



**Town of Esopus
Waterfront Advisory Board
Meeting via Zoom
July 22, 2020 Minutes**

Members Present: Chairperson Mercedes Ross, Chet Allen, Dale Wolfield, Margaret Phelan, Carol Tomassetti, Vincent Coq, Eli Schloss and Marion Zimmer.

Also Present: Town Board Member Kathy Quick, Heather Blaikie of Scenic Hudson, Consultant Matt Rogers of the LaBerge Group and Diane Dintruff

Chairperson Ross confirmed that February minutes had been approved and would be posted. The Minutes from May and June needed some corrections pursuant to notes from Marion and Carol and would be submitted for approval at the August meeting. Carol had also provided some notes pertinent to the May Minutes.

Chairperson Ross called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

RPC Update - Matt Rogers

July 7, 2020b Town Board comments that had been received and recommendations from Planner Rogers are as follows:

1. Comments provided at the July 7 Town Board meeting.
 - a. Freer Park access - need for traffic control and lighting at intersection of Canal, Hoyt and J. Road.
 - i. Look into soft lighting for the intersection and park entrance? *WAB members did not embrace need for additional lighting - the Park was closed at dusk and light pollution was a concern.*
 - b. Dog waste not being cleaned up. Dogs were currently not allowed at the Park. *Dogs are prohibited and the question was raised that it could be a Canadian Geese issue - waste stations not to be added.*
 - c. Concern that adequate funds may not be available to maintain proposed improvements. Some of the parks are in disrepair.
 - i. Study could recommend that a maintenance plan be prepared prior to any major improvements and investments.
 2. **Nancy Beard - NYSDEC Estuary provided 5 primary comments:**
 - a. SP-9, FP-1, LP-2: Revise report to more clearly discuss the existing access conditions to soft launched.
 - i. Will clarify that, where feasible, the proposed canoe/kayak launches at Sleightsburgh, Freer and Lighthouse Parks and associated routes will be surfaced to meet ADA standards. Sleightsburgh may be difficult due to congested parking lot. Recommend laying out

possible parking stalls (current recommendation) and determine if there is sufficient room for an ADA space near proposed soft launch.

- b. **SP-16, LP-17: Kiosks should be ADA accessible and consider use of QR codes with recorded message.**
 - i. In agreement regarding ADA accessibility. QR codes with recorded message can also be included as a long-term consideration.
 - c. **FP-15: Proposed path from northern parking lot towards playground should be ADA accessible.**
 - i. Intent of the path is not to provide access to the playground.
 - d. **SP-13: Central Hudson Gas & Electric ROW at Sleightsburgh Park - can the recommended footbridges be ADA accessible?**
 - i. Permanent structures and ground disturbance within the ROW/above the gas line is prohibited.
 - ii. Correcting the drainage issues along the ROW does not appear to be a feasible investment at this stage.
 - e. **Carex frankii - use of comment name - Frank's sedge.**
 - i. Study will be updated.
- 3. Nava Tabak - Scenic Hudson's Director of Science, Climate & Stewardship:**
- a. **Sleightsburgh Park**
 - i. Sleightsburgh Park natural/ecological conditions, Esopus Meadows and Black Creek are part of a NYSDOS Significant Coastal Fish & Wildlife Habitat Designation (SCFWH).
 - 1. **Study will be updated:**
 - ii. CHGE ROW will be added to Easement section for Sleightsburgh Park.
 - iii. References to Carex frankii will be revised accordingly.
 - b. **Lighthouse Park**
 - i. Not in support of thinning vegetation between the Parks due to concerns for shoreline destabilization, loss of habitat and the potential to create a landscape that requires continued maintenance.

