

COUNTY OF ROCKLAND

OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION PROGRAM



January 2020

 **Rockland County**
Ed Day, Rockland County Executive

Open Space Guidelines

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Introduction

The County of Rockland (“Rockland County” or “the County”) needs more open space. The continuing development of the County has increased its population. There is little vacant land remaining. Only 10 percent of Rockland’s total land area is now undeveloped. Rockland County is the smallest county in New York State outside of New York City. With 1,400 people per square mile, Rockland is third in population density in the state. This density will surely increase. Marginal building sites will continue to be developed and redevelopment of older sites at higher density will occur.

Rockland County may appear to have sufficient open space. There are approximately 30,000 acres of state parkland, 2,100 acres of county parks, and 2,200 acres of municipal parks. Taking the **location** of these parklands into account yields another conclusion. Most of it is in the extreme western and northern sections of the County and along the Palisades ridge. The center of the County contains relatively little open space, yet most of the population lives in the center where the development density is highest and where the greatest building activity is taking place. Increasing the amount of open space within the populated sections of the county will enhance the recreation opportunities of residents and lessen the environmental impacts of dense development.

Rockland’s Open Space Character

It shall be the policy of the County of Rockland to preserve open space, to protect its environment and, especially, its beauty.

Open space consists of land and water that is beheld as "open." Recognized only in a context, open space is distinguished as much by its surroundings as by its size. It can provide beauty, recreation, a sense of history or a place favoring natural processes. It may qualify as open space solely as a segment of a larger open space system. Land that has been built upon may also qualify, provided the structures support open space aims or will be adapted to support them or shall be removed.

Because open space must be an important element in Rockland’s development, Rockland County will acquire open space properties that will best enhance its residents’ quality of life, to be preserved for public use and dedicated as parkland or otherwise enduringly protected.

These acquisitions will be land and water with significant natural beauty, ecological importance, watershed attributes, agricultural value, historical integrity, or other community benefit potential. These open space acquisitions may also have such collateral proprietary uses as farming, timber forest, cemetery or recreation.

Open Space Guidelines

Rockland County's open space system will have two major components:

Protected Open Space - public or private land permanently protected from development, such as dedicated parkland, parkways, nature preserves, cemeteries.

Transitory Open Space - parcels not permanently protected from development (e.g. farms, private golf courses, public and private schools, historical sites, estates, public or private institutions, reservoirs, public utility and highway rights-of-way, camps) which contribute to the open space character of an area.

In preserving open space, it shall be the Rockland County policy to acquire land and water that:

- ✓ Connects other open spaces
- ✓ Safeguards environmentally sensitive resources
- ✓ Saves farms
- ✓ Protects historic and cultural places
- ✓ Promotes public use and enjoyment of the Hudson River and its shore
- ✓ Can be obtained through redevelopment
- ✓ Provides for recreation
- ✓ Limits sprawl
- ✓ Maintains or improves all rivers and streams in Rockland County
- ✓ Conserves its watersheds

Open Space Benefits

- Enhance the quality of life for Rockland County residents
- Shape the direction of future land use patterns
- Define and separate community centers
- Protect unique environmental resources
- Provide for recreation
- Protect scenic views
- Provide public access to the waterfront
- Protect farming
- Protect watershed resources
- Protect historic resources

Attributes

Rockland County has identified these features to distinguish the open space it will preserve. Those attributes are listed below in alphabetical order.

Open Space Guidelines

1. *Connecting Open Spaces*

Rockland County will continue to acquire open space to form a connected system of parklands or greenways in the tradition of Rockland's major parks, parkways and regional trailway system.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Land or water which connect protected open space (state, county or local parks, parkways, nature preserves, cemeteries)
- B. Land that allows for foot and bicycle travel
- C. Bodies of water that allow boating
- D. Abandoned railroad rights-of-way
- E. Scenic roads
- F. Existing and proposed trails

2. *Environmentally Sensitive Resources*

It shall be the policy of the County to protect and preserve properties that have special natural, scenic or environmental significance.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Steep slopes
- B. Wetlands
- C. Ridgelines
- D. Viewsheds, especially those visible from long distances, such as those seen along the Palisades Interstate Parkway
- E. Land and water with potential for restoring wetland and other environmentally sensitive areas that have been altered or adversely affected
- F. Mature woodlands
- G. Land or water that provides special habitat for plants, fish or wildlife
- H. Land or water that provides habitat corridors
- I. Properties which can be restored or modified to provide biodiversity or other environmental benefits.

