the Open Space and Recreational Resources map. Most notable are the slopes that descend from "the plateau" -- an area of high elevation between Lake Lonely and Saratoga Lake.



Recommended Actions:

Aside from their environmental value, these lands have severe constraints for development. In all cases, the environmentally sensitive lands discussed above should remain undeveloped. Rather than utilizing funding from an Open Space protection program, the flexibility of design provided under the Conservation Development District could be used to steer development away from these important resources. In some cases, the City should consider acquisition of land or easements from willing landowners on parcels that include environmentally sensitive areas.

In terms of stream corridors, current City regulations are not adequate to ensure the protection of water quality. The City should adopt a 100 foot “no development” buffer into its zoning regulations. In addition, the City’s zoning should limit soil disturbance activities and require a substantial vegetated buffer (no cutting) within 75 feet from the stream.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Active Recreational Facilities

A 2001 report issued by the Recreation Task Force documents the city's needs for more outdoor playing fields, more indoor recreation space, more pedestrian and bicycle access to facilities via sidewalks and trails, and more public access to water bodies.

The Open Space and Recreation Resources map can assist in the selection of sites for the development of new recreational areas and highlights opportunities to maximize their accessibility to city residents and visitors.

Recommended Actions:

The City's recent lease of the Gilbert Road Fields has helped to alleviate the shortage of outdoor play space. These fields should be acquired by the city in order to construct and maintain permanent outdoor playing fields.



Further development of outdoor playing fields on Weibel Avenue is also encouraged to create a multi-use recreation destination that is easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists from the urban center via the Spring Run Trail.

The closure of the Armory has strained the city's ability to provide adequate indoor recreational programs. This plan endorses the recommendations of the Recreation Task Force to site a new indoor recreation facility at Weibel Avenue, Excelsior Avenue, or West Avenue. All three places have the potential to be linked with city neighborhoods by safe sidewalk and trail networks.

Passive Recreational Facilities

The recent acquisition of Ramsdill Park provides passive recreation and public access for fishing and boating on Lake Lonely. Similar opportunities should be pursued to secure a public beach on Saratoga Lake, and access points to the Kayaderoseras and Fish Creek. Public recreational options should also be sought



at Loughberry Lake as the City resolves its water supply issues.

The Open Space and Recreational Resources map also highlights the opportunity to create a network of multi-use trails throughout the city, linking downtown with outlying neighborhood and recreational facilities.

RURAL OR SCENIC ROADS AND VISTAS

Rural or scenic roads and vistas enhance the character of our community in many ways. Roads being the primary vantage points from which most of us experience the land around us, the quality of the roadside has a lasting impact on our perception of place. In rural areas such as the City's outer district, narrow country roads and undeveloped lands adjacent to them create a sense of remoteness and calm. In Saratoga Springs, this experience is particularly valuable because these rural features are in such close proximity to the City's vibrant inner core. Just minutes from downtown, it is still possible to drive a car or ride a bicycle on a quiet country road.

Recommended Actions:

Rural or scenic road segments are identified on the Lands of Conservation Interest map. They include portions of:

- Petrified Gardens Road, Hickok Road, and NYS Route 9N;
- NYS Route 29 west (near the City's western boundary);
- Grand Avenue (near the City's western boundary);
- Adams Road;

- Hutchins Road;
- Geysers Road;
- Route 50 (near the City's southwest corner);
- Kaydeross Avenue;
- Crescent Avenue;
- NYS Route 9P (Union Avenue east of the Adirondack Northway);
- Gilbert Road;
- Meadowbrook Road;
- Stafford's Bridge Avenue;
- Ruggles Road;
- Ingersol Road;
- Old Schuylerville Road; and
- NYS Route 29 east (east of the Adirondack Northway)

Protection of the character of rural or scenic roads can be accomplished through two approaches. The first involves the land at the edge of these roads. Development of land at the edge of rural or scenic roads can preserve a "country" feel when undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Conservation Development District. This creative design process allows development along Rural and Scenic Roads to be steered away from the roadside, and homes clustered elsewhere on the site as appropriate. In some cases, acquisition of land or easements from willing landowners could also be used to conserve particularly critical lands along these roadways.



