

CAC Recommendations Regarding the City of Beacon's 2007 Comprehensive Plan

The City of Beacon's CAC has reviewed the 2007 Comprehensive Plan and compiled a list of 16 topics that we would like to see addressed in the updated Comprehensive Plan to be approved in 2017. We want to ensure the protection of natural habitats, viewsheds, streams and forests, outdoor recreational areas, and other natural aspects of Beacon for the benefit of residents and visitors. We hope that the decisions the city makes moving forward on all topics, from zoning to infrastructure, are mutually beneficial to the needs of Beacon's natural environment and human residents, and avoid any undue harm to Beacon's natural beauty, resources, flora, and fauna.

CAC Review of Beacon's Comprehensive Plan October 31, 2016

Members of the CAC reviewed and commented on the city's 2007 Comprehensive Plan. These are the main issues we feel are important to note in the existing plan and should be addressed in the updated plan.

The City of Beacon Conservation Advisory Committee is charged with advising the Planning Board and the City Council on matters affecting the preservation, development and use of the natural and man-made features in the City, and advises on major environmental threats and maintains an inventory of natural resources and an index of all open spaces. We see the review and update of the City's Comprehensive Plan as an important, exciting time to further steward Beacon's natural resources and further advance Beacon's role as a leader in environmental management. We wish to ensure that the beautiful natural habitats, viewsheds, streams and forests, outdoor recreational areas, and other natural aspects of Beacon that help residents and visitors love our unique city are protected in this time of burgeoning development. We hope that the decisions the city makes moving forward on all topics, from zoning to infrastructure, are mutually beneficial to the needs of Beacon's natural environment and human residents, and don't create undue harm to Beacon's natural beauty, resources, and non-human residents.

I. Most Important Topics to Address:

- 1) Mapping: We feel proper mapping of Beacon's natural resources and features of conservation interest including wetlands (NYS and Federal maps, plus soil types where wetlands are probable/possible), species of conservation concern (local, regional, and federal), open spaces, brownfield, flora / fauna survey must be included in various processes that are being recommended in the updated city comprehensive plan. This data will better inform land use decisions and other topics that may affect a specific site. Information about existing environmental conditions is essential for effective (in terms of ecological value, time, and cost) open space planning. (Note: Many more map resources are available than are included in the 2007 plan.)

2) Fishkill Creek:

- a) Clarity: There are many contradictory proposed uses for the Fishkill Creek area in the plan, most of which would have negative environmental impacts on the creek and surrounding ecosystem. We noticed a distinct lack of clarity regarding this zone in the plan, and urge the city to establish clarity regarding the intended goals and permitted uses of the areas adjacent to the Creek.
- b) Keep it Natural: CAC advocates for uses that have the least impact on the creek as opposed to residential or light industrial development. If the former industrial site no longer has a viable structure(s), sites should be considered on a case by case basis balancing the natural resource concerns against development plans.
- c) What is Light Industrial: Light industrial zoning is referenced as a possibility next to Fishkill Creek. The CAC requests clear definitions of what constitutes light industrial (vs. heavy industrial). The more potential impact a business can have, the further away it should be from sensitive areas.

3) Drinking Water Conservation and Reuse: Beacon has a history of droughts, and is not the 100% owner of its water supply. Water conservation and reuse planning is paramount for our future. We recommend:

- a) Assess: Conducting a baseline assessment of current, and forecasted future, drinking water resources and demands.
- b) Absorb: Maximizing watershed recharge through the reduction of pervious surfaces in new private development and already-developed public space.
- c) Improve: Continuing improvements in water supply infrastructure (leak detection & remedy, "smart technology", etc.).
- d) Reduce: Considering the reduction of water demand through: (1) rate structure amendments, (2) low-flow building/plumbing code requirements, (3) incentivizing grey water reuse and rainwater catchment and use, and/or (4) adopting a water conservation ordinance for outdoor use (under "normal" non-drought conditions).
- e) Teach: Engaging in public awareness interventions, trainings and workshops specific to water conservation and reuse.

