

Clifton Park would benefit from a park

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34 wooded acres behind Shenendehowa's Shatekon Elementary School could be bought by developers and transformed into shopping centers, restaurants, office spaces and parking lots if the town isn't able to make a deal with the school district by the end of October.

Both the town of Clifton Park and the Shenendehowa school district have benefitted significantly from a strong tax base that includes one of the region's premier shopping areas and a growing residential and commercial tax base.

They should loosen the purse strings and work together to give residents what many have long been clamoring for — a community park they can call their own.

That dream would come to fruition if the town and the district could agree on a sale price for a 34-acre tract of heavily wooded property located behind Shatekon Elementary School, between Moe Road and Maxwell Drive.

[\[Residents fight for future of Clifton Park wild space\]](#)

Residents have been increasingly vocal and organized about trying to secure the land for the park, rather than have it sold and turned into more buildings and parking lots — which they say the town already has plenty of.

Tax base is important for a community. But so is a quality of life that lends itself to a sense of community.

Look how area communities like Malta, Wilton and Queensbury, which all have benefitted from shopping, manufacturing and residential housing, have nonetheless struggled to create a center square/downtown area to boost the sense of community for their residents. Clifton Park is in the same situation.

Green space — like the kind that could be provided by a 34-acre park accessible to residents for passive recreational uses such as hiking and biking — would go a long way toward creating that community space and community feeling for Clifton Park residents.

The district has owned the property since 1970 and has considered selling it. One developer reportedly offered \$1.7 million for the land, but later withdrew the offer. Town officials also reportedly made an offer to the district that included money and land for sports fields, but it hasn't been accepted by the district.

The school district, the town and their taxpayers can afford to sacrifice whatever property tax and sales tax revenue they could otherwise generate from residential or commercial development on the parcel.

The school district's \$166 million spending plan for 2016-17, approved by voters in May, contained a tax levy increase of 0.74 percent, below the state tax cap and the lowest such increase in 11 years. The district was able to do that while preserving existing educational programs and services, and even adding to some programs.

The town of Clifton Park is in similarly stellar financial shape. The town doesn't even collect a general town tax. Yet it was able to expand some services and produce a 2016 combined \$22.4 million general fund/highway fund budget without tapping into surplus and without going over the state tax cap. That's all thanks to efficient budgeting and continued development, especially in the growing healthcare industry.

Residents clamoring for a sense of community deserve this, want this, and can afford this. It will be an investment that will pay dividends for the community for decades.

Officials in the school district and the town should ramp up negotiations and find a way to make it happen.