

**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**  
**CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION**

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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Town Supervisor  
Members of the Town Board

**From:** Libby Liebschutz, Chair  
Members of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC)

**Date:** April 18, 2007

**Re:** **Clarification of Task regarding Map of Existing Conservation and Recreation Land**

At its meeting on January 24, 2007, the Town Board discussed tasking the CACC with producing a map to show existing areas of open space or public space within the Town. Specifically, the Town Board expressed interest in having a listing of parks and green spaces, both publicly and privately owned. It is our understanding that the purpose of this request was to learn how much land is already protected or available to the public and to assist the Board in deciding whether to move forward with developing an Open Space Plan. The CACC conducted an initial discussion of this task at its February meeting, but that discussion highlighted the need for further clarification from the Town Board.

There are different concepts of what might be shown on a map of existing open space resources, which stem from different goals that might be served by open space. Some people have the goal of increasing recreational areas; others want to preserve wildlife corridors or habitats; others want existing woodlands, pastures and cultivated fields to remain in those states simply for the view they afford from public streets; others want to prevent suburban sprawl or increased traffic; and there are other goals as well. Some of these objectives conflict with each other, so that one person's "open space" does not meet another person's definition at all.

For purposes of our present task, we suggest the following: Without defining "open space" or suggesting that we are mapping "open space," we could work on a map that would show the following categories of property that are derived from the real property codes on the Town's assessment roll:

- Public Wildlands (some town parks carry this code)
- Other Unimproved Wildlands (e.g., the Audubon Hollyhock Sanctuary)
- Purported public or private conservation lands (e.g., properties owned by the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy)
- Public Recreation areas (some town parks have this code)
- Private Recreation areas (e.g., Normanside Country Club, the Soccerplex, the Bethlehem Area YMCA);

- Educational lands (e.g. public schools); and
- Other Town or County owned land

These categories are taken directly from the NYS Office of Real Property Services (ORPS) codes; ORPS does not define them, so they may not be mutually exclusive. We note that it is not possible at this time to produce a complete map of these categories of property. In particular, there are many parcels that have been set aside in the subdivision process that are not currently mapped, and it would require extensive research through the Town's deeds and/or tax records on a parcel-by-parcel basis to be able to obtain the information necessary to map each such area. In some cases, it may be possible to list the approximate acreage or linear feet of some easements or set-asides even if they cannot be shown on a map.

If this map is distributed publicly, we recommend that it clearly indicate that not all properties shown are open for public access. Rather, it could indicate, among other things, which properties are private, which are freely open to the public, which are open to public access by request, and which require membership or a fee to access. We recognize expressed community concerns about the mapping of private property and would obtain prior written permission from any individual private property owner before including his or her property on the map.

In the future, the project could be expanded to report other categories of uses as desired by the Board. Some of these uses could be shown on a map through color-coding or on an overlay. We would, of course, continue our sensitivity to the objections of some private property owners to inclusion of their property on a map such as this one. As an alternative to being shown on a map, other types of uses could be listed and described in terms of acreage. Types of uses that might be added to the report in the future include:

- cemeteries;
- other religious property;
- sewer and water properties;
- electric or gas lines;
- agricultural districts; and
- land coded as "vacant."

We propose that the CACC review all of the real property codes for potential inclusion on a report, pie chart or map provided to the Town Board, as a second-stage effort after the production of the initial map described above. We note that, even after this potential expanded stage, our map or report is not intended as a substitute for a more precise map or other inventory that might accompany a formal Open Space Plan.

Please advise whether this description of our task meets with your approval or how you might modify the task described here. Thank you.