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**Esopus Riverfront – Access and Connections Study**  
**Riverfront Project Committee Meeting #3**  
**July 10, 2019**  
**Summary Meeting Notes - APPROVED**

**Attendance:**

*Riverfront Project Committee (RPC):* Mercedes Ross, RPC Chairwoman; Alex Dean, Community Outreach Coordinator, Chet Allen; Diane Dintruff; Margaret Phelan; Carol Carson-Tomassetti; Dale Wolfield; Marion Zimmer; Heather Blaikie, Scenic Hudson; and Rita Shaheen, Scenic Hudson.

*Planning and Design Team:* Matthew Rogers, Senior Planner, Laberge Group and Peter Loyola, RLA, CLA Site

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Ross at 5:05 PM.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Mercedes moved, seconded by Chet to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2019 Committee Meeting #2 with no changes.

**Meeting Discussion:**

Matthew introduced Peter Loyola from CLA Site who will be the lead Landscape Architect for improvements at Freer and Lighthouse Parks.

At Committee Meeting #2, Scenic Hudson received permission to prepare a letter of support on behalf of the RCP for Scenic Hudson's CFA application. The letter was circulated during this meeting and all RPC members present signed the letter.

**Review of Current Proposed Improvements**

- The first objective for the meeting was to begin considering the vision, role, or purpose for each Park and Preserve in Town. A brief summary of each Park and Preserve was provided by Laberge Group for Committee discussion. A discussion ensued:
  - Freer Park was identified as the Town's primary family-oriented and ADA accessible Waterfront Recreation Park which offers opportunities for fishing, canoeing and kayaking, family events and picnics, scenic views, and includes a playground, a horseshoe pit, basketball court and restrooms. There was a brief discussion about what "accessible" means and it was clarified that the term is now used more often to refer to ADA accessibility. It was decided that for this project, we would use the term "ADA accessible" in place of just "accessible" to clear up any confusion.
  - Sleightsburgh Park was identified as the Town's primary public boat launching and fishing location with opportunities for fishing, boating, hiking, bird watching and scenic viewing. The Park offers a

NYSDEC Hudson River Estuary Grant for River Access

boat ramp for trailed boats, a canoe/kayak launch, seasonal restrooms, hiking trails and an ADA accessible fishing platform.

- Lighthouse Park was identified as the Town's more rural Town Park that provides opportunities for canoeing and kayaking, bird watching, fishing, scenic viewing, picnicking, and environmental interpretation in association with the adjoining Esopus Meadows Park.
- Esopus Meadows was identified as a recreational and educational preserve that provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, picnicking, environmental interpretation, and canoeing and kayaking.
- Black Creek Preserve was also identified as a recreational and educational preserve that provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, picnicking, environmental interpretation and canoeing and kayaking and includes an ADA accessible trail providing views of Black Creek and the Hudson River.
- Matthew stated that the current summary of each Park and Preserve will be revised as the project continues and suggested the Committee continue to think about the primary focus/intent/role of each Park and Preserve as the desired improvements are discussed.
- Carol asked if the Town would be conducting a survey or using other methods to begin understanding the overall use statistics for Town Parks. The idea of using a traffic counter was discussed along with the Sleightsburgh Park stewards and accessing the Town's pavilion registration information. After a discussion, it was determined that the Town could consider conducting an online survey (Facebook, Town Website, SurveyMonkey, or other means) to begin obtaining use statistics and additional information on what park users would like to see at each location. It is recommended that this process begin as soon as possible to coincide with the public design workshop.
- Using a PowerPoint presentation, Matthew provided an overview of each Town Park and the current proposed improvements along with feedback based on recent site visits with the NYSDEC. The Committee discussed all improvements as follows:
  - Freer Park:
    - Based on site visits and discussions with NYSDEC, it was determined that the majority of the shoreline erosion behind the bulkhead and some deterioration to the bulkhead itself has and continues to be caused by stormwater from the parking lot and overland flow. Wave action and storms also contribute to the weathering of the bulkhead.
    - The bulkhead has been in place for approximately 30 years and is in good shape, although an engineering analysis is necessary to confirm existing structural conditions. Replacing the bulkhead would be costly and require multiple permits from the DEC and other agencies. It is therefore, recommended to keep the existing bulkhead in place, make necessary repairs and address the park's stormwater issues that are causing erosion and deterioration. The Committee was in agreement.
      - Stormwater improvements will include the use of rain gardens and other measures to prevent runoff from the parking lot to the shoreline.
      - The source of the stormwater being discharged into the River will need to be confirmed. At least a portion of the stormwater originates from the parking lot as evidence of storm drains. Based on a discussion between Matthew and the Town's stormwater engineers, Tighe and Bond (T&B), they are not currently looking into stormwater around or at Freer Park.
      - There was a brief discussion about existing stormwater issues being experienced by residents along the lower portion of Canal Street, just north of Freer Park. Matthew will follow up with the Town Board and T&B to determine if they will eventually be looking into stormwater issues at and around the Park.
    - NYSDEC suggested that the Town consider raising the height of the bulkhead to protect against anticipated sea level rise. The majority of the existing bulkhead is comprised of separate concrete blocks of varying dimensions that are stacked between two and three blocks high. Due to several years of weathering and repairs, the majority of the blocks sit at different angles and therefore, adding an additional layer of blocks to raise the height may not be feasible. If the bulkhead needs to be

