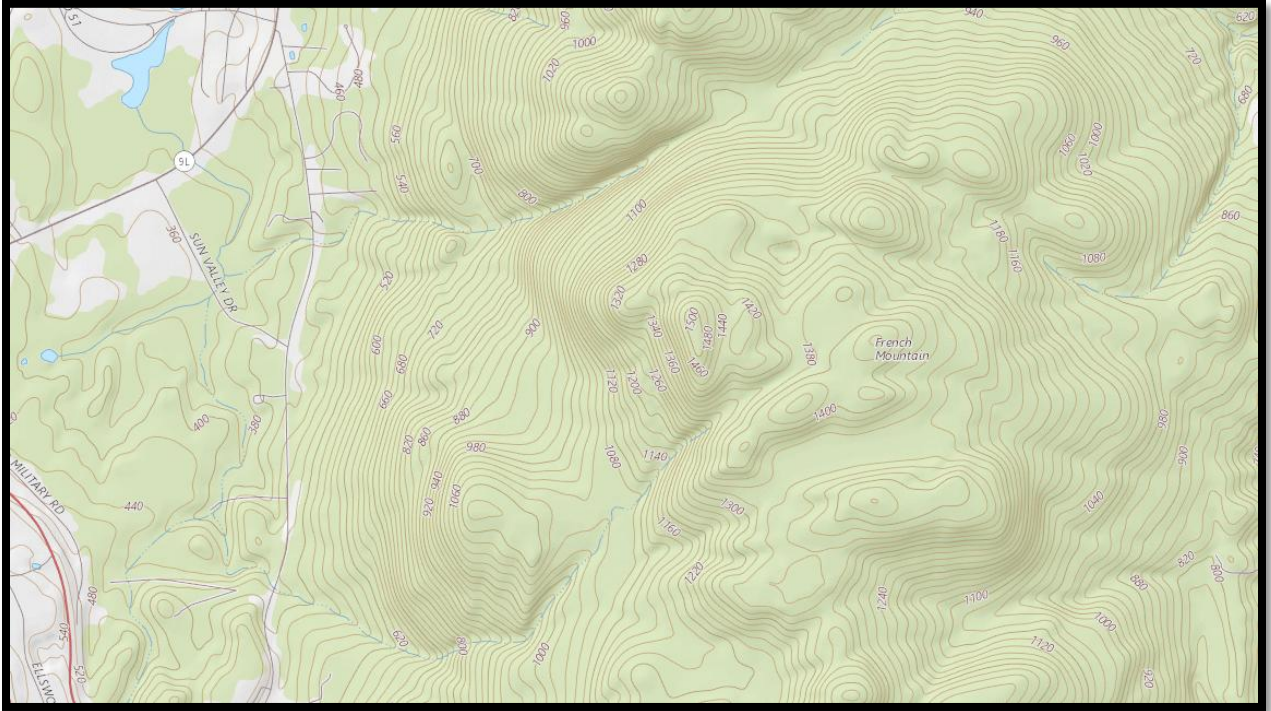


# *French Mountain Park*



*A new jointly-owned public conservation park located along the French Mountain tract in the Lake George region, containing hiking and biking trails of all experience levels, interpretive and educational signage, and an outdoor classroom facility*

**Partners: Town of Lake George, Town of Queensbury, Lake George Land Conservancy**

## 1. The Proposal

The proposal for the 'French Mountain Park' includes the acquisition of roughly 317 acres of forested, undeveloped lands along the French Mountain tract in the Towns of Lake George and Queensbury, and to use that acreage as a municipal park, enveloped in conservation easements which would protect the lands from development.

The currently vacant, underutilized property is conveniently located along Bloody Pond Road, on the eastern side of the Town of Lake George, at the base of French Mountain. The property is within a mile of the basin of Lake George, and roughly 1/4 mile from the Warren County Bikeway via Sun Valley Drive.

