

Guilderland Conservation Advisory Council

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2024

As required under article 12-F, Section 239-x, 1.f. of the General Municipal Law, the following is a report of the activities of the Guilderland Conservation Advisory Council (GCAC) for the calendar year 2024.

A major responsibility of GCAC, which now stands at nine members, continues to be the review of applications for subdivisions for the Town of Guilderland. GCAC's part in the overall approval process for subdivisions has been and continues as follows:

After initial review of an Application by the Town Planner, the name of the applicant is placed on the calendar for the monthly meeting of GCAC as designated by Schedule B (a schedule determined and approved at the annual organizational meeting of the Town Board). Prior to each GCAC meeting, the GCAC chair and members review the application and related documents, and make note of the various aspects of the proposal that may be of concern related to the environment.

At the start of each meeting, the GCAC chair introduces herself to the Applicant and/or representative and gives them an outline of what topics GCAC will expect the Applicant to discuss in his/her presentation of the proposed project. The meetings have been hosted in the large Town Board Room, and are also televised.

At the meeting itself, the Applicant(s) and/or a representative for the project makes a presentation on the proposal including a concept plan showing how they wish to divide the property, along with building envelopes within which structures would be developed. At a minimum, the information covered either in the Applicant's presentation or through questions and answers by GCAC, includes background information such as how long the Applicant has owned the property and what the plan is to do with the property, the topography, vegetation and trees on the property, type(s) of soil on the property, watercourses, drainage and possible wetlands, proposed water and sewer systems, visual impact of the development, and known endangered species on the property (such as the Karner Blue butterfly, Indiana bats, etc). And input regarding historical considerations in the development on the property (i.e. Native American relics or old barns and cemeteries).

Before the meeting and presentation is finished, arrangements are made with the Applicant for the GCAC to conduct an on-site inspection of the property (usually the Saturday following the date of the GCAC meeting), at which time the Applicant or representative is expected to be available to accompany GCAC as they do the site inspection.

During the site visit, the GCAC walks the property and makes observations of what effect the proposed plan may have on the existing environment.

Along with the site inspection, GCAC reviews the soil survey map of the property as shown in the "Soil Survey of Albany County New York" by James H. Brown in addition to the information provided by the Albany Interactive Mapping and the Town of Guilderland Interactive Mapping online resources. GCAC has become more dependent upon the information provided by the County mapping site since that site provides detailed overlay environmental information on individual parcels identified by tax map numbers. The soil information gathered is included in the GCAC reports on each property to show what limitations the particular soil types have, related to the planned development, as well as how well the soil drains and its suitability related to septic systems and roadways. Usually, it is found that a particular lot has more than one type of soil - in some cases as many as ten or more types - which in turn helps dictate what areas on the property are more suited than others when development is being considered.

Upon completion of the Applicant's presentation and the site inspection, a written report completed by the GCAC is directed to the Town Planning Board containing the pertinent information and observations related to the concept plan, along with the conclusions and recommendations of the GCAC. The report is sent to the Town Planner for the Chair of the Planning Board, as well as sent to the Town Supervisor and Confidential Assistant to the Town Supervisor for official filing. A copy is kept on file by the Chair of the GCAC. Copies of the GCAC reports are posted to the Town website, as well as sent to the Town Board Member who has been designated as the liaison to GCAC.

Compared to the previous year, GCAC had more applications for review. In 2023, there were only three subdivision applications which GCAC reviewed, totalling approximately 33 acres. In 2024, there were 10 subdivision applications which GCAC reviewed. By the end of 2024, all reports related to applications referred to GCAC were completed.

Of the subdivision sites noted above, one was termed as a major subdivision, since it was for five lots or more. This site was for a 6 lot major subdivision. Of the other sites, 5 were for two lots, 2 for three lots, and the remaining 2 were for four lots. Of note: one of the 3 lot minor subdivisions, located at 6283-6285 Farm Lane - Ecolegacy Values, LLC (Tax ID: 50.00-3-2) was proposed originally as a 3 lot subdivision, but at the recommendation of the Town Planning Board, the applicant changed the site to a 2 lot subdivision. For the purposes of GCAC reporting, we reviewed the plan as the proposed 3 lot subdivision. Total acreage of these 10 applications was approximately 763 acres, about 730 acres more than the previous year. It should be noted that the applicant at State Farm Road/Nott Road - JRG Builders, LLC (Tax ID: 51.00-2-5.8) planned to convey 31.2 acres of the 4 lot cluster subdivision to the Town's Nott Town Road Park. Zoning of the properties reviewed were as follows - RA3 (5 applications), R20 (3 applications), R40 (1 application), IN (1 application). Also, several of the planned subdivisions had rather large plots that the applicant had no plans to develop. The GCAC recommended Conservation Easements to these applications as well.

As part of the GCAC review process, the Council considers what effect the proposed subdivision may have of historical significance on the property. Only one property had any indication of a potential historical significance flag (6 Lot Major Subdivision - 5095 Western Turnpike, Tax ID: 39.06-3-31). During the site visit, the Applicant indicated that he submitted the subdivision application materials to SHPO's CRIS system for review. He was waiting to hear back on the results of this review. Nothing of historical significance was noted by GCAC at time of the site visit. As for the other sites inspected by GCAC, there were several structures considered of historical significance near, but not actually on, the sites inspected.

While completing this annual report, the attendance of GCAC members at GCAC Meetings was also reviewed and it was found that all nine Members were in compliance with Section 62-8 of Article II of the Town Code.

In an effort to continue to gain additional knowledge related to conservation practices and the environment, GCAC members attended webinars and even several in person trainings conducted by NYS DEC on the following topics: Learn What's Ahead for Freshwater Wetlands Regulations in NY, Identifying Small Streams and Wetlands (Field Workshop), Amphibian Migrations: Case Studies in Reducing Mortality at Road Crossings, Vernal Pool Habitat Conservation. Also attended by members of GCAC include a webinar hosted by NYS Association of Conservation Commissions: "The Slow Violence of Nitrogen and PFAS." It is well to note that a former GCAC member who received training in 2021 to become a Master Gardener is now on the Town Planning Board, but has voluntarily joined GCAC on several of our site visits. She has contributed to the reports, especially in the identification of plants and trees on the sites visited.

Of further note is the added responsibility assigned to GCAC in 2022 whereby they have been designated the Town Conservation Easement Review Board. There were no Conservation Easements to review in 2024, though the GCAC did recommend to several applicants the opportunity to take advantage of this program as they look to next steps in their subdivision application.



Respectfully submitted:

Caitlin P. Ferrante - GCAC Chair, 12/27/2024