

Bethlehem Open Space Conservation Planning

Public Workshop

WELCOME!

Tonight's Agenda

6:00 – 6:45: Open House, Part One – Welcome! Please explore the stations around the room and in the hallway (this packet has background information and a comment sheet at the back). Please ask questions of the facilitators at each station – we are here to help!

Open House Stations include:

- **Open Space Values and Conservation Priority Areas Maps:** Here you are invited to look at a series of four maps that show Bethlehem's forests, fields and wildlife ecosystems; community character areas; recreation areas and greenways; and natural water systems. The data used to create these maps informed a set of 25 Conservation Criteria (see attached) that were analyzed to produce a fifth map: the draft Conservation Priority Areas Map.
- **Open Space "Scenic Views Photo Survey" - results and ongoing public input:** Here you are invited to observe where the participants of our summertime photo survey took their photos and what these locations look like on a Bethlehem map. You are invited to place any additional scenic view locations on the map, as well, using the provided "dot stickers".
- **Bethlehem's Conservation Tools:** Here you can learn about tools the town uses to conserve open space.
- **Natural Areas and Wildlife in Bethlehem:** Here you can see and learn about the birds, animals, fish and other wildlife that thrive in our town's open spaces and habitats.

6:45 – 7:15: Presentation and Questions - Bethlehem town staff and town consultants will briefly present the background, purpose, methods and implementation of open space planning in Bethlehem. You are invited to ask questions following the presentation.

7:15 – 8:00: Open House, Part Two - Please visit any station(s) that you didn't get a chance to visit before the presentation, or revisit stations where you'd like more clarification.

Comments, questions, suggestions: Please allow yourself a few minutes to write down anything that you did not have time to ask or suggest during the workshop (space is provided at the end of this packet) and drop it in our Comment Box at the Welcome Table as you leave.

Also, email OpenSpace@townofbethlehem.org anytime.

Thank you for coming tonight!

The Purpose and Process of Open Space Planning in Bethlehem: The town’s formal open space resources include its system of public and private parks and preserves, recreation areas and dedicated conservation lands (about 2,070 acres or 7% of the Town’s total area). More informally, the town’s open space resources also include its undeveloped wetlands, floodplains, water bodies, tidal areas, wildlife habitats, steep slopes, forests, fields and agricultural lands. Most of these open space resources are held in private ownership and are found throughout Bethlehem. Over the years, the town has lost a good deal of its open space to the development of housing, industry, commerce and other land uses, many of which support and add value to the community. Open space planning does not aim to stop or curtail development activity, or to limit or curtail the rights of private landowners. **The purpose of open space planning is to ensure that future consumption of land for development is balanced with the conservation of land for its open space value.** The conservation of open space resources is essential if the town is to maintain critical natural systems, the character of the community, its quality of life, property values, and recreation opportunities for town residents. (See the Town’s 2005 [Comprehensive Plan](#), and the 2009 reports: [Recommendations on Open Space Needs and Opportunities](#) and [Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan](#) on the town’s website for further background information.)

With this purpose in mind, town planning staff continue to work closely with the town’s [Conservation Easement Review Board](#), as well as M.J. Engineering and Land Surveying, P.C., to create a series of data-driven **Open Space Values Maps** that show existing conditions within the town related to open space. The publicly available data within these maps has been analyzed using a Geographic Information Systems **Conservation Analysis Tool**. This simple, but robust and flexible mapping tool allows us to apply research-based open space **Conservation Criteria** to the town’s existing open space land, and produces a composite **Conservation Priority Areas Map**. After incorporating public input at several stages during this analysis and mapping process, the Conservation Priority Areas Map illustrates certain broader areas in town that contain overlapping conservation criteria based on the multiple natural and cultural resources present. These areas of moderate, high, and significant conservation priority will be highlighted on the map with their conservation values described in a subsequent **Open Space Plan** document. The Open Space Plan will prepare and guide the town in responding to landowner-initiated inquiries about conservation opportunities, as well as inform the town’s development review and design process. The **Open Space Program** (or implementation strategy) will be served by town planning staff with support from the Conservation Easement Review Board and the Town Board. An Open Space Plan will also allow the Town to apply for state, regional and federal grant funding for the implementation of the Open Space Program. Implementation of the Town’s open space program must occur in the context of voluntary participation by willing landowners.