The second approach involves the road itself. Over --“improvement” of rural or scenic roads -- through excessive widening or straightening -- can adversely effect the special character of these roadways. The City Department of Public Works should work with the County Department of Public Works and the NYSDOT to prepare guidelines for the treatment of these roads within our community.

Scenic vistas are particular locations in the City from where the visual qualities of the natural landscape are especially rewarding. Several specific places have emerged through public discussions as especially significant to our community. These are indicated on the Open Space and Recreation Resources map.

Scenic vistas can be protected through the development process, using the provisions of the Conservation Development District, or through acquisition of land or easements from willing landowners.

SIGNATURE GATEWAYS

Gateways are important entrances to the City where the scenic qualities and character of our community are on display for residents and visitors alike. Saratoga’s signature gateways come in two forms -- gateways that are primarily undeveloped and almost pristine in appearance, and gateways that are somewhat developed with a mixture of commercial and residential uses.

Recommended Actions:

In the case of Saratoga’s primarily undeveloped gateways, the Open Space Plan recommends that the City strive to conserve the pristine qualities of these entrances to our community. The

experience of arrival to Saratoga Springs is greatly enhanced by the sharp transition from these undeveloped gateways to the developed inner core of the City. To accomplish



this, the City should seek to protect significant properties that comprise these gateways through development that is not in keeping with the city character. A recent project by the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region to acquire a conservation easement on the veterinary facility at Exit 14 is an excellent example. The City should also use the development process, under the provisions of the Conservation Development District, to steer the location of new homes away from the gateway area. Using the creative design process outlined for the Conservation Development District, gateway areas can be included as conservation lands set aside as part of future subdivisions. By clustering homes elsewhere on the site, a gateway’s undeveloped character could be effectively preserved even as development takes place.

In the case of Saratoga’s developed gateways, the Open Space Plan recommends that the City work to improve the site design and architecture of development through the use of design standards. The design standards should emphasize, among other things, pedestrian and bicycle connections to the inner district, buffering of parking areas through the placement of buildings or the use of native vegetation, appropriate architecture and signage, and the consolidation of access onto the highway. The goal for these areas is not to foster



a more intense (or dense) pattern of land use development, but rather to improve the physical appearance, attractiveness, and sense of arrival for these developed gateways.

WATERFRONT ACCESS

Public access to the City's abundant water resources remains limited. Private subdivision and development of waterfront land has nearly eliminated opportunities for securing public access along the shores of such significant water features as Saratoga Lake. In this case, all four municipalities that share the shoreline of Saratoga Lake have failed to secure access in the form of a beach, park, or other public space.

Along Lake Lonely there has been recent success in securing public access for the purposes of fishing and boating. The recent development of the Saratoga National Golf Course led to the creation of walking trails,



including a path to a viewing platform on the lake from Union Avenue (NYS Route 9P). The

City recently secured permanent public access to the lake at the Lake Lonely Boat Livery in agreement with the livery's owners. As part of this agreement, approximately 30 acres of land adjacent to the livery and along the shore of the Lake Lonely outlet was purchased by the city for the creation of a public park.

Streams such as the Kayaderosseras Creek and Fish Creek also present opportunities for additional public access and use. The Kayaderosseras is a regionally significant trout fishing resource and is used for non-motorized boating (canoes and kayaks). The Saratoga Springs Open Space Project recently prepared a map for distribution to canoeists and kayakers who wish to navigate the Kayaderosseras. The organization also organizes annual clean-ups of this creek. Fish Creek, the outlet of Saratoga Lake, is used for fishing, recreational boating, and for competitive rowing. A state operated boat launch is located at the northeast corner of the NYS Route 9P bridge, and rowing activity is organized from a small facility near the bridge that carries Stafford's Bridge Road over the stream.

Recommended Actions:

The Open Space and Recreation Resources map identifies several opportunities for public waterfront access within the City. These include:

- The possibility to purchase land and create a small City park, or other public space, on Saratoga Lake south of the NYS Route 9P bridge.
- The extension of the Bog Meadow Trail to a terminus along Fish Creek.
- The development of access points along the Kayaderosseras Creek for the launching of canoes and kayaks, and for fishing. To create these access points, the City should partner with the Saratoga Spa State Park.