The conceptual park design, which would have to be formally developed **after** any grant funding to develop the park are awarded, would include a trailhead and parking area, new wood-chipped



walking and hiking trails, an extensive mountain biking trails system for all levels of experience (to possibly connect to Top of the World trails system), interpretive signage throughout, as well as a proposed outdoor classroom area for the Lake George and Queensbury School Districts to utilize.

Depending on any grant awards

for park development, the project could also include stream restoration and ponding (if applicable), and the installation of site material-sourced benches and bridge(s) over any stream(s). The enhanced space would allow native flora and fauna to thrive, providing a reconnection of residents to natural recreation areas and preserving integral mountainside parcels in the Town(s) that are subject to future development.



This project will add important quality of life value to the Lake George region, adding a new recreational opportunity along with the preservation of valuable open space. With a possible connection to the Top of the World trails network, the Route 9L multi-use path, the Lake George Elementary School, and the Warren County Bikeway, this would also serve as a regional transit connection.

### Statement of Need

French Mountain, an environmentally sensitive area, with undeveloped mature forest, provides a beautiful natural and scenic landscape, and an ecological safe haven for many flora and fauna in the area. Conservation of these acres would not only support an increase in air quality and habitat protection, but also an additional recreational opportunity for residents and visitors to the area, which has been long overdue. As a natural, water-absorbing, storm resilient property, the land provides watershed protection from the mountainside to the lake. Considering the needs for watershed protection in Lake George, and the value of conserving a tract of land that contains

part of a major mountain range, these 317 acres are already working to provide benefit to the community. The project advances municipal and community planning initiatives by implementing recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan(s) and other recreational studies. Community ownership and stewardship for the local recreational resources would also improve as the park would improve access to new mountain biking facilities, and it would provide a unique, accessible and interactive open space, adding value to residential properties.

## **Cost of Land**

It is understood that the Lake George Land Conservancy (LGLC) intends to first buy the property for \$525,000, which is an agreed upon cost between the sellers (McPhillips) and the LGLC. Once a purchase is solidified by the LGLC, the Conservancy would then look to sell the land back to the municipalities, subject to Conservation Easements (CE), which would essentially preserve the land and prohibit development. The application of CE's onto these lands would reduce the appraised value from \$525,000 to \$134,000, which is a significant reduction. The land cost of \$134,000 would then be split by the Town of Queensbury and the Town of Lake George, at \$67,000 from each municipality, paid to the LGLC. It is also expected the LGLC will seek to retain transaction costs to the tune of roughly \$10,000 per municipality. The LGLC would then fundraise and apply for grants to recoup the remainder of the costs spent that came from the reduction in value from the CE's. Since the cost of this land is so minimal per municipality (relatively speaking), it is expected that this purchase can take place in 2018 without grant funding obtained. Grant funding will be sought for by the Towns for money to design and develop the park, complete with trails development and all signage and other facility components.

## **Timeframe**

A good anticipated timeframe for this project would be roughly 2 years to total completion, from July 2018 to July 2020. The start date would be on or around July 1, 2018 or when the contract for sale from the McPhillips to the LGLC would occur. By the end of July 2018, the Town of Lake George Planning Department will also have submitted for state funding for the design and development of the park, which would likely be announced if awarded, in December 2018 (grant funding discussed later in this proposal).

Following that first property transaction in July 2018, the Town(s) would then work out contracts for sale with the LGLC to acquire the lands. This might take place in the Fall or Winter of 2018, pending available funds for the land acquisition.

Calendar year 2019 would include park design, development of an Operations & Maintenance Plan, and initial public participation. During the year 2019, the project sponsor(s) can also look into municipal parkland conversion/dedication, as well as the potential creation of a "Friend's Group" for the park and decision on a final park name.

Calendar year 2020 would consist of site preparation, permitting, trails network development, sign installation, construction of the outdoor classroom, and project close-out / park unveiling with a potential completion date in early summer 2020.

## 2. The Park

A thoughtfully designed yet modest equipped park, designed for exercise, natural resource protection and greater community connectivity is a logical evolution for the property and can be realistically achieved.