Implementing an Open Space Program: An Open Space Plan is an important document that includes data, maps, resources, descriptions and recommendations - all on paper. If the Open Space Plan is “conservation on paper”, then we can think of the Open Space Program as the people and partnerships that create “conservation on the land”. Ongoing open space plan implementation includes the town supporting the following possible conservation opportunities when they arise, either through an interested landowner that has contacted the town for assistance; or, through the development review process for conservation subdivision design or planned development districts that may include density incentives. In this way, a landowner who is NOT interested in engaging in conservation measures will not become involved. However, if a landowner reaches out to the town for conservation assistance, or when the town is actively engaged with a developer, the town can effectively work with the landowner or developer in achieving open space conservation in the following ways:

1. **Conservation Easement Exemption:** If a landowner applies to the [town’s Conservation Easement Exemption](#) program, the Open Space Plan will inform the Conservation Easement Review Board about the conservation benefits of the land. The CEE program invites interested/willing landowners with 5 acres or more of open space to apply for tax exemptions in exchange for placing a conservation easement on their land for a certain period of time (from 15 years to perpetuity).
2. **Conservation through purchase of land or development rights (PDR):** If a private landowner expresses interest in selling their land or their development rights for conservation to the town, the Open Space Plan will inform the conservation benefits of the land.
3. **Conservation within the development process:** The Open Space Plan can inform, where appropriate, the support of Conservation Subdivision or Planned Development District projects ([see Citizen’s Guide to Land Use, Planning and Development](#)) within the Town’s development review process. These design options that include density incentives can help to conserve priority open space areas, while clustering development in less sensitive areas on the development site.

DRAFT Bethlehem Open Space Conservation Criteria List:

Identifying Bethlehem's Conservation Priority Areas

There are numerous benefits of conserving open space in town - undeveloped forests, fields, farmland, wetlands and streams provide many "natural services" such as clean water and air, reducing flood risks, protecting important wildlife habitat, providing public health benefits, and maintaining community character and recreational opportunities, to name a few. Using the data in the Open Space Values Maps, these multiple benefits are categorized below into 25 "conservation criteria" that were analyzed town-wide to produce the Draft Conservation Priority Areas Map. Please see the "Detailed Version" of the Conservation Criteria List (at the Welcome Table) for more specifics on methods of analysis, conservation benefits, sources cited, etc. *Note: Open Space Value Map references to each conservation criteria are annotated as: Community Character (CC); Recreation and Greenways (RG); Forest, Fields and Wildlife Ecosystems (FFWE); and Natural Water Systems: Streams, Wetlands and the Hudson River (NWS).*

1. **Adjacent to or containing town or privately owned parklands, or existing commercial outdoor recreation (including golf courses, private athletic fields, the YMCA, Rail Trail, etc.).** Open Space Value map: CC, RG
2. **Adjacent to conserved land and preserves, including land owned by MHLC, Scenic Hudson, Audubon and other private/non-profit entities** (as of 2009, approximately 800 acres or about 3% of the town's total acreage falls under this category). Open Space Value map: NWS, FFWE, RG, CC
3. **Adjacent to town conservation easements, including lands participating in town's Conservation Easement Exemption program.** Open Space Value map: NWS, FFWE, RG, CC
4. **Adjacent to Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Network roads.** Open Space Value map: CC, RG
5. **Contains an officially registered historic structure (12 such structures in town) or district (the Slingerlands Historic District and a portion of the Onesquethaw Historic District).** Open Space Value Map: CC, RG
6. **Adjacent to community educational facilities or services, including public schools and libraries.** Open Space Value Map: CC, RG
7. **Adjacent to wildlife corridors or greenways, which serve as wildlife travel pathways between habitat patches.** Open Space Value Map: MWS, FFWE, RG
8. **Contains a known wetland (mapped by federal or state agencies, including tidal wetlands), including a natural, vegetated wetland buffer to filter pollutants and reduce downstream flooding.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG
9. **Contains a known wetland (mapped by federal or state agencies, including tidal wetlands), including a wider natural, vegetated wetland buffer to filter pollutants, reduce downstream flooding and provide wildlife habitat for biologically diverse plant and animal species.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG
10. **Contains a potential wetland.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG
11. **Contains land within floodplains adjacent to local streams, their tributaries, or the Hudson River.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG
12. **Contains land affected by projected sea level rise due to climate change predictions.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG
13. **Contains, or is adjacent to, a stream or river, and/or a moderately wide vegetated streamside buffer area to filter pollutants and reduce downstream flooding.** Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG, CC

