

FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE

www.cpopenspace.org

February, 2020

FRIENDS Goals – 2020

FRIENDS has adopted its goals for the coming year. And those goals include ongoing plans to promote the concept of the Green “C” in western Clifton Park. Steps toward this goal include:

- Advocate for the conveyance of all development-related open space in the GEIS area to be accessible to the public
- Assist in the parcel-specific identification of connected open spaces
- Develop and advocate for a position regarding troubled golf courses and their development proposals

Additionally, we will continue our outreach to the public about the benefits of open space—particularly in regard to the new 37-acre Town Park at Exit 9.

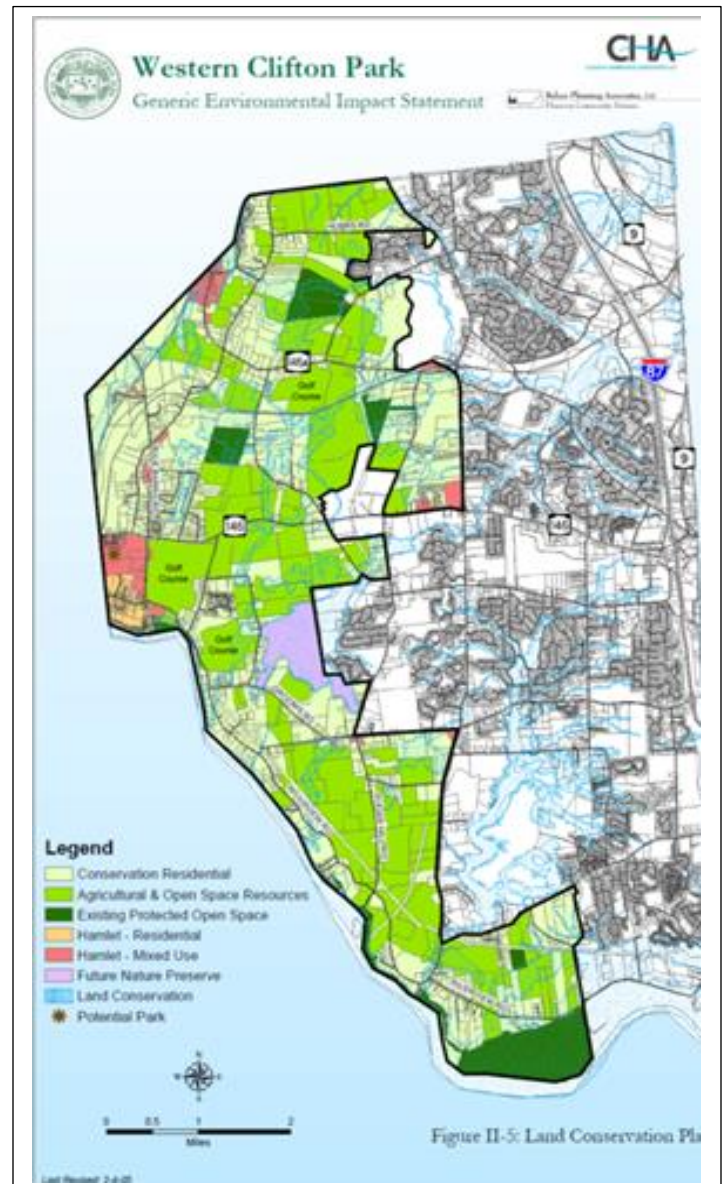
However, a new goal for FRIENDS will be to protect the integrity of the Conservation Residential (CR) Zoning in western Clifton Park. Steps toward this goal include:

- Developing a position on the management of commercial solar & wind generation to present to the town.
- Work with the Zoning Board of Appeals to recognize the importance of protecting the CR Zoning regulations and guidelines.