The park itself would be designed to promote active, short-term day use, with low intensity walking/ running trails for residents and visitors of all ages, who live, work and play in the Lake George region. The trails would connect to other recreational and transit amenities in the area, and encourage a reconnection with nature. As a protected area for birds, bats, small wildlife and native plants, this parkland would also serve as a setting to bring domestic pets.



The park would have a westerly access point, in the Town of Lake George off of Bloody Pond Road. At this location, a welcoming park sign, a parking lot and a trail head would lead directly into the park from which visitors could follow walking/hiking trails that would be complemented by interpretive signage, or follow the mountain biking trails up the mountain range. Towards the trail head, but sheltered from public view, would be a new outdoor classroom facility for the local school districts to utilize during visits to teach students about the

interworking of the watershed, as well as the ecological habitat for flora and fauna in the area. Outdoor classrooms provide numerous benefits to students and to the community at large, and would be a great central component of any grant application. The classroom itself would be a structure to shield students from the elements (such as the one in the photo below), and could be accompanied by a community garden, displays and other educational materials.



Photo Source: <http://www.vernonpta.org/about-us/committees/schoolyard-improve/outdoor-classroom-project/> (Vernon PTA Outdoor Classroom Project)

## The Trails Network

Throughout the park, trails for all different level of user would meander through the forest, excellent for running, dog walking, a lunch time stretch, or nature hike with the family or classroom.

With the help of the Town Planning Departments, the Warren County Safe & Quality Bicycling Organization (WCSQBO), and possibly landscape architects or similar consulting firms hired through grant funding, the Towns of Lake George and Queensbury will be able to come up with a comprehensive plan for a trails network to accommodate all types of users. This would include trails for hiking, as well as walking and mountain biking. It is assumed that several miles worth of trails could be incorporated into this park, eventually bringing users back down to the trailhead, or connecting at the top, to the Top of the Mountain trails in the Town of Queensbury.



Throughout the trails network would be amenities for all users, including numerous seating areas with benches made from site-sourced lumber, interpretive signage based on a plethora of things (such as flora and fauna), as well as some possible hydrologic features such as stream ponding. Stream ponding and stream bank restoration/stabilization could increase the water quality of the intermittent

streams flowing down French Mountain, as well as provide for a fresh new habitat for aquatic species and aesthetically pleasing sights along the trails. Where streams may exist, and crossings need to be made, the park could utilize existing site-sources lumber to also create Adirondack-style bridges.



While the walking and hiking trails would be primarily located on the parcels of land within the Town of Lake George, it is expected that many mountain biking trails would be located throughout the entire park, specifically on the parcel of land in the Town of Queensbury. As the topography of the land gets steeper, the further up the mountainside you travel, there would be more intermediate and advanced level mountain bike trails, as well as some basic level ones that would meander from side to side with the contour of the land.

Finally, towards the top of the mountain, would be a “viewing point” where mountain bike riders and other users of the trails network could view the lake, take photos, and take a break from their exercise. This viewing point, which would be located in the Town of Queensbury, would not be accompanied by a structure, rather just an open area with some seating.

## **Operations and Maintenance**

Operations of the park would likely be split between both owners, the Town of Lake George and the Town of Queensbury. The park would be operated from dawn to dusk as a municipal facility, and would follow many similar rules that are incorporated at other municipal parks such as being tobacco, drug and alcohol free, no weapons, no hunting, fishing or harvesting, and all pets must be leashed. No loitering would be allowed, and possibly gates and/or cameras could be installed. No “park attendants” would be needed, and very small operation budgets would be required. It is assumed at this early point that roughly \$1,000/year per municipality might be needed for O&M.

Minimal maintenance would be required by the Town(s) staff members for this park, as compared to other facilities operated by the municipal departments. The Town’s would have some assistance from the LGLC as part of their “stewardship agreement”, and could enlist the WCSQBO and other volunteers and non-profits to assist with spring and fall “Clean-up days”. Clean up and care-taking initiatives could also be organized by a “Friends-of-the-Park” group and/or school-aged residents needing community service credits.