14. Contains, or is adjacent to, a stream or river, and/or a wide vegetated streamside buffer area, and/or an active river area to filter pollutants, reduce downstream flooding and provide wildlife habitat for biologically diverse plant and animal species. Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG, CC

15. Contains a stream that has been designated as a migratory fish run or a trout stream (includes the Normanskill, Vlomankill and Onesquethaw Creek). Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, RG

16. Contains a potential groundwater recharge area. Open Space Value Map: NWS

17. Contains or is connected to a large forest patch of 5 – 199 acres or more. Open Space Value Map: FFWE, NWS, CC, RG

18. Contains or is connected to a “Stepping Stone” forest patch of 200-1,999 acres. Open Space Value Map: FFWE, NWS, CC, RG

19. Contains or is connected to a “Locally Significant” forest patch size of 2,000-5,999 acres. Open Space Value Map: FFWE, NWS, CC, RG

20. Contains or is adjacent to a Significant Biodiversity Area (SBA). Open Space Value Map: NWS, FFWE, CC

21. Contains or is adjacent to an Areas Important for Rare Plants or Rare Animals. Open Space Value Map: FFWE, NWS, CC, RG

22. Contains land currently in active agricultural use, is within an agricultural district, or has a current agricultural assessment from the town. Open Space Value Map: CC, FFWE, NWS

23. Contains land with “prime farmland soils” or soils designated as “Farmland of Statewide Importance”, as these soils are best suited for supporting current and future active agriculture. Open Space Value Map: CC, FFWE, NWS

24. Adjacent to active farmland, providing a buffer between farmland and other land uses, thereby reducing potential conflicts. Open Space Values Map: CC, FFWE, NWS

25. Contains land with soils and geology designated as having “high erosion potential” or steep slopes. Open Space Value Map: CC, FFWE, NWS

Additional subjective criteria to be considered after GIS analysis on a case by case basis:

Contains a scenic view area as identified by public photo survey and input. During the summer of 2017, the town conducted a “Scenic Bethlehem Photo Survey” and invited residents to submit digital photos of scenic open and natural spaces that are important to them in town. More than 200 photos were submitted to the town from the public, illustrating publicly noted “scenic” areas. Due to the inherent subjectivity of scenic views, these locations serve as important information, but are not included in the above objective data analysis tool. The scenic views photo location data will be utilized by the land use professionals reviewing specific conservation opportunities as they arise on a case by case basis. For example, if land is being reviewed for a Conservation Easement Exemption, and the scenic views data shows several residents have sent photos of land in this area and consider it to have high scenic value, this information would add to the conservation value of that land. Open Space Value Map: CC

Other additional considerations outside of the 25 Conservation Criteria. Each conservation opportunity will inherently have its own unique set of circumstances. The above 25 criteria can produce useful information about a proposed conservation action, but ultimately, only provide a piece of the puzzle. Each conservation opportunity will be assessed by town staff and the Town Board, and in partnership with the interested individual who owns the land being considered, so that the landowner and the community both benefit from any resulting conservation action. Open Space Value Map: CC, FFWE, NWS, RG

Please share with us your comments, questions or suggestions.

Use this space to jot down your thoughts and either discuss them with an Open House station facilitator, or leave this sheet in the Comment Box at the Welcome Table. Or, email us anytime at OpenSpace@townofbethlehem.org.

Open Space Values Maps, Conservation Criteria, and Priority Conservation Areas Maps Station:

Open Space "Scenic Views Photo Survey" Station:

Bethlehem's Conservation Tools Station:

Natural Areas and Wildlife in Bethlehem Station:

Open Space Conservation Planning Presentation:

Other comments/questions/suggestions:

If you would like someone from the town to contact you, please tell us how we can best reach you:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Thank you! Your input is valued and appreciated.