

# The Skaneateles Open Space Plan

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In 2014, a Skaneateles Open Space Planning Committee was formed as a partnership between community leaders and the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNY RPDB). Concerned with the loss of agricultural land and valuable open space throughout the town, the Committee's goal is to generate a report with recommendations to protect natural and cultural resources, to support agricultural sustainability, and to protect Skaneateles Lake. Open space is land that is not intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use. It can include publicly or privately owned land and areas such as wetlands, parks, forested and agricultural lands, stream corridors and shoreline areas on Skaneateles Lake. The Open Space Plan will also recognize cultural and historic resources that contribute to the town's unique heritage.

Public and private participants that are involved in the Open Space Plan include elected officials, Town Board members, residents, farmers, and agency representatives. The planning process is providing an opportunity to identify and prioritize unique and valued natural resources and to evaluate cost-effective tools to protect them.

Recommendations in the Plan are being developed in order to promote wise land use decisions and will help to safeguard the natural, historic, and cultural heritage of Skaneateles. The report will serve as a roadmap for the future connectivity between dedicated open space through greenways and trails, and will recommend land use tools that can help to prevent urban sprawl and haphazard growth. It will also serve as a living document that can be referenced and updated on a regular basis in order to protect the areas that define community character. In addition, open space protection will help to mitigate pollution, reduce soil erosion and stormwater runoff, and improve lake water quality. Many of the recommendations will be based on Smart Growth principals.

In the process of compiling the Open Space Plan, maps have been developed and valued land parcels are now being identified and prioritized. Community partnerships between federal, state and local governments and community groups have been maintained; funding needs are being compiled; and grant opportunities are being summarized. Community education and outreach will also be organized through workshops featuring conservation options.

To facilitate the site identification and prioritization process, the CNY RPDB compiled information and developed a comprehensive set of maps that display conservation characteristics using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. This information includes agricultural soil productivity, topography, FEMA flood zones, community and historic sites, scenic viewsheds, unique habitats, sensitive environmental areas, land use, soil erodibility, water resources, wetlands, watershed boundaries, trails, and conservation lands. Much of this information is currently being used to identify and prioritize sites through a modeling process known as the Skaneateles Suitability Analysis for Open Space Conservation.