raised, a second level of blocks may need to be added landward of the bulkhead. The ability to raise the bulkhead in this manner will need to be discussed with NYSDEC and evaluated as part of the engineering analysis.

- In addition to repairing the bulkhead and stormwater issues, an ADA accessible path/boardwalk is recommended along the shoreline with native shoreline vegetation that would help stabilize the shoreline and improve the overall habitat.
  - There was a discussion about the type of plantings and if they would require ongoing management. Peter explained that there are several types of low-maintenance shoreline vegetation.
  - The type of path/boardwalk was discussed with agreement to use a composite material that would require minimum maintenance and be more resilient than wood or a stone dust base.
  - There was also a request to provide access points to the existing bulkhead between the shoreline vegetation.
- The length of the boardwalk was discussed. After Committee discussion, it was decided that the boardwalk would run the length of the existing wall. A stone dust trail would run along the shoreline in the southern portion of the Park, but will not disturb the existing shoreline/aquatic vegetation that is taking hold in this area. The boardwalk and stone dust trail would likely be constructed in phases.
  - NYSDEC strongly suggested that the shoreline/aquatic in the southern portion of the park remain undisturbed and not allow any cutting or clearing of the vegetation.
- Benches and interpretive signage would be placed along the boardwalk.
- ADA accessible connections from the main parking lot and the new northern parking lot to the boardwalk was also proposed and agreed upon by the Committee. A fully ADA accessible connection to the northern parking lot will need to be further investigated due to the change in elevation.
- It was suggested that additional trees be planted at the Park and especially along the shoreline. The existing trees, especially the weeping willows, will eventually need to be replaced and the Committee was in agreement that the Town should begin the process of planting new trees for shade and to help with shoreline stabilization.
- Canoe and Kayak Launch Site.
  - Currently, the park has two soft and unimproved canoe/kayak launch sites: northern and southern. The southern site is more accessible due to the existing paved parking lot being in close proximity to the shoreline, but not fully ADA accessible. The northern site requires a long walk from either parking lot.
  - The Committee discussed the various options of where to provide designated launch sites and if an ADA accessible launch is feasible.
  - During peak low tide at the southern portion of the Park, the river is located approximately 20-30 feet (exact average distance will need to be confirmed) from the shoreline requiring canoe and kayakers to traverse the muddy river bed to reach navigable water. As a result, placing a designated launch in this location will be limited by the tides, not only for launching but also coming ashore. As a result, the tides may impact the ability of the Town to provide a fully ADA accessible launch. A dock to facilitate access would need to be long in order to ensure access to open water which may be cost prohibitive among other negative implications, including the ability to obtain a permit.
  - The northern site is less affected by tides due to the river depth and open water at low tide is located approximately 10-15 feet (exact average distance will need to be confirmed) from approximate mean high water mark. The river bed in this location is comprised mostly of small rocks and degraded bricks. The rocks and bricks closer to the shoreline are weathered and relatively smooth and are larger and more angular further out into the River. While this

location may be more accessible, reaching the shoreline requires walking down a slight hill and over maintained grass lawn from the current informal parking area along J Road.

