

## Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update

### Questionnaire for Boards and Commissions

Submitted by Town of Riverhead Open Space Committee

April 2023

#### Overview

The Town of Riverhead Open Space Committee is an advisory committee comprised of five members from Riverhead Town – Janis Leonti (chair), Marge Acevedo, George Bartunek, Charles Cetas, Nancy Gilbert – and one ex-officio member, Julie Wesnofske, representing the Peconic Land Trust. Also attending the meetings are town councilperson Frank Beyrodt as liaison to the Town Board and deputy town attorney Annemarie Prudenti.

The Open Space Committee meets at 2pm on the second Wednesday of every month at Town Hall. Additionally, members meet as needed to inspect potential land purchases and to assess existing open space sites for improvements and maintenance. We work with a parcel rating form developed by the committee that rates the property's natural habitat and community value when considering sites for purchase.

Since 1999 a two percent real estate transfer tax (Community Preservation Fund) has funded the Open Space program as well as the purchases of development rights by the Farmland Committee. In addition to preserving habitat and natural lands, many of the open space parcels purchased in this program allow the community and visitors to hike, access waterfront, and enjoy open vistas.

#### Recent Projects/Actions

- Turned our attention to stewardship when CPF funds became unavailable; developed a form to rate condition of existing Open Space parcels; toured parcels and made recommendations to town board intended to result in additional public access and better environmentally sensitive care for these properties
- Working with both county and town to implement walking paths and appropriate culturally respectful signage at Sharper's Hill, Jamesport, an ancient burial ground
- Improved signage and rectified problems (removed library story boards, tarped small barn roof) at Sound Avenue Preserve; working with Highway Department to fix parking lot
- Have worked with and advised the county on several county open space purchases, i.e. Saw Mill Creek; provided county with extensive comprehensive priority parcels for preservation using one quarter percent county sales tax
- Supported and advocated for the acquisition of the Broad Cove property by the Peconic land Trust
- Drafted a letter for the town board to consider sending to Town of Southampton to recommend that they purchase the former Peconic Paddler property with CPF funds

- Provided input urging the incorporation of as much greenspace as possible to the Town Square Project consultants
- Worked with Peconic Land Trust to update the town's open space priority list by reviewing all available parcels to create the Town of Riverhead Updated Community Preservation Fund Project Plan
- Purchased with use of CPF funds Weeping Willow Motel and rehabilitated property with kayak launch and demolition of derelict buildings; purchased and preserved two adjacent lots on Sound Avenue to create the Sound Avenue Preserve; purchased a parcel slated for development on Riverside Drive known as the Riverhead Meadows; purchased the 41 acre Kobylenski property that includes several glacial kettle holes; purchased property to create Miamogue Point Park in Jamesport

### Issues

- Committee needs a periodic update to the town's open space priority list
- Riverhead should continue to work with county, state, federal agencies and also groups such as the Peconic Land Trust as preservation partners
- The town should consider using the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program as an option for open space preservation or the implementation of incentive zoning
- Continue using the CPF funds when funds are available but additional sources of funding for preservation purposes must be explored; consider establishing a land preservation fund separate from the CPF to accept donations for open space and farmland acquisitions
- More clarity and transparency around status of CFP funds is necessary
- The town needs to create an annual budget for stewardship and maintenance of town-owned open space parcels
- When considering a development project that includes an open space set aside, a stewardship and public access plan for that open space should be included as a necessary condition for project approval
- Open space sites throughout the town, including state and county parklands, should be identified and assessed for tree replanting or planting
- The committee should inventory trees on existing town-owned open space parcels

### Priorities

- Acquiring additional funds for both acquisition and stewardship of open space parcels is essential
- Better stewardship and maintenance of all existing town-owned open space parcels
- Identification and improvements to existing parcels appropriate for more public access with well-thought-out interpretation

- Develop a liaison relationship with the county

### **Other Considerations**

- Develop walking trail from Riverside Drive and East Main Street through town and county land, continuing through unused section of Indian Island, continuing through Broad Cove and ending at Meeting House Creek
- Work with Highway Dept to identify appropriate locations for pollinator gardens; recruit volunteers to plant
- Work with developers to require access to properties scheduled for development to remove certain native species; develop partnerships to do this
- Meet on a regular basis, at least twice yearly, with town board
- Pursue grant funding for stewardship; work with town board to also include monies for stewardship are in budget
- Communicate more to community about open space and recreation opportunities in Spanish as well as English
- Increase penalties for encroachments on open space properties and make sure there are inspections for code violations every few years
- Think about appropriate places to do Land Acknowledgements – website, signage?