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## Esopus Riverfront – Access and Connections Study

### Public Informational Meeting #1

### May 22, 2019

### Summary of Public Comments

The following is a summary of comments received at Public Informational Meeting #1 of the Esopus Riverfront – Access and Connections Study. This meeting was held on the evening of May 22, 2019 at 7:00, at the Town of Esopus Town Hall. Approximately 45 interested individuals (35 of those individuals signed in on the Project sign-in sheet) attended the meeting. The meeting closed shortly after 8:40 pm.

The meeting began with an approximate 50-minute presentation given by the Laberge Group's Matthew Rogers-Senior Planner and Joshua Westfall, AICP- Planner, with an introduction by Supervisor Shannon Harris. The presentation provided an overview of the Project goals, objectives and schedule along with the results of the recent site visits, existing conditions, and potential improvements at the following sites:

- Black Creek Preserve
- Esopus Meadows Preserve
- George H. Freer Memorial Beach
- Lighthouse Park
- Sleightsburgh Park

The presentation was followed by a public question and answer period that was moderated by Laberge Group and Supervisor, Shannon Harris.

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#### Sleightsburgh Park

1. An unnamed individual asked if a fee schedule and/or other usage restrictions could be implemented in the park for use of the boat launch.
  - Matt Rogers stated that this idea has been discussed by the Committee and that that the option would continue to be explored.
  - Rita Shaheen of Scenic Hudson, spoke and stated that due to Scenic Hudson's Easement on the property, restricting access would not be permitted as it had to be open to all in the public. Rita Shaheen indicated she would need to review the easement to determine if the Town could collect fees.
2. Chet Allen asked if the easement held on the property by Scenic Hudson would allow for an expansion of the access driveway as it is currently very narrow and ingress/egress can be difficult when met by oncoming vehicles.
  - Matt Rogers explained the adjacent environmental constraints caused by wetlands and indicated that the Committee has discussed and will further explore pull-offs, or alternately, utilizing signage and lights that would limit vehicle use of the access drive to one vehicle at a time.
  - Mr. Allen further discussed that the use as a boat launch and a recreational asset may outweigh the value of the wetlands adjacent to the road and that this should be considered as he felt more visitors to the Park would be using it for fishing, the trails, and the water access.
  - Zura Capilli indicated she enjoyed the road along the wetlands and that it was a valuable asset to the Park.

- Mr. Rogers confirmed that the wetlands were a fragile environment and that a fair assessment would be considered that takes both recreational needs and environmental needs into account-protecting, benefiting, and maximizing both.
3. Matt Rogers brought up the fact that out of all of the Parks and Preserves in the Town, Sleightsburgh Park is facing the most adverse impacts related to future sea level rise (SLR). Referring to the site condition maps at the back of the room, Matt Rogers described how the access road into Sleightsburgh Park will be negatively impacted by SLR, along with the trails, and parking and boat launch areas. Increased frequency of strong storms, associated storm surges and the increased flood plain impacts associated with SLR will also negatively impact the Park. The Town will need to take the future impacts of SLR and storms into consideration when planning for improvements to ensure investments are appropriate while understanding that the Park may eventually be unreachable.
  4. An unnamed individual asked if there were any solid statistics of how many people want to launch their boats at this location and if it is just a short term demand.
    - The individual went on to advocate for a mix of uses at the Park that enhances both the natural and developed portions and asked if those uses can be segregated so as to provide maximum benefit for all visitors.
    - Also in regard to Sleightsburgh Park, the individual described potential benefits of placing lights on the road, allowing for safe access to, and egress from the Park for all vehicles (as previously discussed).
    - The individual asked if the Town, as a result of this process, would be creating additional demand for a boat launch facility at the Park or if there is currently significant demand. She restated that perceived demand may be short term in nature and may not really exist.
      - Mr. Rogers stated that there are no official statistics for the park. The Committee has discussed this and is in agreement that usage statistics should be obtained in the future. This may occur partially with the assistance of volunteer stewards to be stationed at the park this summer. Long-term surveys/monitoring is desired by the Committee and recommendations on how this should occur would be provided.
  5. Laura Petit stated that in her role as a County Legislator, she spoke with a resident in the Sleightsburgh hamlet regarding traffic and pedestrian safety as well as a lack of provisions for adequate site safety and security. Legislator Petit asked if sidewalks or other pathways were being considered to separate pedestrians from the adjacent roadways and indicated a concern for dangerous pedestrian and boat trailer interactions. Legislator Petit also stated that she didn't feel existing wayfinding signage was sufficient in many locations to lead those unfamiliar with the area to the park.
    - Supervisor Harris confirmed that she has also spoke with many residents about safety and security and indicated that the Town will begin locking the gates overnight and spoke on clarifying hours for vehicular access. The Supervisor continued that the Town is seeking to install surveillance cameras and adequate lighting to improve safety and security at the Park.
    - Matt Rogers stated that due to built and natural constraints, the siting of sidewalks in the hamlet to the Park may be difficult to consider. However, the Town will be looking into opportunities for traffic calming along the vehicle and pedestrian route into Sleightsburgh Park.