To accomplish these recommendations, the City should supplement its own funding by applying for grants from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, or from the federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA21).

TRAIL CONNECTIONS

In addition to ensuring that lands of conservation interest are protected to the maximum extent possible (through a variety of techniques), the Open Space Plan seeks to expand opportunities for a Citywide trail network connecting resources both inside and outside the urban core. Significant portions of this trail network have already been established. Existing trails are shown on the Open Space and Recreation Resources map, and include:

- Bog Meadow Nature Trail – this walking trail follows an old railroad line and connects NYS Route 29 (Lake Avenue) with Meadowbrook Road
- Railroad Run – this short multi-use (bicycling / walking) trail connects West Circular Street with Congress Avenue. This



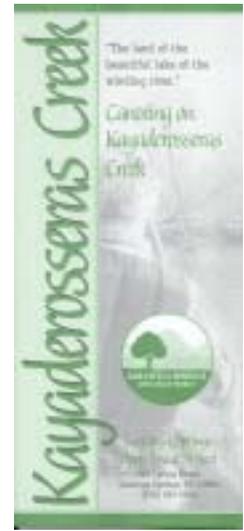
short section is considered to be the first segment of a trail that will

ultimately connect downtown to the Saratoga Spa State Park and beyond.

- Saratoga Springs Bicycle System & Pedestrian Path map (1996) – this brochure created by the Saratoga Springs Open Space

Project shows the Bog Meadow Brook Nature Trail and Railroad Run, and it illustrates the City's on-road bicycle network. The network consists of three routes (A, B, and C) which extend from the downtown out to the City's outer district. Consistent bike route signs were developed and located throughout the City in conjunction with the designation of these routes. Except for the short section of Route C that follows Railroad Run, all of the designated bicycle routes share the roadway with automobiles. The brochure notes that bicyclists should always ride with traffic, should stay as far to the right as possible, and use the shoulders where available.

- Kayaderosseras Creek Canoe Trail – The Saratoga Springs Open Space Project produced a brochure and map for this water trail in 1999. The 6.5 mile canoe trail runs from Kelly Park in Ballston Spa to Saratoga Lake. The map identifies 5 access points to the creek. Although the route offers a relatively mild canoeing experience, there are two small areas shown on the map where whitewater canoeing experiences are possible.
- Saratoga National Golf Course Trails – as part of the approval process for the golf course, the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project worked with the golf course developers to secure the creation of walking trails on this site. One of the trails runs from



the Union Avenue entrance to the golf course to a viewing platform on Lake Lonely. The other trail (not yet completed) will run along the northern edge of the golf course property to Yaddo lands east of the Northway. The Saratoga National Golf Course and associated public trails opened during the summer of 2001.

Recommended Actions:

There are approximately 28 miles of existing on-road bicycle routes, and about 5 miles of existing off-road trails in the City of Saratoga Springs. The Open Space Plan's goal is to double the community's trail system mileage. The plan proposes that an additional 35 miles of trails should be developed in the City. Some of the proposed trails will consist of newly designated bicycle routes that will share existing roads, however significant portions of the proposed network will be off-road. Some of the off-road trails should be constructed as multi-use trails while others would be more appropriately developed as pedestrian trails.

The Open Space and Recreation Resources map illustrates the proposed pedestrian and bicycle trails. Three priority off-road trail connections are:

- The Spring Run Trail – this multi-use trail will run north from Congress Park and down High Rock Avenue before heading off-road along an abandoned trolley right of way. The off-road trail will head east on the trolley bed, crossing under Excelsior Springs Road and the northern end of Eureka Avenue to a temporary turn around at the Adirondack Northway (I-87). This portion of the trail is currently being

designed, and much of the funding for its construction is already secured. Phase II of the Spring Run Trail project will be to extend the trail under the Northway to Weibel Avenue near the City Ice Rink and Recreation Area, and ultimately to connect to the Bog Meadow Nature Trail.



