

**Town of Stillwater
Farmland & Open Space Protection Plan**

**Farmland & Open Space Public Workshop
Tuesday, September 18, 2007
7:00 PM, Town of Stillwater Middle/High School**

Meeting Notes

Attending: See sign-in sheets (Attached)

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

Mike Welti, Project Manager from The Chazen Companies (TCC), welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting. Mr. Welti then reviewed the meeting agenda (attached).

2. Presentation

Mr. Welti and Paul Cummings, associate planner from TCC, gave an introductory presentation to the audience. The presentation covered three topics: information on the project's background, the planning process, and some sample tools and techniques for conservation. Mr. Welti discussed how the Farmland & Open Space project is part of a greater town-wide Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) study. He also discussed some the conservation tools and techniques that are being used throughout the Capital Region (i.e. conservation subdivisions, purchase of development rights programs, etc). Mr. Cummings explained that the planning process was rooted in the *Green Infrastructure Plan for Saratoga County* (see www.co.saratoga.ny.us). Mr. Cummings also explained how the public workshop was part of a greater effort to inventory the Town's natural systems, recreational opportunities, existing and potential trails, and cultural and working landscapes, which is only the first phase of the project.

3. Facilitated Discussion – Group Breakout Session

Public Workshop attendees were split into two groups. Each group was provided four maps for review (i.e. Active Agriculture & Protected Lands, Protected Lands & Selected Parcels, Natural Resources, and Historical Resources). Using these maps, moderators facilitated a discussion around three questions:

- What are the important categories of open space resources in Stillwater?
- Where are Stillwater's Special Places?

- What are the opportunities for linking these resources, and connecting different parts of the town to one another, and to adjoining municipalities and trail systems?

Breakout Group 1

Moderators: Paul Cummings, Associate Planner (The Chazen Companies) and Matt Ruderman, Associate Planner (The Chazen Companies)

The group reviewed the committee's inventory maps – participants pointed out several agricultural properties that had either not been identified or incorrectly identified on the Active Agricultural Map. In addition, participants suggested that the types of farms be identified on the map (i.e. equestrian, crop, etc). In addition, several missing features such as the old gravel pit, the former Radar Site, several sections of abandoned railroad, and various proposed and/or under development subdivisions were pointed out.

What are the important categories of open space resources in Stillwater?

This first question led to a greater discussion about the threats to farmland and open space. There was strong consensus amongst the participants that water and wastewater extensions encouraged growth in undesirable places, which inevitably places undue pressure on farmers. It was mentioned several times that active agriculture and residential development were not compatible. It was noted that recent subdivisions were situated directly along active agricultural properties (and in close proximity to streams and waterways) and that these farmers are now having to deal with stormwater management issues (from the developed sites), neighbor's complaining about standard agricultural practices (i.e. noise, smell, etc), and vandalism.

Participants also noted that the current zoning regulations within the Town encouraged growth in undesirable places. Several farmers complained of small minimum lot sizes within, or adjacent to, zoning districts that were predominantly comprised of farms. It was also mentioned that density bonuses were awarded to housing developments that had municipal water and/or wastewater services, which was considered reasonable in already existing sewer and water districts, but seemed unreasonable in any additional ones – especially when adjacent to a farm.

Where are Stillwater's Special Places?

Old Radar Site – Located off of Henry Robens and Gronczniak Roads, the Old Radar Site was pointed out as having a high historical value. Several World War II and Cold War era facilities are located at the site, which includes an underground fallout/bomb shelter. In addition to the sites historical value are its possible viewshed opportunities. Participants pointed out that the location offers some of the best views of the areas natural and agricultural landscapes.

Stillwater Waterfront – it was noted that there is limited access to the Town's waterfront. Participants identified a large strip of state owned land north of Ferry Lane as a possible site for public access.

Luther Forest – snowmobile trails, equestrian trails, wetlands, waterways, proximity to the Mechanicville Reservoir, forested landscapes, and the site’s cultural and historic value were several of the reasons/features that participants believed made Luther Forest an important community and regional resource. Participants were concerned about the possible expansion of water and wastewater services in and around the site, and the growth/development it would likely encourage.

What are the opportunities for linking these resources, and connecting different parts of the town to one another, and to adjoining municipalities and trail systems?

Roadside rights-of-way – many participants believed that there existed opportunities throughout the town to develop multi-use trails alongside the roadways. State Route 423, County Route 76, Farley, Cold Springs, and Elmore Robinson Roads were all identified for several reasons. Participants highlighted the fact that these roads linked several key areas of the Town (i.e. Saratoga Lake, Saratoga National Historical Park, Luther Forest, Zim Smith Trail, the waterfront, proposed Route 4 improvements, etc). It was suggested that as the Town improves and/or repairs these roadways, it should seek to develop said trails.

Snowmobile Trails – many of the trails within the community were developed and/or maintained by the local snowmobiling club, which at one point was in partnership with the equestrian community. Participants were concerned about the loss of these trails due to development. One participant felt that snowmobiles should be allowed into the Saratoga National Historical Park.

Equestrian Trails – It was mentioned that there are over 11,000 horses in Saratoga County, and that the ancillary services that support the equestrian industry were vital to both the Town and County’s economy. As such, the maintenance of existing equestrian trails and the development of new ones was a key priority.

Luther Forest Technology Park Power Line – one participant pointed out a piece of property that was owned by Saratoga Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) off of County Route 75, which would be the beginning of a proposed power line that would lead to the Luther Forest Technology Park. It was suggested that any such power line should include a pedestrian path.