### **Freer Park**

1. During the Presentation period of the meeting an individual in attendance asked for clarification on the existing storm water drainage and sedimentation issues at Freer Park (there are multiple stormwater pipes that discharge into the River at Freer Park).
  - Joshua Westfall and Matt Rogers clarified that the stormwater drains from the park and based on information from the Town's stormwater consultant, areas along US Rt. 9W also contribute to the drainage at Freer Park.
  - Matt Rogers also stated that the Town is in compliance with State regulations for stormwater. Going forward, any plan to improve the shoreline at Freer Park will take into consideration the current stormwater discharge system and possible improvements.

2. An individual raised concerns about additional paving at Freer Park. Supervisor Shannon Harris had commented that the Town has set aside money for repaving and that there are no plans to significantly increase impervious areas. There is an existing unpaved area where people park at the northern portion of the Park. This area gets muddy and is subject to erosion during rain events and as a result may be paved or a suitable pervious surface installed. The Town will look to reduce the amount of impervious areas at the Park if possible. The efficiency of the parking lot may also be improved along with the overall drainage from impervious areas.

### **Lighthouse Park**

1. Zura Capelli voiced her concern for an expanded parking lot as identified in the presentation. She stated that she felt the lot was adequate and there was no need for expansion saying that currently the lot is in good shape save one large pothole. She stated that there would be too much parking and that any expansion of parking would make the Park unenjoyable.
  - Zura Capelli also spoke on her concerns for moving the large rocks along the shoreline, which were identified in the presentation to be moved. She felt any movement of these rocks would further affect shoreline erosion and affect the integrity of River Road.

### **Esopus Meadows Preserve:**

1. Zura Capelli stated her displeasure at the prevalence of unleashed dogs at the site, citing that she felt they were destructive to plant and animal life- decreasing natural diversity in the area. There was a discussion about the issue and the fact that Park rules require all dogs be leashed. Scenic Hudson acknowledged that while this is the rule on all of its properties, it is difficult to enforce and that dog owners need to take more responsibility.