3. *Farms*

It shall be the policy of Rockland County to protect and encourage the opportunity to farm.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Farms, crop fields, orchards, retail stands, timber forest, or horse farms
- B. Fallow agricultural lands or orchards.

4. *Historic and Cultural Places*

It shall be the policy of Rockland County to protect or preserve historically or culturally significant properties.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Historically significant properties which are endangered.
- B. Properties listed on or nominated to the New York State or National Registers of Historic Places or on the County Inventory of Historic Places.
- C. Properties with cultural features such as museums, art galleries, archeological sites.
- D. Properties with industrial historic significance, such as mill sites, furnaces, waterfront structures
- E. Stone walls
- F. Bridges

5. *Hudson River*

It shall be the policy of Rockland County to acquire or otherwise protect the Hudson River shoreline for public access, public use and scenic enjoyment.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Waterfront properties with deteriorating, substandard or incompatible development that can be reclaimed for open space or park use.
- B. Properties having unique natural features or which offer unusual recreational opportunities.
- C. Properties which foster local revitalization and economic development opportunities at or near the waterfront.
- D. Waterfront properties that are landlocked, but which offer a natural shoreline environment.

6. *Open Space Through Redevelopment*

It shall be Rockland County policy that redevelopment will provide open space.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Properties located within densely populated neighborhoods
- B. Properties which provide community parks and greenway paths
- C. Properties which eliminate no longer viable strip malls
- D. Properties which will provide vest pocket parks

7. Recreation

It shall be the County policy to promote opportunities for recreation compatible with the existing natural resources.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Properties that provide unique recreation or other benefits not available or accessible elsewhere in the County.
- B. Properties that protect or connect trailways and greenways.
- C. Properties that provide access for water-related activities.
- D. Properties that can be developed as neighborhood parks.

8. Rivers and Streams

It shall be County policy to protect rivers and streams, including their banks and floodplains.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Properties within the 100-year floodplain of rivers and streams
- B. Properties adjacent to the water bodies identified as stressed, threatened, impaired, or precluded on the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Priority Water Body List
- C. Properties adjacent to Class A or Class B* rivers or streams, or rivers and streams which support fish
- D. Riparian buffers* along stream or river corridors
- E. Properties that surround or adjoin springs or intermittent streams

9. Watershed

It shall be the policy of the County to protect its watersheds*.

Preference will be given to:

- A. Properties which protect water quality including groundwater recharge areas and aquifers*
- B. Properties along shorelines or reservoirs
- C. Wetlands, floodplains and riparian buffers*
- D. Properties that contain springs

* - A definition for the word is found on the following page.

Open Space Guidelines

Implementation

Means available to protect open space:

- 1) Purchase of fee.
- 2) Purchase of less-than-fee interests, such as conservation easements.
- 3) Gifts of fee or gifts of less-than-fee.
- 4) Federal or state agency intergovernmental sales or gifts.
- 5) Cooperative acquisition with federal, state, municipal governments or private entities, such as land trusts or foundations.
- 6) Providing technical assistance to municipalities on the use of:
 - ❖ Average density or cluster developments.
 - ❖ Transfer of Development Rights.
 - ❖ Conservation Easements.
 - ❖ Establishing Critical Environmental Areas.
 - ❖ Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs.
 - ❖ Conservation Zoning.
 - ❖ Environmental protection ordinances, such as for floodplains, steep slopes, wetlands and tree removal.
 - ❖ Overlay zones, such as mountainside protection districts.
- 7) Amending the County Official Map.
- 8) Eminent Domain.

Acquisition Priorities

Priority will be given to land and water that meet the criteria of these Open Space Guidelines and to which any of the following apply:

1. Immediate threat of development.
2. Tax delinquency.
3. Purchase money available through grant or grants.
4. Possesses more than one attribute.
5. Adds to adjacent protected open space.
6. One attribute that is extremely important.
7. The property is identified for protection by another Rockland County Department of Planning document or in another municipal, state, interstate, or federal agency's report.
8. Support of public and private organizations.

Definitions

Aquifer means a geological formation of saturated rock or sediment that is both porous and permeable enough to yield usable quantities of water to a well or spring.

Class A Stream means a water body classified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as suitable for drinking.

Class B Stream means a water body classified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as suitable for swimming

Riparian buffer means an area of trees, shrubs and herbaceous vegetation located adjacent to and upslope from a lake, stream or other body of water which maintains stream system integrity, protects water quality and improves the habitat of plants and animals on land and in the water.

Watershed means the land that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river, lake, ground water supply or coastal water body.