- The idea of establishing a path from the parking lot to the shoreline was discussed along with providing a more stable surface for vehicles and specifically for launching and retrieving Chester. The possibility of providing vehicle access closer to the shoreline was discussed to facilitate a fully ADA accessible launch from the small parking area.
- The northern point is also a popular location for fishing. Any designated launch site in this location may cause user conflicts which will need to be considered.
- Due to the above constraints, the Committee did not come to a final decision on a preferred location to establish a formal launch site, including an ADA accessible launch. The Committee would like to seek public and stakeholder input to assist in determining the number and type of launches that should be developed at Freer Park.
- Fishing Pier
  - The idea of a fishing pier at Freer Park was recommended during the Town's comprehensive planning process. The Committee recognizes the popularity of fishing at the Park (especially at the northern point) and while it does not want to discourage fishing, it would prefer not to establish a primary location for it at Freer Park. Having a fishing pier at the northern point would likely increase user conflicts. In addition, Sleightsburgh Park has been identified as the Town's primary fishing location.
  - Even if no improvements are made to the northern point at Freer Park, the area will likely continue to be used for fishing as well as a canoe/kayak launching and for launching, retrieving and fueling Chester. There is an understanding that all users will need to coexist at the Park. Signage in this area and at the Park in general is recommended to alert all users of the variety of recreational uses allowed and to encourage all users to be respectful.
  - A fish cleaning table at Freer Park was not recommended by the Committee.
- Norther Point Erosion
  - There is evidence of ongoing erosion at the northern point at Freer Park. An evaluation of the erosion will be conducted and recommendations to limit or prevent further erosion will be considered.
- Fire Pits
  - While open fires are prohibited at Freer Park, there is evidence of fires, particularly at the northern point. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of allowing for open fires at Freer Park and recognize that, if properly regulated and controlled in a permanent fire pit, they could provide an added benefit to park users. However, obvious liability concerns combined with the possibility of the fire spreading and the chance for injury to person and property may be too great to allow open fires. Additional concerns include the limited and almost total absence of fire wood at the park which could result in vandalism and increase the chances of living vegetation being cut at the park for burning.
- Canoe/Kayak Storage Shed
  - Carol stated that the interior wooden racks of the newly constructed storage shed should be modified to accommodate canoes/kayaks if this building is chosen for paid public storage. Heather indicated that Scenic Hudson has construction diagrams for canoe/kayak storage racks that were constructed at Long Dock Park and will provide the Town with a copy of these plans. These modifications could begin as soon as time and funds are available.
- Summary of Proposed Improvements at Freer Park
  - Improve the existing parking lot:

- Improve circulation and safety.
- Stripe parking spaces.
- Establish a formal pervious parking lot at northern section of the Park.
- Allocate ADA spaces close to the shoreline.
- Consider designated parking for canoe and kayakers and a few parking spaces for canoe/kayak trailers which could also allow for overflow non-trailer parking.
- Improve parking lot stormwater drainage to protect against further shoreline erosion and water quality impacts, including, but not limited to rain gardens, vegetated swales and the removal of unneeded impervious surfaces.
- Relocate the existing small restroom located in the parking lot.
- Widen the entrance gate and ensure trees along the entrance drive are maintained/cut back.
- ADA accessible shoreline boardwalk constructed of composite material, with low-maintenance shoreline vegetation to assist in shoreline stabilization, providing access points to the bulkhead and shoreline, sitting benches and interpretive panels.
- New interpretive and informational kiosk and a bike rack near parking lot.
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing up to two designated canoe/kayak launches with one ADA launch.
  - Alternative 1:
    - Northern point to serve as a soft launch with no improvements.
    - Southern launch to serve as an ADA accessible launch (access will be limited by the tides).
    - Fully accessible dock.
  - Alternative 2:
    - Northern launch to serve as an ADA accessible launch.
      - Pervious driveway leading to a new pervious parking area near existing boat storage building with ADA accessible spaces.
      - ADA accessible path to shoreline.
      - Fully ADA accessible dock or ramp.
    - Southern launch to remain a soft launch with no major improvements.
- Canoe/kayak seasonal storage rental at the newly constructed storage building.
- Modify storage racks in the new boat storage building to accommodate canoes/kayaks. Begin this project as soon as time and funds permit. Scenic Hudson to provide plans for canoe/kayak storage racks that were developed for Long Dock Park storage facility.
- Maintain shoreline vegetation along southern shoreline of the Park.
- Maintain neighborhood trail connections.
- Remove unused former lifeguard building at southern end of Park, replace with small pavilion/seating area.
- Begin planting new trees and establish a long-term replanting program.
- Evaluate erosion at northern point.
- Evaluate source of all stormwater being discharged at Freer Park and begin considering options to enhance treatment.
- Lighthouse Park
  - According to the NYSDEC, the rocks placed within the intertidal zone by an artist in 2012 are becoming “habitat” and removing all of the rocks is not recommended. In addition, the rocks may be serving to protect the shoreline and to help break up ice. However, NYSDEC did indicate that selective removal of the rocks may be permitted to create a safe access point and to help reestablish the shoreline. After Committee discussion, there was agreement that certain rocks should be removed to enhance access to the river and to restore and protect the shoreline. The rock relocation would require use of machinery in the River, and therefore, one or more permits would be required.

- The Committee agreed the eroding shoreline should be restored and protected from further erosion through the use of rock from the intertidal zone and planting of native shoreline vegetation. The restoration could use one or more established techniques, including, but not limited to coir logs – biodegradable fiber rolls (See image).
- The Committee discussed the location for a designated launch area. NYSDEC recommends providing only one designated launch area due to the small size of the Park. After Committee discussion, it was decided that a gently sloping path/ramp to the shoreline would be established in the southern portion of the park to provide canoe/kayak access and to provide an improved access for the Chester rowboat. This would be accessed by an ADA accessible path from the parking lot and new ADA parking spaces. No in-water improvements would be made except selective removal of rocks as previously discussed.



Biodegradable Coir Rolls

- After additional discussion, the Committee was interested in maintaining an informal access point to the northern shoreline. An informal trail exists, although it generally becomes overgrown with poison ivy. It was decided that this shoreline access point should be improved with on-going vegetation maintenance and minor improvements to create a gently sloping trail to the shoreline. No other shoreline improvements would be made.
- There was agreement that ongoing shoreline maintenance is necessary at the Park to ensure access points remain clear of obstacles.
- The driftwood located further up the shoreline and against the eroding areas should remain as they act as they are a natural process for shoreline stabilization.
- In an effort to increase recreational opportunities at the Park, the idea of placing a small pavilion or gazebo on or near the existing, abandoned raised absorption field was discussed. There was agreement that this area should be utilized. The Committee also agreed that the stability of the absorption field be evaluated before any disturbance. If necessary and practical, the absorption field could be removed. Prior to any work in this location, the conservation easement for Lighthouse Park needs to be reviewed to ensure there are no deeded limitations for further improvements in this area (See a summary of the conservation easement on the following page).