### **General Park Comments Provided:**

1. During the Presentation period of the meeting a resident asked a question about the efficiency of nature-based shoreline and their adequacy of use. She asked for clarification on what a nature-based shoreline is.
  - Matt Rogers described that the term “nature-based” shoreline is a shoreline that uses natural materials (combination of vegetation and rocks) to reinforce the shoreline against erosion. Matt Rogers referred to the nature-based shoreline at Esopus Meadows Point (southern portion of Esopus Meadows Preserve) that was previously a bulkhead. The use of bulkheads/sea walls can increase shoreline erosion on either side of walls due to wave deflection. This is evident at Freer Park.
  - The resident further stated that many of the trees along waterfront trails at Esopus Meadows are dying due to constant flooding and erosion and further identified the movement of a waterfront trail west, away from the river as an example supporting her assertion that nature-based shoreline improvements are not appropriate.
    - It was clarified that the erosion she referred to was not at the location of the nature-based shoreline, but at the shoreline along the northern portion of the park that has not been improved or stabilized.
  - Matt Rogers further clarified that any plans to construct nature-based shorelines would include appropriate evaluations including engineering studies to ensure any improvement efforts are suitable for each site.
2. An unnamed individual spoke on a handful of issues:
  - Scenic Hudson should provide garbage cans at parks despite the difficulty it would cause as it would ultimately maintain clean conditions within the sites. It was clarified that Scenic Hudson as a “carry-it-in, carry-it-out” rule and there are no plans to provide garbage cans.
  - Increased use of public parks for events would be a benefit to the Town and suggested a food truck event in Freer Park which would draw both residents and visitors and promote local businesses.

- Inquired if the Town should approach park planning from the perspective of spaces intended for residents and non-residents versus ones intended for residents only, including more small scale and passive in nature.
    - Matt Rogers, in response for her support of more events at parks, indicated that this was discussed by the Committee, is included in the Draft Comprehensive Plan and that the newly created Economic Development Task Force for events and tourism would be examining this.
3. Victor Cappelli read a prepared a statement:
- Regarding the destructive effects of unattended and unleashed dogs at park properties in Esopus. Capelli stated that dogs cause major environmental damage and microclimatic disturbances for birds and endangered flora. Capelli continued to cite personal knowledge that dog spread ticks between different locations as they rub against plants. Lastly Capelli stated that the high amount of “poop bags” and excrement piles left by dogs create an unenjoyable experience at parks and create a visual affront to all visitors.
  - Victor Capelli also discussed the need to balance and minimize tourist type activities in order to maintain the environmental ecology of the area and that an increase in tourist activities at natural areas will negatively affect the Hudson River.
4. Zura Capelli stated that she felt the best asset at all parks was the natural diversity, and this should be preserved and considered throughout the Town. She continued that the Town and this Study should recognize what lands should be intended to be Parks and what should be a Preserve, and to manage and maintain those lands accordingly, and that any development and recreational amenities considered should be appropriate. She cited that in her time in the Hudson Valley she has noticed a decrease in natural diversity and an increase in invasive species.
5. From Facebook live video comments, Jesse Hicks via Alex Dean, asked if this considers environmental issues such as dumping, and invasives in the River, or adjacent to Park locations, for any future development or recreational offerings.
- Matt Rogers stated the Town is aware of current data on water quality but the Committee has not discussed this to date.
  - Supervisor Harris stated that addressing water quality is not in the scope of this project, but that any information readily available will be considered.

### **Comment Cards Received**

#### Comment Card 1:

- “GREAT MTG. Thanks for all the work”  
-N. Ryan

#### Comment Card 2:

- “We need to encourage + support local gov’t initiatives that protect habitat + decrease threats to biodiversity”
- “Have you identified provincial conservation concerns and if not, why not.”
- “Do you have a red list for areas most at risk + a blue list for areas vulnerable to human activities + natural disturbance”  
-zuracapelli@yahoo.com

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### **Post Public Discussion Period**

1. Chairwoman Mercedes Ross spoke briefly after the meeting, thanking all in attendance and pointing out that Scenic Hudson brochures were available at the sign in table.

2. Lastly Chairwoman Ross called for volunteers to operate “Chester” and described the training, the duties, and the need. She stated that anyone interested should contact Carol Carson-Tomassetti of the Committee.
3. Supervisor Harris supported Chairwoman Ross’ call for volunteers, describing the importance of this service provided.
4. Supervisor Harris closed the meeting shortly after 8:40pm, thanking the committee and all those in attendance.