

V. Open Space Scoring System

Why a Scoring System?

One of the more difficult tasks associated with an open space protection program is determining the value of open space properties under consideration for permanent protection. When speaking of “value” in this sense, we are not talking about a monetary figure. Rather, we are speaking of the relative public benefit that comes with protection of open space.

Clearly there is a fair amount of subjectivity when determining whether a particular property or portion of property is worthy of permanent preservation. Five people could all look at the same property and come up with five different opinions about its value as open space. With that in mind, the Open Space Committee opted to develop a scoring or ranking system that can be used to eliminate some of the subjectivity that is inherent in placing a value on open space. That scoring system can be found in Appendix C of this Plan.

How the Scoring System Works

The scoring system assigns a point value to properties based on the presence (or absence) of certain amenities or natural resources. These amenities/natural resources include aquifer recharge areas, freshwater wetlands, steep slopes, historic significance, location adjacent to existing parks and preserves, and scenic views, to name a few. Points for each amenity can range from 0.5 to 5, based on a weighted scoring system that assigns a higher value to resources that are generally viewed as most important. By way of example, any property on which the wellhead protection zone of the aquifer recharge area exists is given a value of 5 points. This high value is appropriate because the vast majority of those who responded to the community survey stated that protection of the aquifer is considered most important.

On the flip side, if a non-classified, year-round stream flows through a property, this is assigned a value of 0.5. This doesn't mean that the protection of that stream is not important, but rather that in a relative sense, it is more important to protect classified streams that are characterized by water quality that supports fishing, primary contact recreation or even suitability as a drinking water source. Depending on the classification of the stream, a value of anywhere from 1 to 3 will be assigned. Class AA are given a 3-point value because the water quality in these streams is good enough where the water can be used for drinking.

This scoring system “rewards” properties that contain several amenities or natural resources. For example, if a property is home to wetlands, flood plains, an agricultural operation and scenic views, it will score relatively high. Conversely, a property

characterized by only one amenity – adjacent to the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, for example – would not score particularly well, although there would still be public value in protecting open space along the Bike Path.

To test the scoring system, Planning staff randomly selected 50 properties throughout Glenville and applied the point system. Scores ranked from a low of 0 to a high of 19. The scoring system appeared to work reasonably well in that the higher scoring properties seemed to be very strong candidates for preservation. In other words, the scoring system supported the Open Space Committee’s collective common sense. It is acknowledged, however, that a fair dose of subjectivity still comes into play in applying the scoring system, but at least there is some logical basis for evaluating the relative merits of properties for open space preservation.

How the Scoring System Should be Used

There are two instances that should trigger application of the scoring system:

1. Offer of donation or property for sale: From time-to-time property owners will offer to donate their property to the Town of Glenville. On other occasions, certain properties with apparent open space value will go on the market. In both cases, the Town Board should apply the open space scoring system to gauge the merit of accepting the property donation or of purchasing the available property.

2. Evaluation of Site Plan and Subdivision Applications: The other circumstance in which the scoring system should be applied is when the Glenville Environmental Conservation Commission and/or Planning and Zoning Commission evaluate site plan or subdivision applications in which the loss of quality open space could occur as a result of the proposed development. There is some subjectivity in this application, obviously, as a judgment has to be made about what constitutes “quality open space.” The location of the property can certainly come into play (i.e. is it near an existing park or preserve or along the Mohawk River?) as well as the presence of certain amenities and natural resources (is the property used for agriculture or is the property characterized by a mature forest?). Additionally, the Town can be guided by the size of the property to be developed. The subdivision of a 60-acre vacant parcel into 20 residential building lots should be evaluated in terms of potential loss of quality open space.

It should be cautioned here that the use of the scoring system to evaluate open space impacts associated with site plan and subdivision applications does not mean that the Town will attempt to stop the development proposal, or acquire the property. Rather, the scoring system in this instance is to be used as a means to reshape the proposal, if necessary. For example, if the property scores high, or if there are valuable natural resources on the property, a traditional “cookie cutter” subdivision is probably not the best manner to develop the property. Perhaps clustering or the application of conservation design principles would make more sense in this case. Or, depending on the

location of the proposal, perhaps a buffer should be employed to lessen the environmental or visual impacts of the development on adjacent properties.

The Scoring System as a Tool

The temptation might be to apply the scoring system and only the scoring system when evaluating the importance of preserving open space. The scoring system is just one tool to assist the Town in judging the merits of open space. The scoring system should not be the sole determinant in deciding whether a property is worthy of preservation, especially in instances where common sense might be telling you something different than the score suggests.

For example, a property could score very well, but if the asking price of the property is well above what the market would normally bear, the Town will need to weigh economics vs. open space protection. Conversely, perhaps a property does not score very well at all. Yet, if that open space property happens to be located over a critical area of the aquifer or adjacent to an existing park or preserve, the Town Board should be willing to substitute good judgment and not let a low score cancel what is perhaps a one-time, extremely beneficial opportunity.