- a. The Conservation Easement allows for cutting and clearing of trees: (1) to remove those trees and limbs which are fallen, dead, diseased or dangerous; (2) to prune or cut individual trees and shrubs for landscaping purposes, and in order to maintain views of the Hudson River currently existing on the property; and (3) for such other reasons as Grantee may approve in advance.
 - b. Consider revising the recommendation to acknowledge the Conservation Easement's limitations and clarify the intent is to remove fallen, dead, diseased or dangerous vegetation and any invasive species that might exist. Care will be taken to avoid changing the overall character the parks buffers. Further coordination with Scenic Hudson on this task will be necessary.
 - c. Esopus Meadows
 - i. Will revise the existing conditions map to depict the Esopus Kill.
4. Additional/updated Recommendations for Esopus Meadows from Scenic Hudson:
 - a. **EMP - 1: Hudson River shoreline restoration.** The shoreline at Esopus Meadows Preserve has endured multiple hurricane and storm events that have wreaked havoc. Scenic Hudson stewardship staff routinely visit and address erosion issues by installing coir logs and/ or re-routing the Blue Trail upland from the shoreline.
 - b. **EMP - 2: Expand Trail Network.** Long term goal to expand the existing trail network south to adjacent Scenic Hudson owned parcels to increase the network and evaluate the possibility to extend foot access to Hudson Lane.
 - c. **EMP - 3: Improve park connectivity.** Improve visual and physical connectivity between Lighthouse Park and Esopus Meadows Preserve so the two parks serve the public in a more integrated way. Remove thick vines and invasive trees from the property boundary to open up vistas from Lighthouse Park towards the pavilion and open up the connection footbridge. Possibly identify a second footpath to bridge the drainage channel if feasible.
 - d. **EMP - 4: Improve day-use of pavilion:** Improve park integration by expanding use of the EMP pavilion for picnicking by providing picnic tables on and/ or adjacent to the pavilion. Picnic tables on the pavilion will make the pavilion more inviting (rather than feel off-limits) and useable when not in use by the Clearwater Tideline educational program. Coordinate placement of picnic tables with Tideline director. Any tables on the pavilion deck should be ADA accessible.
 - e. **EMP - 5: Evaluate formalization of fishing trails to shoreline:** Improve existing social fishing trails to shoreline as designated and safe routes off the Blue Trail. However, as a nature preserve, evaluate impacts to natural resources and increased maintenance demands. 'No swimming' signs would be posted.
 5. Need to identify timelines for project implementation.

Implementation of timeline - Planner Rogers indicated it was the hope to use last year's reports. With regard to time lines for implementation, generally he prefers the Committee to identify the

timeline - it didn't seem feasible currently. Planner Rogers would use last year's CFA's reports and in terms of implementations, he would provide draft timelines in the final report rather than leave blank. He would send out early the following weeks and create a dialogue.

- a. WAB to address or Laberge Group to provide recommendations?
6. Remove references to the Lake and Capri Motels (missed that one).
7. Add recommendation for Town to seek ownership for end of North Broadway.
Will add recommendation for Town to seek ownership.
8. Add new Town seal to Report.
All new documents will have new seal.

Additionally, kayak shed needed to be retrofitted and question was raised whether that should be included. Member Tomassetti indicated that it should be included in the recommendations, stating that it could be looked into and be made more effective.

Recommendation from Diane Dindruff to add additional grills to discourage fires was acknowledged.

ADA accessible kiosks and QR Codes to Black Creek and Esopus Meadows were noted.

Planner Rogers noted that coordination had been undertaken with Esopus Outreach Coordinator to get input from stakeholders but it was important to get the responses from Dan Vedder - Parks & Recreations was important and office staff and Town Board Liaison would reach out to obtain that input.

Planner Rogers acknowledged the comments submitted by the Environmental Board as follows:

We appreciate being able to offer our input and comments. Included are very minor edits, some suggestions/observations, some questions, and some general important notes. The page numbers refer to the shorter of the two documents.

Sleightsburg Park

SP-11 - Create a small pull-off - This is much needed. Oncoming vehicles have no safe way of passing each other, especially at high tide.

SP-12 & 13 - Trail improvements - Given that the Sleightsburgh Park is likely to have increasingly large areas under water, at least at high tide, costs for improvements and maintenance away from the boat launch and heading east should be kept to a minimum. Trimming limbs from trees in poor condition

would be a good idea so that trail users are not hit by falling limbs. Short-span bridges sound good. Is there a kind of floating technology available? All this speaks to the "overall question" about sea level rise.

SP-14 - Trail maintenance - Can we reach out to Parks and Trails NY, a volunteer organization that focuses on this? At the least, they might help guide the volunteer effort.

SP-15: We could note that the "volunteers" are the current Environmental Board members that are responsible for counting the sedge (*Carex Frankii*) annually.

SP-20: "fishing" should be "fish"

Under "regulatory needs" - next to last paragraph - Removal of trees vis-a-vis impacts on the bat population is also addressed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan regarding wildlife habitat, and should be strictly adhered to. Also pertains to Lighthouse Park. Our overall goal should be to avoid habitat destruction whenever possible and all pertinent regs should be strictly enforced.

Page 23 relating to Sleightsburg park, listing natural resources but does not mention frog or other amphibious animals that reside there. (it does mention *Carex frankii*, bats, waterfowl, sturgeon and other fish, but no mention of the frogs)

There is discussion about cutting back the reeds (in a few places, notably on p.6), and needing permissions. It is believed that the reeds in question are the invasive species, *Phragmites*, which in other parts of New York State are being actively removed (by goats and otherwise). Cutting them back would likely be a good thing from an environmental perspective.

The trails could be grassy, and mow able, which would make maintenance easier. If Central Hudson is digging up their gas line anyway, the path design could be integrated into their "restoration" plan.