4) Stormwater quality and quantity management: Beacon is a MS4 community, and although it meets its State obligations, could do more to protect the Fishkill Creek and Hudson River. We recommend the following actions:

- a) Green infrastructure (rain gardens, bioswales, pervious pavement, green roofs, etc.) should be incentivized on private projects within sub-watersheds draining to the Fishkill Creek, Hudson River, and other areas of heightened concern.
- b) A city-wide public space integrated green infrastructure concept-level design should be analyzed and modeled for improved stormwater attenuation and water quality discharged via MS4 outfalls.
- c) A stormwater utility fee, to be paid by non-single-family property owners, should be studied.

- d) Educate homeowners and responsible city agencies about alternative stormwater management and drainage systems, including topics such as rain barrels and roof downspout disconnects where it is structurally sound.
 - e) Design plans presented to the Planning Board should catalog areas of impervious surface before and after proposed development so as to provide a perspective on potential increased runoff within a project as well as cumulatively City-wide.
- 5) Comprehensive Ecotourism plan: Beacon has enormous potential for Ecotourism, and the city can be better positioned in this way to improve the local economy:
- a) Better maintenance and management of our existing parks and resources (i.e. solid waste removal, uniform signage)
 - b) Linking our sites to each place, i.e. trail, sidewalk, bus: How our sites of natural interest would be linked should be defined in the plan
 - c) Marketing Beacon as an ecotourism destination and strategic leveraging of our attractive natural features
 - d) Long-term planning to restore, protect, or enhance natural areas to support this industry
 - e) Uniform and pervasive signage on risks that can result from interacting with the natural environment, including tickborne illnesses, hazardous fish consumption, hazardous swimming areas, and the like.
- 6) Open Space Preservation: The current plan does not prioritize and provide adequate enforcement to the protection of open space. Open space is very important to the natural habitats of the city, water flow, and human enjoyment, and is worthy of protection in the face of development pressures. Strong protections should be established to maintain existing open spaces in Beacon, including the following:
- a) What Kind of Open Space? In the city's plan, there needs to be differentiation between natural open space (forest, meadow, wetlands), recreational open space (parks, sports, etc), cemeteries, and other open areas. For example, are Memorial Park and Long Dock considered open spaces? All are important, but should be considered with different goals and treatment.
 - b) Former Industrial, Now Open: The city's plan and consideration of open space should differentiate between industrial sites that have gone back to nature (and now are like open space) and sites that are still industrial, structural, a built environment, potentially redeveloped. This needs to be defined because areas like Dennings Point are technically former industrial sites.
 - c) Develop an Open Space Plan: Develop a plan for open space that studies and prioritizes properties important to the City for passive recreation and conservation purposes, to be preserved through either purchase of development rights or through direct acquisition of property.

- d) Expiration Date: Approval of development plans in environmental significant areas should include an expiration date if plans have not been executed due to potential changes in local ecology and natural resource inventories.
 - e) Mitigating Harm: Throughout the entire document (esp in sections regarding environmental impact), the city proposes “mitigating potential environmental harm” through zoning changes and the like that protect open space. This is concerning, since in the opinion of the CAC, “buying” “environmental impact credits” isn’t a legitimate system of responsible environmental stewardship. This is especially the case since “protecting open space” is the primary environmental “good” leveraged, but (as referenced elsewhere in this section) we have significant concerns about the protection that open space receives in this plan, so even if a credit-type system were valid, open space would be a weak currency.
 - f) Create an environmental easement and protection incentive program: The city’s plan and zoning choices should shift away from “consider easements or acquisitions,” towards the goal to actually enact preservation through actively establishing easements and protective purchases.
- 7) Linkage Zone: The CAC’s suggestions for the linkage zone acknowledge the need to balance the city’s desire to develop more housing and commercial structures with preserving the natural character of the entrance to the city. In order to best protect natural elements of this area, we recommend:
- a) Walkway: The proposed walkway from the waterfront/train station area to Main Street has the potential to support the natural character of the city. For example, creating a new tree-lined pedestrian walkway cutting directly through the Linkage Zone, designed with plantings and berms and incorporating artwork and celebrating Beacon’s unique culture, would add to the appeal of traversing up the hill, and could be incorporated amidst proposed structures.
 - b) Consider the Natural: Any proposed major structural developments within the Linkage Zone should take into consideration the existing natural habitat, viewshed from land and water, stormwater runoff needs, damage to significant slope, reduction of significant tree coverage, and other impacts on the current natural character of this area.
 - c) Viewsheds: Preserve viewsheds of the Hudson River from Wolcott Ave.
 - d) Useful Development: While we prefer the preservation of open space, we especially do not want the Linkage Zone to succumb to high-density urban development. We suggest innovative, green-oriented businesses to be given priority for use of this land. For example, if developed, the areas north of the Train Station, currently owned by 45 Tompkins Ave Beacon LLC should be encouraged to use Smart Growth Concepts with LEED certified commercial space for businesses that will bring jobs in the technology, science, and engineering fields which would not compete to Main Street commerce.
- 8) Waterfront Zone: The CAC feels that Beacon is one of the few river towns with an undeveloped, accessible waterfront. We strongly recommend that the city puts the