- Saratoga County Zim Smith Trail Northern Extension - Working with the Saratoga Spa State Park, Saratoga County, and the Village of Ballston Spa, a trail running through the southern end of the park on an abandoned trolley bed could ultimately connect Saratoga Springs to Ballston Spa and Saratoga County's Zim Smith Trail. The Zim Smith Trail (which is partially under development) runs from Ballston Spa, through Ballston, Malta, the Village of Round Lake, Halfmoon, and terminates in the City of Mechanicville. Making the connection north to Saratoga Springs would add a regionally significant recreational facility to the mix of family-oriented tourist attractions in the City, and would create a year-round recreational asset for residents of the City and surrounding communities. The Saratoga County Heritage Trail Committee and the Saratoga County Planning Department completed preliminary conceptual plans for this trail extension several years ago.
- Completion of the Saratoga National Golf Course Trails – When the golf course



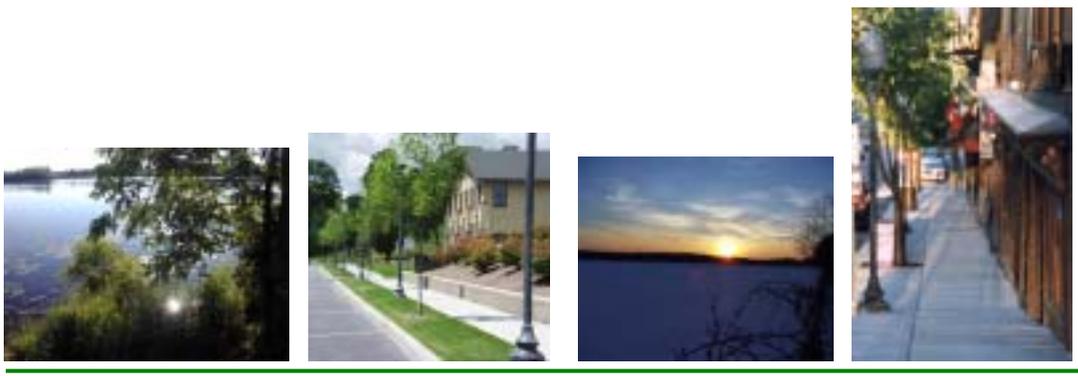
opened its doors in the summer of 2001, it had already completed construction of a walking trail from a small turn-off next to its entrance on Union Avenue to a beautiful viewing platform on Lake Lonely. The second walking trail, which was agreed to as part of the City's approval process for the golf course, is not yet completed. This trail will run along the northern edge of the golf course property to Yaddo lands east of the Northway.

The City can obtain trail linkages through acquisition of land or easements from willing landowners. It should also use the incentive provisions of the Conservation Development District to obtain public access to conservation lands and assistance in the actual development of trails. Of course, in addition to using its own resources, the City should seek sources of grant funding to develop trails. The most likely source of such funding is the enhancements program of Federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Ideally, more of the City's trail system would be off-road. Although the dedicated bicycle system

in the City is a good beginning, route signage and even well maintained road shoulders do not provide adequate safety for the many types of riders who use, or might use, this system in an active and tourist oriented community such as ours. As a long-term goal, the City should work toward creating off-road trails which parallel the on-road network, or use existing passages such as utility right-of-ways and stream corridors, that separate riders from traffic. A fine example of this type of system exists in Martha's Vineyard. Off-road alternatives would greatly enhance the safety and pleasure of trail users and would add another attraction to our already successful tourist economy. Off-road trails would be especially appropriate along the high speed, high volume state highways that run through the City's outer district.