Friends Still Concerned With Western Zone Development

Many projects requesting variances in zoning regulations



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Town Park Master Plan Officially Adopted

Town Board adopts Park Plan at February 3rd Meeting

The town had contracted with Behan Planning and with ELAN Landscape Architecture for a series of events to engage the public in the overall planning process for the 37 acres which the town acquired from the Shenendehowa School District. These meetings resulted in the adopted plan which can be viewed via these links:

- **Town Park MASTER PLAN**, Dec. 9, 2019: <https://www.cliftonpark.org/document-center/projects/37-acre-town-center-park-project/2900-park-master-plan-town-board-dec-9-small-v2/file.html>
- **Town Park Master Plan APPENDIX**, Dec. 9, 2019: <https://www.cliftonpark.org/document-center/projects/37-acre-town-center-park-project/2903-appendix-town-center-park-master-plan/file.html>
- **Public Presentation** (PowerPoint, in PDF format) of the Town Park Master Plan, Dec. 9, 2019: <https://www.cliftonpark.org/document-center/projects/37-acre-town-center-park-project/2902-town-board-dec-9th-presentation-reduced/file.html>

The Plan also outlines a budget for making the park a reality and it is important that the Town follow thru and budget for these improvements.

Contact Town Board members and let them know you want to see this happen.

FRIENDS also proposes additional connectivity to Collins Park, the Public Safety Building, and the Arongen Elementary School/Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library complex. We believe that this additional connectivity will greatly enhance the proposed plan and has already been designated as a priority by the town supervisor. It is also important to note that all these locations have public restroom facilities.

Connectivity to **Collins Park** would create an enhanced park-trail network. Much of its acreage is undeveloped, but it does have restroom facilities and 20 parking spots. A picnic pavilion, a large playfield, a baseball diamond and a volleyball court are also present.

The **Public Safety Building** site is a retention basin with little mature vegetation. The existing depression should help to bring the additional parking to the level of the Public Safety lot, or, if elevated to street level, still retain its function for flood water mitigation.

The **Arongen/Library Complex** both connect the existing “bridge trail” to the Town Center Park via an existing “herd path” trail and both locations are vital and logical additions for creating a viable and extensive park trail network.

Solar-Generating Facilities Expand in Western Clifton Park

[These projects should comply with the existing zoning](#)

Together We Can Keep the Park in Clifton Park!

The Conservation Residential (CR) Zone was created to promote & support open space and agricultural uses, and to sustain the rural character of this predominantly natural, agricultural, and low-intensity residential setting. The CR Zoning was established to protect these goals while providing for well-planned new development and protecting the health, safety, economic base and quality of life in Clifton Park.

Today, large land-owners are looking to generate revenue by leasing part of their land for solar-generation facilities. Utility customers can save money on their utility bills. Solar projects do not create increased demands on municipal services and infrastructure. And NYS is committed to generating 50% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

Recent town projects include:

- Ashdown Road—22 acres
- 753 Grooms Road—34 acres
- 160 Sugar Hill Road—40 acres
- 267 Sugar Hill Road—30 acres
- Appleton Road—27 acres

These projects only represent about 2% of the developable land in Western Clifton Park. Nonetheless, these projects are seldom required to adhere to the existing CR zoning. There are:

- NO Base density requirements.
- NO Green space protection/set-aside acreage required
- NO Open space protection for wild life or habitats

Today's electric grid infrastructure limitations provide a de facto moratorium for us to evaluate our solar zoning code. According to NYSERDA "Many local governments are implementing strategies to review solar installations within their community by updating their comprehensive plan and adopting zoning requirements for the siting, installation, and decommissioning of large-scale solar arrays.

NOW is the ideal time to review Solar Zoning Standards—especially in the CR Zone.

Potential Steps to Mitigate Adverse Solar Impacts

Our town is unique and that's a valuable resource itself.

Let's protect it!

Municipalities can use special use permits and site plan regulations to support solar energy development while ensuring that their most valuable and productive farmland is protected and remains in productive use.

