

2022 Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council Annual Report

Report to the Mayor & Common Council for calendar year ending December 31, 2022.

The following document was prepared for the Peekskill Mayor and Common Council as required by the City Code Chapter 24 pertaining to the Conservation Advisory Council's (CAC) activities for 2022. For more information, please refer to the appended monthly meeting minutes.

2022 CAC Composition

CAC Members:

1) Elaine Caccoma (Chairperson), 2) Chris Barrett, 3) Kay Barthelmes, 4) Carmen D'Angelo, 5) Mary Inserra, 6) Janine Melillo, 7) Lise Prown, 8) Amy Wiggins, 9) Courtney M. Williams

City Liaison: Councilwoman Kathleen Talbot

ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVEMENTS

1) NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY (NRI)

The NRI is being developed by the City of Peekskill guided by the Conservation Advisory Council in consultation with MJ Engineer Consulting, the firm selected by the city to provide technical assistance. The NRI report and website are on track to be complete by the early 2023 and will serve as an important resource to assist stakeholders such as city officials, developers, and residents in making informed and environmentally responsible land use decisions.

- The NRI project, originally commenced in November 2021, resumed in April 2022 after a 5-month pause due to a change in the city planner.
- The CAC is on schedule to contribute over 350 volunteer hours in the creation of the NRI as part of the volunteer match required by the Greenway Compact Community Grant.
 - 1) A single CAC member, Lise Prown, provided 75% of the volunteer hours used to organize the GIS maps as well as creating the basic maps in the report.
 - 2) Other CAC members provided project coordination, guidance, and feedback, as needed, throughout the project lifecycle.
- The scope of the NRI included ~ 20 maps, narrative descriptions, and analysis on these topic areas:
 - 1) Land Area and Existing Land Use; Geology and Soil
 - 2) Habitats, Biodiversity & Ecology Features
 - 3) Wetlands, Streams & Water Resources
 - 4) Topography, Slopes & Sea Level Rise
 - 5) Cultural Resources
 - 6) Climate Changes and Environmental Justice
- Prior to completion, the NRI report was subject to a series of QA/QC reviews both internally by MJ Engineering and by various experts in the field including the DEC

Hudson River Estuary Program/Cornell University representative, the City Planning Department, members of the Common Council, the CAC, and others.

- MJ Engineering is planning to host an NRI educational outreach webinar in January 2023.

2) OPEN SPACE: 1410 CROMPOND ROAD

The CAC was extremely pleased to learn of the completion of the purchase of 1410 Crompond Road parcel (.83 acres) on 10/4/2022. While the city is now the owner of the property, Westchester Land Trust holds the perpetual conservation easement, ensuring that the property will always be managed as open space for public benefit. The area is unique because it provides a dramatic view of the city, the Hudson River, and the mountains beyond in Harriman Park. When complete this parcel will be an overlook public space, a viewshed. The CAC was the initial group that brought this parcel to the attention of the parties many years ago and it is our hope to continue to be involved in the final design of the viewshed.

3) ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION, HERITAGE TREE PROGRAM, TREE CITY USA, TREE PLANTINGS

The CAC hosted an Arbor Day Celebration at the Depew Park on Saturday, April 23, 2022 which was attended by City Officials, our DEC Urban Forester, middle and high school students and many others from the community. The event was arranged in collaboration with the Peekskill Parks Department as part of the annual park's cleanup day. The CAC also chose this event to launch the new Heritage Tree Program by designating the large sycamore tree on Robin Drive as the first tree award recipient in the city. Two donated trees were also planted in the Depew Park near the Memorial Pool.

As a result of this event, the city has now fulfilled all the requirements to become a Tree City USA; an elite designation for communities that meet the minimum standards set by the Arbor Day Foundation for community forestry programs. If successful, the designation will be bestowed on the city next year.

The CAC also participated with the DPW Director and others on 11/23/2022 to discuss the location and selection of tree species for the downtown area.

4) DRINKING WATER SOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAM (DWSP2) AND WATER MONITORING

The CAC participated as a stakeholder in Peekskill's DWSP2 project which met monthly in 2022 and is planning to complete its work by early next year. This is a free program provided by NYS DEC and DOH to assist municipalities like Peekskill with assessing and proactively protecting their drinking water. The results of the effort will be the development of a tailored plan to protect Peekskill's drinking water and a proactive roadmap to implement the plan to protect the sources of our drinking water.

In 2022, Pace University students participated in a project testing and monitoring the Hollow Brook Creek. This will inform the upcoming 2-year project funded by DEC project between Riverkeeper and the city to assess water quality in the Peekskill Hollow Brook and its tributaries. The result will update the DEC's water quality assessment and help define long-term source water monitoring needs for the brook and tributaries.

5) CAC ADVISEMENT RE: PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEMS

The CAC continued to be an active environmental voice for the community regarding development reviews by the Planning Commission. Below are the projects the CAC provided written and in-person comment on:

- **SOLO Commons (Lower South Street Redevelopment Area)**

The CAC highlighted certain concerns with this brownfield redevelopment project including: 1) adequate cleanup of the site for residential use; 2) use of green building technology including the use of solar; 3) implementation of green landscaping, trees, and rain gardens; 4) pervious pavement, among other suggestions.

- **Mountain View Estates (Overlook Avenue)**

The CAC supported the Planning Commission's positive declaration for the site given our concerns: 1) buffer encroachment and proximity to wetlands and streams that empty into the Hudson River; 2) steep slope construction, widespread tree removal (~500) and ground cover disturbance; 3) sandy soil of unknown fill composition; 4) possible contamination from proximity to historic manufacturing facility (The Hat Factory).

