



SARATOGA SPRINGS

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE AGENDA

JULY 28, 2021

5:00 P.M.

3RD FLOOR MUSIC HALL, CITY HALL, 474 BROADWAY

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81737252323>

Meeting ID: 817 3725 2323

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1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE —

- a. City Staff: Tina Carton; Skip Scirocco, Commissioner of Public Works; Leah O'Connor, Executive Assistant DPW.
- b. Committee members: Tom Denny, Jenn Hunt Dempsey, David Miller, Tim Holmes, Maureen Roberts.
- c. Invited guest experts: Mike Horn, Saratoga PLAN; Alane Ball Chinian, Regional Director of the Saratoga-Capital District Region NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
- d. Public: There were no members of the public present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT — No public comment

3. DISCUSSION WITH COMMISSIONER SCIROCCO: UNDERSTANDING DPW CHALLENGES TO OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE AND ITS FUNDING

Committee Chair Tom Denny welcomed the Commissioner, his assistant, and the two guests, and then gave a brief introduction to frame the topics that the OSAC wished to discuss with the Commissioner.

Commissioner Scirocco stated that there have always been budgetary issues related to open space and trail maintenance. He stated there are nine miles of trails in the city that need periodic maintenance. He has requested additional laborers and vehicles, but funding for these has been cut from the budget.

He stated that each trail is unique, with "its own look". The level of maintenance is determined by how the public wants the trail to look. A management plan would help the DPW with maintaining the different trails.

Regional Director Ms. Ball Chinian stated that it is advisable to have a pre-acquisition plan for proposed areas, and then if acquired, the plan would outline maintenance of said areas.



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Ms. Carton stated that she has created a trail asset inventory that she has previously provided to DPW with the expected cost per square foot for trail maintenance. The asset plan does need to be updated now that the Geyser Road Trail is complete.

Ms. Ball Chinian also stated that a pre-acquisition plan could provide consensus on the question “What is the vision for this property?” The State Park has been doing this as part of acquisition.

Commissioner Scirocco said he has a small crew that is able to maintain what we have now, but he’d like to add some laborers and a vehicle to the next city budget. He also stated that the city may acquire some land next to the water treatment plant on Excelsior Ave for a possible pocket park.

Next there was a discussion of different funding mechanisms, including surcharges on real estate transfer taxes, maintenance fees (similar to a rec fee), or sales tax surcharges. Commissioner Scirocco stated that non-profits can solicit funds for trails and maintenance, but the city cannot do this. He gave the example of the Southwest Neighborhood Association raising money for Geyser Road Trail improvements, such as benches, a table with bike tools, etc.

Commissioner Scirocco stated that there may be a role for volunteers in the day to day maintenance of trails, overseen by a “dedicated crew”, which would consist of a supervisor and two laborers, and their focus would be trail maintenance. If the public wants more “manicured” trails, this would require more resources. It was discussed that the last Open Space Plan from 2002 had no chapter on stewardship or maintenance of trails, and the new Plan that is being developed should have this.

Ms. Ball Chinian stated that in her opinion, volunteers were not the answer for basic maintenance, but they are great for activities like beautification, etc. She stated the Spa Park hires seasonal laborers to handle vegetation, etc.

Mr. Mike Horn offered a different perspective, stating that the Bog Meadow Trail has been maintained with volunteer labor for the past 25 years. He did acknowledge that it requires a special kind of volunteers, self-motivated and dedicated.



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Right now the DPW snow plows the Spring Run Trail and the Railroad Run Trail, and they could hire seasonal staff, but the problem is the lack of funding in the city budget to support additional work.

Commissioner Scirocco stated that different non-profits have contacted the DPW to do projects using local volunteers, such as the Lions Club. He spoke with particular enthusiasm for the new volunteer effort by the Saratoga Springs Preservation Society to improve and maintain landscaping and gardens in the vicinity of the Spirit of Life statues. The Committee discussed the possibility of the Saratoga PLAN's "Monday trail stewards" program being replicated in Saratoga Springs, and also coordinating with DPW on projects. Perhaps a "Saratoga Springs Conservancy" could be started, serving as an entity that would have its volunteer's contract with the city for services. This group could also be involved with future Bond Acts and acquisition of open space.

The committee discussed the difference between day to day maintenance, and capital upgrades, for which there are available grants.

The potential for union pushback against volunteers was discussed, and Commissioner Scirocco stated that this would only be a problem if volunteers were taking work away from unionized city workers. There is also a liability concern with volunteers. Volunteers should be covered by some type of "umbrella" insurance coverage, seen with such groups as Saratoga PLAN, Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation, etc.

The discussion again turned to funding, and the fact that capital improvement fees cannot be used for trail maintenance. The committee asked if a portion of the current Rec fee (i.e. 50%) could go to trail maintenance. The Commissioner stated that the Casino generates about \$500,000 a year, and this revenue goes into a General Fund. The committee wondered if some of this money could be available for trails, although it was acknowledged that this would require replacing this amount to the general fund from some other revenue source. There is a possibility that the Visitor's Center could generate more revenue.

Community Preservation Fund was discussed as a possible vehicle for funding maintenance. New York State town law (section 64), which does not apply to Saratoga Springs, authorizes some



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towns to establish a Community Preservation Fund. In this model, the Community Preservation Fund functions as a “holding tank” for money that came from various sources. Possible sources of money include: real estate transfer taxes, grants, and non-profit contributions. We decided to continue discussion of Community Preservation Funds at future meetings and whether one might be an option for Saratoga Springs. There also is money available in a “Building Reserve Fund” that can be used for many different things. We decided continuing discussion of Community Preservation Funds at future meetings.

4. OTHER BUSINESS —

Mr. Tom Denny stated that this was the final meeting for Mr. Tim Holmes, and he was thanked for his years of dedicated service to this committee.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no further public comment.

6. MEETING ADJOURNED: The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 PM. The next meeting will occur on August 25, 2021.