The NYS Solar Guidebook includes some steps to take:

1. Determine Special Use Permit and new site plan approval standards to minimize the impact of large-scale solar on appropriate land.
2. Based on the selected additional site plan requirements, determine what additional submission information will be required to determine compliance and identify mitigation opportunities. Create a menu of potential mitigation conditions to reduce impact in the event that projects are approved upon conditions.
3. Amend the site plan regulations to include new approval standards with submittal specifications.
4. Amend the zoning code if applicable to specify that the development of any large-scale solar project triggers a site plan review.

FRIENDS suggests that these steps also include:

- A green space percentage for acreage set-asides which complies with the existing CR zoning code,
- Inclusion of open space corridors for town trails and wildlife habitat,
- Minimizing the amount of alternation to vegetation,
- Consideration of proximity to wetlands, buffer zones, etc.

Other towns such as Nassau have established specific solar array zoning codes and FRIENDS intends to study these kinds of regulations and make suggestions for our Town's consideration. We are always open to your ideas on this topic.

Zoning Variances in the Conservation Residential Zone—A Recent Example

In June, 2019 a project came before the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The project involved a 20.19 acre parcel with 4.57 acres of unconstrained land which the builder wished to subdivide into 2 lots, then build 1 duplex on each lot for 2 duplexes with a total of 4 dwelling units.

According to CR zoning updated that past December regarding duplexes, this kind of project would require 3 acres of unconstrained land for each dwelling unit—or 12 acres—as well as 25% of unconstrained land in permanent open space protection—or 5+ acres. The applicant was requesting an Area Variance for each lot—one for 500% and one for 40%. In order to address the open space requirements of the CR code, the applicant was proposing a separate, non-contiguous lot of 7.12 acres be “given” to the town.

FRIENDS spoke at the ZBA June meeting outlining the long and public process which the town undertook to create the Open Space Plan beginning in 2001, to the Western Design Guidelines and CR Zoning code in 2005, to the 2018 updates to the CR Code regarding duplexes. We opposed the variances requested as an ongoing erosion of the all the work done in creating and maintaining the goals of the Town’s Open Space Plans and Ordinances, as a bad precedent for future request, and as an abrogation of the Town Board’s recent CR Zone updates. Nonetheless, the ZBA approved the variances with stipulations for approval by the Planning Board and an offer of the 7.12 acres to the Town.

When the same proposal went before the Planning Board in November, the request has been changed to 2 single family homes but still required substantial area variances. there were many opposing comments by adjoining residents as well as FRIENDS at the Public Hearing. When it came back in January, 2020 for final approval, the Planning Board approved 1 single family house—which was allowed under the CR Code—and the 2nd only if the 7 acre separate parcel could be conveyed to the town with a Deed of Conservation Easement or, preferably, conveyed to Saratoga PLAN which owns the parcel actually adjacent to the applicant’s 7 acre parcel.

This whole process is symptomatic of how a small project could have cumulative effects on the CR Zone, and of how so many need to get involved in sustaining the protections so many have fought for, for so long. In the end, concessions were made and concerns of citizens were recognized and the town staffs understood the public benefits involved for everyone. But we all need to continue working towards that end.

Join Us In That Effort!

FRIENDS OF CLIFTON PARK OPEN SPACE would like your **financial help** in sustaining our research and outreach efforts. If you would like to help in this way, please detach, complete and mail the form below with your check made out to: **FCPOS, P.O. Box 821, Clifton Park, New York 12065**

--Or--Go to our website: www.cpopenspace.org and make a contribution directly from there.

Thank you very much for your support!

Yes, I want to help Friends of Clifton Park Open Space in their work to preserve the “Park” in Clifton Park

I would like to contribute: \$10 \$20 \$30 \$40 \$50 \$75 \$100

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please make checks payable to: Friends of Clifton Park Open Space—or—FCPOS

Friends of Clifton Park Open Space is a 501C3 corporation and Contributions are fully deductible as a charitable donation