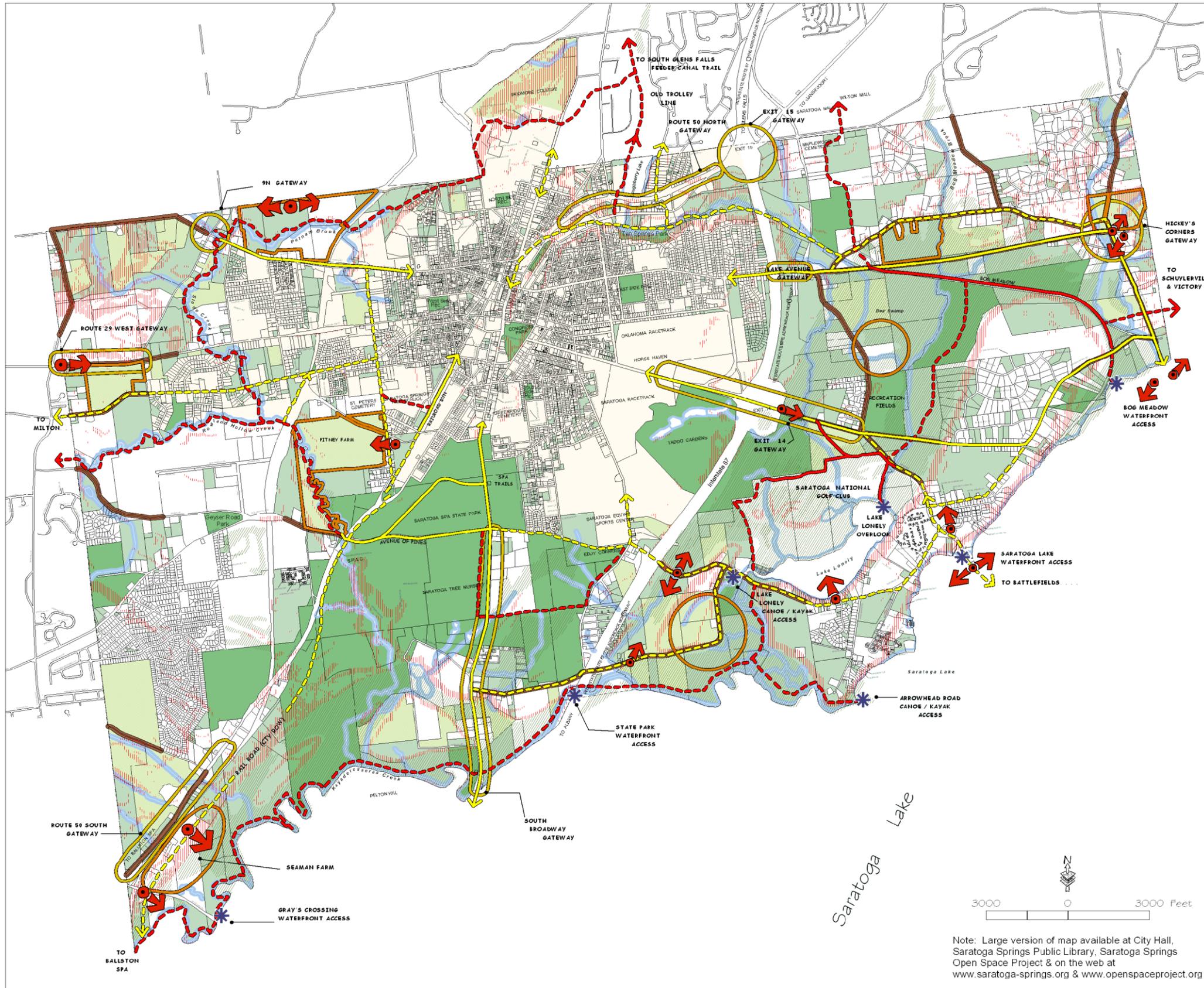
Another important consideration for the City's trail network is to determine how these trails should ultimately arrive in the busy urban core. Although directional signs are a useful start, movements through the inner district, and especially within the downtown area, need to receive more attention.



Appendices

**APPENDIX A – OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION
RESOURCES MAP**





LEGEND

- Urban Core
 - Permanently Protected/ Recreation Lands
 - Vacant Lands
 - Predominantly Undeveloped
 - Signature Gateways
 - Agricultural Heritage
 - Property Parcels
 - Municipal Boundaries
 - Rural Road Corridor
 - Scenic Vistas
 - Waterfront Access
- Pedestrian Trail System**
- Existing
 - Proposed
- Bike Trail System**
- Existing
 - Proposed
- Environmentally Sensitive Lands**
- Steep Slopes > 25%
 - Lakes, Ponds
 - Wetlands
 - Streams with 100 Ft Buffer

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CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
OPEN SPACE RESOURCES 2002
AN UPDATE TO THE 1994 OPEN SPACE PLAN

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION RESOURCES

Note: Large version of map available at City Hall, Saratoga Springs Public Library, Saratoga Springs Open Space Project & on the web at www.saratoga-springs.org & www.openspaceproject.org

APPENDIX B - THE BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE

Open spaces contribute enormously to the environmental health, quality of life, and fiscal stability of Saratoga Springs. Conserving the City's open space resources will have lasting value to our community for this and future generations.