On Sleightsburg Park, additional questions:

1. How many people use the trails currently, and how many trails would they expect? Where will the volunteers come from to maintain them?
2. The physical approach, marketing and promotion of the park is not addressed.
3. How will people know about it? Perhaps additional signage is needed, as well as an improved approach. Impact of getting to the park through a small neighborhood might be aided by discussing possible cut through the riverside property adjacent (Cosco property) which has a chain-link locked gate.

Freer Park

p. 9: paragraph 2: "structural" should be "structurally"

FP-6: "The existing unimproved dirt parking area along J Rd. to the north is proposed to be surfaced with either gravel or asphalt" -- Would strike "or asphalt" -- we should minimize asphalt, and that goes for the rest of the parking areas as well. A permeable surface.

FP-7 turnaround - Is the turnaround area necessary? Seems like an awkward way to direct traffic. Why not just continue additional parking spaces and narrow the amount of pavement, giving more space to the park, continuing the curve around convexly.

Can the small restroom that will be removed be used elsewhere (as per our Zero Waste goals?)

FP-14 SOLAR powered lights

FP-17 - Shoreline boardwalk - As with the comment re: trail improvements at Sleightsburgh, cost of building a boardwalk so close to the River's edge seems a bit extravagant. An at-grade path sounds like a better idea, along with rain gardens, etc. to help stem flooding.

FP-19. It would be nice if the playground colors were a little more understated.

FP-22 - Strongly support making the southern shoreline area "off-limits to future shoreline improvements." The existing structured area of the park seems to be adequate for current usage and some growth, is probably affordable for the Town to maintain, and natural shoreline vegetation is essential. Also, making that southern end of the park more enticing may well result in parking problems at the end of Tilden Street.

Overall question:

What is being predicted in terms of sea level rise and when? What about storm surge? This is particularly important on Freer and Sleightsburgh. It is clear the team has been thinking about it, and any investment in the parks should reflect the likely longevity of the parks themselves. What does this imply about how picnic tables and signage are secured or made, for example? In particular, it is mentioned frequently that "NYSDEC strongly recommends that the bulkhead be removed" What would NYSDEC propose instead? How would they handle it? Did the team seek input on other approaches? If the wall is removed, what does the park look like and when? (I'm sorry if this is addressed somewhere in the document; I did not see it in the longer one either.)

Lighthouse Park

LP-15: "River Road was previously designated as a Scenic Road, although the status of that designation is not able to be confirmed at this time and is currently being investigated. Looking ahead, the Town would benefit more from a Scenic Byway designation and should actively seek this designation." What is the difference? If so, extra care should be observed on keeping it scenic otherwise as well.

LP-16 and EMP-1 (from longer document): "Conduct an initial feasibility study in partnership with Central Hudson Gas and Electric to determine the possibility of incorporating sections of their ROW into a trail connecting Lighthouse Park and Esopus Meadows Preserve with Black Creek Preserve to the south and to High Banks Preserve and Port Ewen to the north. In addition to utilizing the ROW for improved Park connections, improvements to US Rte. 9W and other roads will be necessary to enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety. Arrows and appropriate signage should be considered in select locations. Where there is adequate room, designated bike lanes should be installed. The shoulder of all roads should be properly maintained, by the repair of potholes and removal of debris that presents hazards to pedestrians and bicyclists."

- This is a major point which we should take a stand on from an environmental standpoint. By creating what seems to be a bike path, this will create another and unnecessary cut through the landscape which will create problems for wildlife crossings. Currently, this Right of Way is mowed twice a year, and Central Hudson trims and clears trees perhaps annually. By creating a path, which might be paved or mowed regularly, the abundant wildlife in the area which is housed in the neighboring woods and fields, has one more roadway to cross and during the spring, would compromise nesting sites. In addition, there are several wetlands which would be compromised. It is not clear why we need additional paths when the Esopus Meadow and High Banks Preserve is still not used (even in these Covid times) to its full extent. Most people stay by the river. River Road is a suitable way to connect the two parks if need be.
- Because the ROW is a straight shoot, with some corners, it is not a well-construed path. In parts it is very steep and unsafe, with (blind) curves at the top and bottom. It would be an unsafe biking path, especially if shared by pedestrians.
- Running a path on top of a gas line could present liability issues for the town should there be an accident.
- It is an expensive proposition.
- The ROW by definition is not owned by Central Hudson, and therefore they cannot give permission to Scenic Hudson to allow a path. The ROW is owned by various landowners; it is their land. To the north, the ROW runs through *at least* 3 owners, meaning that property owners own on both sides of the ROW. The private property owners may not want to have people riding bikes or hiking across their property. Also of note, three of these are hunted aggressively during hunting season, which presents other issues.
- Suggestion is to pursue an expanded bike lane on 9W, and to bury the lines at the same time.