Example of Driftwood to Stay in Place for Shoreline Stabilization

- The previously agreed-upon recommendation to expand the existing parking lot was discussed further, with an agreement to add one or more ADA spaces. After further discussion, the Committee recommended adding a southern entrance/exit location to the parking lot. River Road is a county-road and will need approval from Ulster County. Safety of sightlines will also need to be evaluated. To expand the parking lot, the location of the absorption field will also need to be confirmed.
  - [NOTE: Ulster County will need to be contacted to obtain an initial determination for the new access point.]
- The Committee agreed that ADA accessible picnic tables should be provided. The Committee also observed the fact that the tables must be reachable via an accessible path from the ADA parking spots.
- The Committee discussed and agreed that a fish cleaning table should be provided to encourage anglers from cleaning fish on picnic tables.

- [Note: Matthew subsequently confirmed that NYS Law prohibits the disposal of fish caucuses and related parts in waters of the State or on land within 100 ft. of the waters. All waste has to be properly disposed of. Disposal in garbage cans will likely become a nuisance and attract wildlife. Therefore, the Town may not want to encourage fish cleaning by providing the tables.]
- The existing deteriorating kiosk was discussed and the Committee was in agreement that it should be replaced and include information regarding the Town of Esopus and relevant local businesses, including, but not limited to restaurants. Interpretive details should also be provided. The kiosk was previously constructed as part of 2006 Eagle Scout project. It was recommended that the Town reach out to local Troops for assistance in replacing the kiosk. In addition, the Committee recommended that all kiosks in the Town have a consistent look/style.
- At a prior Committee meeting, the potential of expanding Lighthouse Park by acquiring a 0.39 acre parcel to the north, owned by Ulster County, was further discussed (Parcel 64.3-2-12.2). After a recent site visit, Matthew indicated that the property is narrow, overgrown and slopes down from River Road. It would not provide any meaningful addition to Lighthouse Park. After a discussion, the Committee agreed that it would no longer recommend acquiring the Ulster County parcel.
- NOTE regarding the Conservation Easement for Lighthouse Park:
  - Laberge Group reviewed the Conservation Easement (accessible here: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7jtoimflug7zey7/AABYQ-S2aMSJzDO07sgojulia?dl=0>) which specifically identifies the septic absorption field in Section 5.12 of the easement. Lighthouse Park is encumbered by an easement granted to Scenic Hudson as the owner of the adjoining property, Esopus Meadows. The easement gives Scenic Hudson the perpetual rights to maintain a septic absorption field on the property to serve the adjoining property. The Town, in partnership with Scenic Hudson will need to determine if the absorption field is still in use and if not, determine if it can be removed.
  - The easement also states that prior written consent by Scenic Hudson is needed before new permanent structures are constructed or other improvements are made. This includes an expansion of the parking lot. Scenic Hudson approval does not apply to improvements necessary for public safety and the construction of facilities necessary or appropriate to maintain the park, such as railings, fences and drainage ways. The conservation easement also states that no lighting is permitted, no cutting or removal of trees/shrubbery shall be permitted except the minimum extent necessary to maintain views and landscaping purposes, and structures shall be non-reflective and earth tone in color. The easement goes on to state that the grass covering the septic absorption field shall be mowed and trimmed on a regular basis and kept clear of vegetation.
- Summary of Proposed Improvements at Lighthouse Park
  - Expand the parking lot, create at least one ADA accessible parking spot and establish a second ingress/egress driveway, if sight distance is adequate.
  - Establish two shoreline access points
    - Northern site will include a maintained trail accessing the northern shoreline with on-going vegetation maintenance.
    - Southern access point will serve as the designated canoe/kayak and Chester rowboat access point. Existing large rocks will be selectively removed from the intertidal zone and used to help repair the eroding shoreline/bank and to clear a safe path to navigable water. A gently sloping path will be provided down to the shoreline that is linked to an ADA accessible path connecting to the ADA parking spots. These paths will be stone dust based. The canoe/kayak launch is not proposed to be fully ADA accessible.
  - The eroding shoreline and bank will be stabilized and repaired as indicated above.