Environmental Benefits

The protection of important natural resources is a primary objective of any open space conservation strategy. There are many potential environmental benefits that will result from our efforts in Saratoga Springs.

Perhaps the most important of these environmental benefits is the protection or enhancement of water quality. As the City and the region have grown, the need for improved, and perhaps new sources of drinking water has emerged as a primary concern for the future. Currently, the City's water needs are served by the Loughberry Lake Reservoir, the aquifer-fed Geyser Crest water system, and the Bog Meadow System. The City has commissioned an investigation into the potential for Saratoga Lake to serve as a source of water in the future. While all available options are being investigated, efforts to prevent non-point source pollution and to control erosion and sedimentation into our lakes and the streams that feed them will improve the quality of our water supply.

According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's inventory maps, there are 3,200 acres of state-regulated freshwater wetlands in Saratoga Springs. Additional areas of wetlands are identified on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory or are regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wetlands serve as storage for storm water runoff thereby reducing flood damage and function as natural filters for water pollutants. They also provide wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and provide open space and scenic beauty that can enhance local property values. There are also thirty miles of stream corridors, and three lakes in the City. Conserving lands along streams and lakes, and protecting the City's extensive system of wetlands will all contribute to improved water quality.

In addition to water quality improvements, other environmental benefits of open space conservation include the protection of wildlife habitat, the enhancement of regional biodiversity, and the improvement of air quality.



Quality of Life Benefits

Open space conservation benefits the quality of life in our community in many ways. Saratoga Springs is defined by its “City in the Country” character -- that is, a vibrant urban core surrounded by a network of open space resources. The transition from our dense urban core, to the much more sparsely populated “countryside” is still fairly well-defined. This distinct edge makes it relatively quick and easy for residents in our City to access the “country”, a benefit that few urban residents elsewhere in the United States share. The opportunities for active and passive recreation, and for relief from the urban environment are numerous in our community.

The focus on open space conservation, especially in the City’s outer area, also fosters the continued emphasis on growth and development in the City’s center. There are no “throw-away” sites for development in our urban core. We have managed to achieve a remarkable (and still growing) level of consensus in our community about the form and quality of development that is expected. The result is a vital and still-improving downtown, and surrounding neighborhoods that continue to revitalize. The success of our urban environment is in sharp contrast to many other urban communities in this part of the country. The demand for this type of urban experience is reflected by the growing success of the tourism and convention industries in Saratoga Springs, and in the strength and increasing value of our housing market.

The notion that we must make a choice between economic growth and open space conservation has been revealed as a myth. There is a growing recognition around the state and the nation that this is simply a false choice. For example, according to the Trust for Public Lands’ report, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space* (1999, p. 3-13), “Corporate CEO’s say quality of life for employees is the third-most important factor in locating a business, behind only access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor.” In addition, “Owners of small companies ranked recreation / parks / open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their business.” The same report notes that according to the National Park Service, “At the present rates of growth, the tourism / leisure industry will soon become the leading U.S. industry of any kind” (p. 27). Maintaining or enhancing the quality of life for residents, and the experience for visitors to Saratoga Springs is an important benefit associated with open space conservation efforts.



Fiscal Benefits

The City Council recently commissioned a study to examine the fiscal impact of various types of land uses in Saratoga Springs. At its most basic level, this type of analysis can provide a snapshot of the revenue to expenditure ratio for different types of land uses at a particular time. Called a “cost of community services study”, the result is usually presented as a set of ratios for particular broad categories of land use. Typical categories might include residential, commercial/industrial, and open land / farmland. For each, the analysis compares the revenues generated by the land use and the cost of providing services to the land use.