Black Creek Preserve

p. 25. "The historic significance of the farm house is unknown, but its small size and simple architecture help to identify where more modern additions were added to expand the functionality of the dwelling. Due to the limited capacity of the existing septic system connected to the house, the building could not be utilized as a seasonal bathroom. The building could be used for a writer in residency program in partnership with the John Burroughs Association and as a meaningful connection to the legacy of John Burroughs. The cost to renovate the building for continued residential use by a caretaker may outweigh its benefit to the preserve and should be evaluated more closely before any further decisions are made."

Alternatively, could install composting toilets (like in other locations) if septic is not tenable, for both public and writer's program.

The suggestions of gravel instead of blacktop, and solar lighting should be utilized in the parks, parking areas, etc. as much as possible.

We can do some research and recommend?

<https://cleanenergysummit.org/best-solar-street-lights/>

Does anyone know if there are fire hydrants and or water fountains at any of these parks?

On the children's playground, the material should also be recycled plastic. Although, not sure having a playground near a waterfront is a great idea both for children's safety and also as an investment in an area that could be taken out by a storm.

On that note, here's a little video made by a local biologist on sea level rise and storm surge, addressing specifically the Hudson River.

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oEWgYKy_2w8&feature=share

Some questions regarding the shoreline plantings and rain gardens. Are these existing now, or only proposed in the upgrades? What should be planted? The rain gardens/bioswales would be a good place for pollinators.

Boardwalks and/or raised walkways should be constructed out of something like Trex or other recycled materials that would not require maintenance and wouldn't decay. (pg. 89) Wood will require too much maintenance and the elements would cause deterioration.

What are the implications for removing the current raised leech fields?

The Kiosks can easily be upgraded with QR codes directed to various websites for information and education of the public on the parks, wildlife/water life,

plants (*Carex frankii* ie), the Environmental Board, Water Front Advisory Board, etc.

Questions regarding all waterfront parks with boat landings:

How should businesses be handled? That is, when kayak and canoe (and other) operators arrive with droves of people? Can the town charge them for using the launches to help pay for maintenance? In many cases these are outsiders who are profiting from our (limited) town resources. (There is one such operator near Eddyville who has a storage shed and lots of “traffic.” The town could figure out how that group is charged.)

Separately, are there grants and/or will Scenic Hudson be involved in helping to renovate and maintain?

For many passive boat launch sites around the state, there are no charges, whether on municipally- or NGO-owned sites. Scenic Hudson (in Beacon) and Norrie Point are places which handle fairly large kayak storage and launch sites. Maybe they can advise. Paying for storage helps pay for maintenance. Maybe a seasonal permit/license based on volume such as hotel tax Airbnbers pay.

General Comments

NR-7 - Steep slope protection - Most definitely **prohibit** land disturbance on slopes of 25% or greater, and that means keeping most trees and vegetation in place. "Strongly advise" isn't definitive enough.

NR-8 - Large, contiguous tracts of natural habitat - This is certainly in the Comp Plan and is fairly well set forth in the Large Forests portion of the Plan, also mentioning grasslands, etc. There should be a limit placed on vegetation removal.

NR-9 - Connections between natural habitats - Goes with NR-8 and urge “**requiring**”, not “suggesting”, that natural connections be maintained.

NR-10 - Restoring and maintaining buffer zones along waterbodies and sensitive habitats - This seems easy at first: if anything is disturbed in the process of building or road or pipeline repair/replacement, require the restoration of vegetation to its original state.

Lastly, the reduction of the goose excrement at George Freer Park needs to be addressed. Children playing in the area in front of the pavilion and kayakers launching their boats are encountering a health hazard.

Heather Blaikie acknowledged a new property north of Kingston Point and open house to invite the public. Chairperson Ross asked if an invite e-mail could be provided.

LWRP & Zoning Task Force

There would be a kick off at the August meeting but there were no current update to the LWRP or the ZTF reports (August 3 meeting would commence). Once the RPC was finalized, the LWRP could be initiated.

Sleightsburg Spit Mediation

Carol Tomassetti stated that information had been disseminated to residents. Two facilitation sessions, one for residents and one for anglers, hunters, etc. were to be held August 5 & 6. Actual mediation to take place on August 12 and Carol was awaiting confirmation from mediator. The sessions would be held outside at Freer Park (more prudent given Covid) and 25 to possibly 50 individuals could be accommodated.

Chester

Progress had been made at Lighthouse Park but there were still sprouts. Openings larger than ever. Not as many volunteers given Covid restrictions and there was a lot of scatter growth which could develop into a heavier growth next year.

Upon Motion of Marion Zimmer, seconded by Eli Schloss the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Dated: August 24, 2020

Approved: September 23, 2020