- ADA accessible picnic tables will be provided.
  - The existing kiosk will be repaired/replaced and will provide space for information including, but not limited to local restaurants, other businesses, park rules, and educational/interpretive information.
  - Based on confirmation that fish carcasses and parts cannot be disposed of in waters of the State or on land within 100 ft. of the water, the Town may not want to provide fish cleaning tables.
  - A gazebo or small pavilion will be considered for the southern portion of the park and in the area of the absorption field. The current condition of the absorption field will be evaluated to determine if it should be removed to allow for the expansion of the parking lot and desired gazebo or pavilion.
  - All new improvements being considered will require written approval from Scenic Hudson, the grantor of the existing conservation easement.
  - An ADA accessible trail made of stone dust or similar pervious and stable material will be provided leading from the ADA parking spots to the shoreline and to Esopus Meadows Park.
- Sleightsburgh Park
    - The Committee briefly discussed desired improvements at Sleightsburgh Park – the following is a summary of Committee approved improvements:
      - Improve circulation and parking spaces by relocating the memorial and kiosk to the northeast, closer to the boat launch, and designating trailer parking and ADA accessible spaces. A new kiosk is recommended that is consistent with other new Town kiosks.
      - Repair rubber boat bumpers on the floating dock and the Town signage on the fishing pier visible from the Rondout.
      - Add a section of dock (creating an L-shaped dock) to increase temporary boat docking space.
      - Establish a formal canoe/kayak launch to the west of the existing floating boat launch that is accessible via a short stone dust trail. An alternative location would be the west side of the existing floating dock which could also be made into an accessible launch [The Town owns an ADA accessible canoe/kayak launch at Sleightsburgh Park that is not currently being used as it inhibits launching motor boats.]
      - Existing trails will be maintained and a trail to access the southern shoreline via a boardwalk over wetlands or similar technique.
      - Sitting benches to be placed at key locations.
      - ADA accessible picnic tables to be provided.
      - Consider a pull off spot at a mid-way point on the access drive and/or install signal lights to ensure one vehicle uses the access road at a time.
    - Sleightsburgh Park is also under a Conservation Easement (accessible at the link provided above) between the Town and Scenic Hudson and all improvements will require written approval from Scenic Hudson.
- Black Creek Preserve
    - Scenic Hudson is preparing a Consolidated Funding Award Application for proposed improvements at Black Creek Preserve. Heather provided an overview of the proposed improvements and displayed a draft concept plan depicting the improvements. The agreed upon improvements are as follows:

- Short extension of driveway to provide adequate access for authorized and emergency vehicles.
  - Seasonal toilet.
  - Bike rack.
  - Renovate farm house for caretaker/writer's cabin.
  - Stone dust trail to access northern shoreline and bulkhead.
  - Renovate existing boat ramp to serve as HVG Water Trail "take out."
  - Soft shoreline and wetland restoration to the east of the bulkhead.
  - Formalize trail along ridge at Cedar Point with observation platform and cedar post style railings.
  - New picnic pavilion.
  - Interpretive signage.
  - Restore gazebo.
  - Expansion of meadow buffer along Hudson River shoreline to protect steep slope.
  - Open meadow stone dust trail to access existing trails in Black Creek Preserve.
- Esopus Meadows Preserve was not discussed at the meeting as there are no additional improvements being proposed other than a future expansion of trails previously discussed and included in the summary notes for Committee Meeting #2.

Next Steps:

- The concept plans for Freer, Lighthouse and Sleightsburgh Parks will be updated based on the Committee's recommendations. These updated concepts will be provided to the Committee for review and sign off in advance of the July 24 Design Workshop.
- The Design Workshop will be held on July 24 from 6:30 to 8:30.
- In addition to the revised concept plans, additional information about the proposed concepts will be provided to the public at the workshop including photographic examples of existing conditions and desired improvements. The public will be asked to provide feedback and recommendations. The information boards will be provided to the Committee in advance of the workshop for review and approval.
- The next two Committee Meetings will be scheduled via email.

***Meeting Adjourned at 7:10pm***

Meeting Notes Submitted by Laberge Group July 16, 2019