Many of these “cost of community services” studies have been conducted across the state and the nation. In nearly every case, the results have shown that for every dollar of tax revenue collected from residential land uses, the cost of providing community services is higher than a dollar; and for every dollar of tax revenue generated from open land / farmland, the cost of providing community services is substantially less than a dollar. Some examples from the Farmland Information Center of American Farmland Trust are:

Revenue to Expenditure ratios in dollars

| Community: | Residential | Farm / Forest/ Open Land |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Williamstown MA | 1:1.11 | 1:0.34 |
| Amenia NY | 1:1.23 | 1:0.25 |
| Deerfield MA | 1:1.16 | 1:0.29 |
| Montor NY | 1:1.50 | 1:0.29 |

In the case of Williamstown (above), for every dollar generated from residential land uses, the community spends \$1.11 on providing services to these uses. For every dollar generated from Farm/Forest/Open Land, the community spends \$0.34 on providing community services.

A fiscal model takes the analysis much further. A fiscal model begins with a similar study of a base year --that is, information about the community’s revenues and expenditures must be allocated by land use types for a year which will be the starting point for the model. To create the model, additional information about the community, such as the capacity of existing infrastructure and facilities, planned extensions and/or improvements, historical data about population and housing, etc., must be collected and analyzed. Once the model is created, it allows the community to test different scenarios of development to determine the impact on future taxes of each scenario.

In the mid-1990s, the Town of Pittsford, New York decided to create a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program as part of its Greenprint for the Future (the Greenprint was an implementation item from the town’s comprehensive plan). Under the PDR program, the town would permanently protect 1,200 acres on seven farms. The average cost to a homeowner of this program was estimated at about \$50 per



year. The town used its fiscal model to compare this to a future land use scenario in which the 1,200 acres were developed as housing (a reasonable assumption in that fast-growing town). The fiscal model demonstrated that the average cost to a homeowner of not implementing the PDR program (allowing the houses to be developed) would be approximately \$250 per year. Tax increases would be needed to pay for additional services -- especially schools -- for the new residents in these hypothetical future housing units. The model showed that the savings from avoiding these tax costs would total \$5,000 for the average homeowner over the life of the 20 year PDR bond.

In Saratoga Springs, the city's fiscal analysis was completed at the end of 2001. Results from this study indicate that a moderate conservation program, including bonding to purchase land or easements, will not cost taxpayers any more in the long run than if we simply allow development to continue with no conservation alternatives in place (*Behan Planning Associates 2001*).

All of these studies show that residential growth does not necessarily enhance a community's finances. A *balance of residential, commercial, and open lands is necessary* to balance the rising costs for services. Still, the fiscal benefits of open space conservation are not always well understood. As a recent article in the New York Times stated: "Although an increasing number of municipalities are trying to slow the juggernaut by acquiring open space and requiring large lots for construction, local officials are still obsessed by the never-ending pursuit of development they hope will offset property tax increases that were largely caused by earlier residential growth" (*An Appetite for Construction: New Jersey Cries Sprawl, but Lets Suburbs Swell*, March 11, 2001). Fortunately, we have moved beyond that here in Saratoga Springs.



APPENDIX C - DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION RESOURCES MAP

In preparing the Open Space and Recreation Resources map the Open Space Project conducted a parcel-by-parcel inventory of resources within the City. To facilitate this process, a Geographic Information System (GIS) was used. This system enables geographic information, such as tax parcels, roads, streams, and railroads, to be displayed and manipulated digitally.

To begin, a digital file of tax parcels and their assessment information was obtained from the City, which allowed a map to be created illustrating the current use of each property. For example, all lands that were classified by the City's Assessor as commercial were shaded red, lands classified as residential shaded as yellow, lands classified as industrial shaded purple, lands classified as vacant shaded gray, etc. Once the map was completed, it was used in the field to (1) verify the land use information, and (2) conduct a further inventory of resources.

Additional inventory in the field included a check for wetlands, steep slopes, type of vegetation (wooded, meadow, etc.), approximate percent developed, shoreline habitat, wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, and wildlife observation. All information collected was entered into the computer producing a complete and accurate parcel-by-parcel database of land use and resources in the community. Although much information was collected in the field, supplemental information was collected in order to complete the analysis including NYS delineated wetlands with a 100' buffer, 25% or greater slopes, agricultural lands, and streams with a 100' buffer.

After all the information was gathered and entered into the GIS database, a working base map was prepared highlighting all vacant lands and predominantly undeveloped lands (large parcels with very little development) over ten acres in size. This base map provided a framework to begin to understand the pattern of open space surrounding the urban core.