A discussion about general trail management and user needs followed. Equestrian trails users pointed out multi-use trails are often paved, which is not conducive to equestrian use, and that new trails should incorporate equestrian friendly designs. There was a general concern that existing trails were being lost and/or fragmented due to development. Participants felt that these trails needed to be permanently established, and that any new development should incorporate them into their design as well. It was suggest by one participant that the Town take over trail management.

Additional Questions/Comments?

Over regulation – this was a notable concern for large land owners. Although many participants were open to the idea of farmland and open space preservation, they were wary of overly restrictive

land use regulations. Rather than any regulatory mechanism, participants wanted to see conservation tools that supported agriculture economically.

Wetlands – it was noted that there is currently nobody to enforce wetland regulations within the town.

Breakout Group 2

Moderators: Michael Welti, AICP, Senior Planner (The Chazen Companies) and Diane Metz (Saratoga PLAN)

The group reviewed the committee’s inventory maps – there were a few questions regarding how some features on the maps were identified. Participants also suggested a handful of corrections to the Active Agriculture map; and noted that the snowmobile trails shown on another map were not completely accurate because some of these trails have become fragmented as a result of changing land ownership (example of a horse farm between County Route 75 and Meehan Road)

What are the important categories of open space resources in Stillwater?

There was a question about what the term “open space” means. It means different things to different people. To some it might simply mean land that is undeveloped. Most in this group felt that working farmland was of primary importance and tended to view land that is no longer in agricultural production as of less value.

There was a concern expressed by some of the farmers in the group that certain decisions that the Town could make, such as changes to land use regulations or expanding/not expanding infrastructure, would reduce the value of their property. It was suggested that such decisions would be unfair to those who might consider entering a PDR program, because it would reduce the value of their development rights.

There was a discussion about the Agricultural Districts program. Most of the farmland parcels identified on the map are indeed in the Agricultural District. Some suggested that the primary benefit of the Ag Districts is the protection against local regulations that could limit farming operations. The agricultural assessment component of the program was also viewed positively, but it was pointed out that many landowners (as much as 75%) who might be eligible to receive agricultural assessment in Stillwater do not take advantage of this. There was speculation about why this is – some suggested that it is because of a lack of awareness while others felt that it was because of the repayment penalty that landowners must pay if they exit the program prematurely.

Where are Stillwater’s Special Places?

Luther Forest – was planted starting in the 1920’s and continuing into the 1940’s under a federal program. Some participants recalled family members who worked on this many years ago. The land was previously farmland. It is the only real forest from here to the Adirondacks. Portions of

Luther Forest that are east of Cold Spring Road are not part of the Technology Park. There is concern about the future of this forest because infrastructure and power lines to serve the technology park will cut through there and potential stimulate additional development. There was also concern that the forest is no longer well managed.

Saratoga National Historical Park – the battlefield and the cemetery were highlighted as special places in the community.

Saratoga Lake – it was noted that opportunities for public access to the lake were lost years ago, and this was viewed as unfortunate.

What are the opportunities for linking these resources, and connecting different parts of the town to one another, and to adjoining municipalities and trail systems?

Equestrian Trails – there is a desire to see more horse trails and it was noted that the trail system that exists today is quite poor given the importance of this industry to the county.

Zim Smith Trail – it was noted that horses are not allowed along the trail, but nobody could understand the reason for this.

There was a discussion about the former railroad right-of-way that traverses the Town from the Village to Saratoga Lake. Most recognized this as an opportunity, but one with significant challenges. Ownership of the right-of-way is now fragmented among many landowners and so at best this would be a very long-term initiative. Landowners will have concerns related to important issues such as liability, trail maintenance, lack of privacy and security. It was noted that more than 90% of the public that might use such a trail would be responsible, but the remaining 10% would ruin it for everyone. However, nobody in the group suggested that future use of this right-of-way was out of the question.

The current project to develop a trail from the Village of Stillwater to the Riverside neighborhood was identified as a growing issue in parts of the community. It was noted that some neighboring landowners have raised concerns about the project and others suggested that the process (or lack thereof) has soured some to the idea of trails.

Additional Questions/Comments?

Taxes – this remains the number one problem for large landowners. Though agricultural assessments and programs such as STAR are intended to help, they do not do enough to relieve the burden, especially for older individuals who have limited or fixed incomes.

Retirement – for many farmers or large landowners, the land is their primary or only asset and it is their retirement fund. They are understandably concerned about anything that could impact the value of their land. They are also concerned about becoming involved in programs such as PDR

because they do not want to limit the opportunities for their children or grandchildren who may no longer desire to farm the land.

4. Report Back

After the breakout group exercise, participants reconvened and Mr. Welti and Mr. Cummings summarized each group's discussion for everyone to hear.

5. Next Steps

Mr. Welti thanked everyone for their participation and reiterated that this was only the first phase of the Farmland & Open Space project. He explained that the question, concerns, and comments that have now been gathered will be reviewed by the Committee at its next meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:35 pm.

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**Public Meeting
Tuesday, September 18, 2007
7:00 PM**

Agenda

1. Welcome and Agenda Review
2. Presentation
 - Project Background
 - Green Infrastructure Inventory Process
 - Sample Tools and Techniques for Conservation
3. Facilitated Discussion – Group Breakout Session
 - What are the important categories of open space resources in Stillwater?
 - Where are Stillwater’s Special Places?
 - What are the opportunities for linking these resources, and connecting different parts of the town to one another, and to adjoining municipalities and trail systems?
 - Additional questions/comments?
4. Report Back
5. Next Steps in Planning Process

Additional Comments or Suggestions by October 1st to:

Stillwater Town Hall
P.O. BOX 700
Stillwater, NY 12170
<http://www.stillwaterny.org/>

Sign In Sheet

Town of Stillwater
 Farmland and Open Space
 September 18, 2007

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Sign In Sheet

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