As far as garbage and refuse, the park would most likely employ a “Carry-in, Carry-out” policy, with possibly one or two garbage cans provided at the outdoor classroom / trailhead area, which would be maintained by the Town of Lake George’s Buildings and Grounds staff. Overall maintenance of the Outdoor Classroom area, parking and the main trailhead would likely be spearheaded by the Town of Lake George Buildings and Grounds staff, with some limited assistance needed from the Town of Queensbury Parks and Recreation Department.

Once initial trail development is completed, routine “cleaning” of the trail head and parking area would be needed on an average of once a month. Minimal regular maintenance would be needed on the trails, but could possibly be done by volunteers on an as-needed basis.

Obviously, all future legacy costs would not be known in full until a design is completed and until the two municipalities enter into an Inter-municipal Agreement (IMA) to jointly operate the park facility. At that point, a Municipal Park Operations & Maintenance Plan would be completed, and costs/duties assigned to relative Lake George/Queensbury departments. As mentioned before, it is expected that the future annual costs to maintain this facility will be minimal, with more responsibility / burden falling on the Town of Lake George.

Fundraising for long-term maintenance can also be accomplished through a Friends-of-the-Park fund, LGLC stewardship/fundraising efforts, or through Town of Lake George / Queensbury park fundraising events.

## **3. Funding**

Funding for the park land would be covered by both municipalities, as mentioned above, where each would pay \$67,000 for a total cost of \$134,000, which is a reduced cost from the original purchase price by LGLC due to the Conservation Easements. It is expected that each municipality would figure out where their respective \$67,000 (plus transaction costs) would come from, either general fund, fund balance, dedicated line item, or from a Bond/BAN.

Funding for park design and development would be in the form of a joint-grant application submitted by the Lake George Planning Department on behalf of the Town of Lake George and the Town of Queensbury. Resolutions can be drafted to authorize the joint-grant application submission, which is not due until the end of July. While no specific grant application discussions have been solidified, it is anticipated that the grant request would be in the amount of \$150,000. This cost would cover the consulting team to design the park (\$20,000), acquisition of materials (\$50,000), the development of the trails network (\$30,000) and the outdoor classroom (\$30,000) and the signage (\$20,000). There are numerous funding streams that this money could come from, such as the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)/ Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) Parks, Preservation and Heritage Grant Program, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Climate Smart Communities Grant Program, and even the Community Development Block Grant program.

Most state grants require local match for awarding. In the instances above, and for many other grant programs, the local match required is 25% of the award request. In most all cases, this match can be in the form of in-kind services and/or match dollars.

- If a grant was awarded for the design / development of this park for \$150,000, then the 25% of award amount would equal \$37,500 total, or \$18,750 per municipality.
- If \$150,000 was asked for but only \$100,000 was awarded, then \$25,000 would be the local match requirement, or \$12,500 per municipality.

As stated before, in-kind time could count towards some of these match funds needed, so it is likely that actual dollars needed for match would be in the range of \$10,000-\$15,000 per municipality, which would be based on the amount of money we are awarded and based on the amount of time each municipalities' staff spent on the project. These match dollars would not be needed until 2019 and could be anticipated and incorporated into each municipalities' 2019 budget.

There is a possibility that grant funding will not be awarded (although the Town of Lake George has had a 75% success rate with grants since 2015, which is high). If we are not successful with the grant application for design and development in 2018, there are several options to move forward.

- The Town(s), along with assistance from the LCLG, could contribute to a French Mountain Park Fund and complete design / development on their own, and ask for grant funding the following year to reimburse the costs spent. This would be the most expensive option.
- The Town(s) could hold the land until the following year and re-submit the OPRHP or DEC funding application in the 2019 Consolidated Funding Application round.
- The Town(s) could apply for non-CFA funding source awards, such as through the National Hiking Society, the Open Space Institute, or the PeopleForBikes program.

Chances are, with a good application, good supporting documents (NOI to sell property, support letters from elected officials, partnership letters from stakeholders, etc.) and an adequate local match, the grant would be awarded, as it leads to preservation of over 300 acres of land.