strongest priority and protections on keeping its waterfront undeveloped and accessible, including re-zoning. The following are suggested priorities:

- a) Allow no development along the water west of the train tracks.
 - b) Encourage alternate transportation in and around the Waterfront Zone, including encouraging rail bikes on the underused rail.
- 9) Green building: The comprehensive plan discusses green building.
- a) The permitting process should give precedence to plans that are based on net zero energy consumption or plans that will result in site-based power generation in excess of energy used. Passive house construction can now be delivered to market for within 10% of conventional construction costs. Final approval should be based on measured energy savings, NOT estimated savings.
 - b) CAC thinks anyone building anything should do an environmental / soil test so that the land is properly developed without increasing the risk to the public.
 - c) Elaborate on Sustainable Development: Page 5 or 6, section on Sustainable Development - this should be broken down into sections equivalent to the others around it.
- 10) Energy resiliency
- Approval of new development and upgrades to existing sites should be based on the ability of the new proposal to assist in the creation of strategically placed micro-grids in Beacon. Micro-grids improve grid reliability during normal operation and city resilience during major outages, providing power to critical facilities such as municipal operations centers, shelters, healthcare facilities and schools
- 11) Trash: The waste and recycling management goals outlined in the 2007 city plan are in accordance with what the CAC recommends. We encourage the city to prioritize and implement these goals.
- 12) Environmental Cleanups: Because of Beacon's industrial past, there are many former and current sites of contamination within city limits, and areas affected by toxicity from adjacent properties and industries (i.e. downstream). Information on areas of toxicity, i.e. brownfields at Madame Brett, should be publically accessible to all residents and potential purchasers.
- 13) Alternative Transport: In all of the plan's considerations regarding transport, traffic, etc. the city should encourage walking and biking. These methods of transportation should be treated with more importance: Beacon should aspire to be a walkable, biking city. The city could encourage green transportation through installing proper bike racks around the city, permitting a seasonal bicycle rental facility at the train station, and building a roofed-over bike parking area at the train station.

- 14) Craig House and Settlement Camp: The CAC wants to preserve the open space nature of these locations, in conjunction to preserving the historical character of the buildings; CAC recommends that these areas should be preserved for ecological reasons, including their role as an important wildlife corridor leading from the mountain to the river, and could also potentially used for environmentally-educational purposes.

- 15) Environmental Impact Statements: at the end of each chapter do not serve as adequate assessment or guidelines. The entire plan is intended to serve as an Impact Statement, so this needs to be clarified / defined. Example: If we install a hydroelectric dam, doesn't that also have negative environmental impact on the stream itself?

- 16) Environmental Educator and Sustainability Coordinator: The CAC recommends that a new position be created within city government to be responsible for encouraging environmentally-conscious practices within the city; enforcing environmentally-relevant aspects of law, policy, and interest; and educating the public, businesses, and developers on important topics including water conservation, city-wide tree inventory, natural resource inventory, stormwater management, tick-borne diseases, LEED, sustainable development, and all other topics referenced here and throughout the plan. These goals are referenced throughout the comprehensive plan, and need a salaried, empowered, responsible party to implement, manage, and maintain progress towards these goals.