Once the working base map was prepared, a series of overlay maps were created illustrating different categories of open space resources including:

- Natural Resources: Wildlife, steep slopes, vegetation, wetlands with buffer, streams with buffer, and agricultural lands.
- Existing Trail Systems and Major Origin and Destination Points
- Scenic Vistas, Gateways, and Rural Road Corridors

Each of the maps was printed on clear acetate and overlaid onto the working base map. In so doing, the culmination of resources could be easily pinpointed thus helping to indicate certain lands with conservation interest. Using the overlays as a guide, the Open Space and Recreation Resources map was prepared.



APPENDIX D - BACKGROUND

The 1987 master plan for the City of Saratoga Springs recommended that the City develop an open space plan. From its inception that year, the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project worked toward implementation of that recommendation. In 1994, the Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs was completed by the volunteer Board of the Open Space Project. The plan was presented to the City Council and was adopted as a public policy guide later that year.

“The City In The Country” describes Saratoga Springs. This simple phrase captures the unique opportunity that history and geography have provided our community. Originally a bustling village within a rural town, Saratoga Springs was incorporated as a City in 1915. As a result, Saratoga Springs is the fourth largest City in New York State in terms of land area. The City is in the uncommon and envious position of controlling growth in a large area surrounding the urban core. There remains a significant opportunity to create a network of open lands as a greenbelt around our vibrant City core. The distinct edge between City and country is the essence of the City in the Country vision of the Open Space Plan.

The Open Space Plan articulated a balanced vision of Saratoga Springs -- one still shared throughout our community. The vision was eloquently stated in the introduction as follows:

The Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs aims to protect the critical boundary between rural landscape and town with purposeful urban design. As the City continues to develop, care must be taken to maintain a vital urban center with a strong rural edge. With its emphasis on infill, its focus on consolidation as an antidote to sprawl and its stress on the preservation of land and fiscal resources, the 1994 Open Space Plan aims to safeguard the survival of Saratoga’s economic health and visual appeal.

This balanced vision was quite progressive for upstate New York in the early 1990s. It recognized that growth and open space protection are not contradictory goals. The national dialogue about “smart growth” which has emerged since that time, lends support to our vision. Today in New York State, the Governor has defined general principles for smart growth, or “quality communities”, which include, “the revitalization of downtown areas, historic districts and brownfields and the preservation of community character and open space resources.” The Quality Communities Interagency Task Force, chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, recently issued a report titled, State and Local Governments Partnering for a Better New York (January 2001). The report notes that, “The Governor recognized that the State and local governments 'require creative strategies to combine growth and environmental protection in order to enhance economic vitality and quality of life.'”



The Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs (1994) contained a series of twenty-five policy recommendations, including:

1. Preserve the City in the country
2. Preserve and maintain existing active recreation areas and facilities
3. Upgrade and improve existing active recreation area and facilities
4. Preserve and maintain existing passive recreation areas
5. Develop new areas for passive recreation
6. Conserve quasi-public recreation areas and open spaces
7. Improve and develop additional center City gathering places
8. Encourage further development of small neighborhood parks
9. Preserve important cultural resources
10. Preserve and protect significant habitat
11. Protect drinking water aquifers and watersheds
12. Preserve all existing wetlands
13. Protect stream corridors
14. Maintain existing and develop additional springs
15. Preserve the petrified sea gardens
16. Identify and protect the scenic or visual qualities of the important entranceways in the City
17. Protect scenic byways, vistas and areas
18. Develop bikeways
19. Develop walking, skiing, and equestrian trail systems
20. Maintain and expand a sidewalk system throughout the more developed areas of the City
21. Develop canoe routes
22. Develop public access for boating and fishing
23. Preserve farmland and support existing agricultural activity
24. Formalize the community shade tree program
25. Promote improved land use design and development standards

All of the twenty-five policy recommendations remain valid today, and they continue to form the basis for actions by the Open Space Project and the City. Under each policy recommendation, the 1994 Open Space Plan provided ideas for how the recommendation might be accomplished. Many of the recommendations and opportunities identified in the plan have been implemented since the plan's completion. Many have not. In some cases the situation has changed or new opportunities exist. The 1994 plan recognized that it should be revisited periodically to ensure that it remains current. That is the purpose of this update to the Open Space Plan.