- **Ginsberg Development Corporation (GDC) – Railroad Avenue**

The CAC voiced their opposition to the proposed zoning change to allow additional height to an already obtrusive mixed used residential buildings planned for Railroad Avenue. The concern was specifically around the scale and height of the buildings that were not in keeping with the aesthetic qualities that define Peekskill and the riverfront neighborhood, the negative impact on the viewshed of the Hudson River and the increased traffic and safety in an already congested area.

- **760 Franklin Street Site Plan Review**

The CAC expressed concerns regarding this project's negative impact on Park Brook and the surrounding wetlands, the proposed retaining wall on the banks of the brook and the proposed underground drainage system.

6) ENVIRONMENTAL FILM SERIES

CAC members hosted a quarterly series of environmental films on timely topics. Each virtual event consisted of the film viewing along with a panel discussion hosted by the CAC with recognized experts on the topic. These events were free, open to the public and were very well attended. Events included:

- Adam McKay’s, **“Don’t Look Up”** - January 27, 2022
Panelists included: Marilyn Elie, Susan VanDolsen, Jeanne Shaw
- Peter Nelson’s **“The Pollinators”** – April 6, 2022
Panelists included: Peter Nelson, Dan Raichel, Jack Algieri, Niki Armacost
- Christi Cooper, **“YOUTH v. GOV”** – July 20, 2022
Panelists included: Christi Cooper, Barbara Easterlin, Rasha Elwakil, Caitlyn Carpenter
- Deia Schlosberg, **“The Story of Plastic”** – November 29, 2022
Panelists included: Steven Englebright, Caitlin Chang, David Sayer

7) DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE AND CAC DESIGN PARTICIPATION

The CAC participated in the design initiatives for both redesigns of Pugsley and Monument Parks and the downtown hub and connector via Central Avenue from the Riverfront to the downtown area. Environmental design elements were stressed in all designs to help ease the urban heat island effect, increase the green canopy in the city and counteract the effects of climate change with anticipated increased floods, drought, and extreme heat.

8) FOOD SCRAPS AND COMPOSTING

CAC members researched the feasibility of setting up a food scraps drop off station at the Peekskill DPW site on Lower South Street. The CAC networked with various Ossining groups to understand the funding, logistics and operational aspects of a food scraps program since Ossining is a similar community. Ossining was also able to share their sources for supplies, finances, signage, informational flyers and handouts to be reused by Peekskill. Actions taken by the CAC included: 1) Meeting with City Manager and Director of DPW and others to discuss logistic of food scraps drop off site on 2/10/2022; 2) Tour of Valhalla CompostEd center on 5/17/2022 to learn about compost and the value of it; 3) Tour of Wheelabrator Westchester on 6/24/2022. The CAC plans to work with the city in 2023 to open a drop off site for food scraps.

9) SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR

Early in 2022, the CAC advocated for creation of the Sustainability Coordinator position. Subsequently the council passed a resolution to hire for a part-time position and released an RFP in the Spring but the hiring was delayed by a lack of viable candidates applying for the position. In mid-December, Jamie MacDonald accepted the coordinator role as an intern through the non-profit Center for Economic and Environmental Partnership (CEEP). The CAC looks forward to working closely with Jamie and others to help support the development of a strategic plan for sustainability/climate change programs aligned with the DEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC), NYSERDA Climate Energy Communities (CEC) and Westchester Climate Action Planning Institute (CAPI).

10) CAC LETTERS OF SUPPORT

| Letters of Support | Organization | Date | Type of Letter |
|---|---|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Resolution A7429S699B Birds and Bees Protection Act | New York State Assembly | 2/11/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Westchester Clean Buildings: A New York State Model for Scaling Electrification | NYS Energy Research and Development Authority | 4/20/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Proposal for Clean Transportation Prize, under NYSERDA PON 4744 | Sustainable Westchester | 5/18/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Proposed Water Quality Monitoring Project in Peekskill Hollow Creek | Hudson River Estuary Program | 5/26/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Comprehensive Planning Grant | NYS Department of State Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Grant Program | 7/20/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Environmental Protection Fund: Parks, Preservation and Heritage (EPF) Grants Application for Paramount Hudson Valley Theater | NYS Consolidated Funding Application process for Historic Preservation | 7/20/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |
| Draft Criteria for Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) | The Climate Act, NYSERDA | 7/26/2022 | CAC provided letter of support |

11) Outreach, Training & Education

a. Outreach

| Outreach Event | Location | Date | Notes |
|--|--|-------------|---|
| Ardsley CAC screening of The Sacrifice Zone | Webinar | 1/10/2022 | Courtney Williams participated on the discussion panel |
| Care for Creation presentation - Wheelabrator and the health impacts of air pollution | Holy Name of Mary Croton, NY | 2/20/2022 | Courtney Williams presented |
| NYSACC Westchester Meetup on Environment Justice | Webinar | 2/28/2022 | Courtney Williams and Maria Inserra participated in the discussion |
| CAC Tabling event | Peekskill High School Earth Day Celebration | 4/22/2022 | CAC attend PHS Event and demonstrated recycling and engaged student on drinking water source awareness |

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| CAC Tabling event | Peekskill's Farmers Market | 8/20/2022 | CAC engaged visitors and handed out Recycling Brochure and Water Source materials |
| CAC Tabling event | Peekskill's Farmers Market | 10/22/2022 | CAC engaged visitors and handed out Recycling Brochure and postcards on |
| Recycling Brochure Distribution (English and Spanish versions) | Various | Ongoing | CAC provided the Recycle Brochure to various location in Peekskill including the Field Library, City Hall, The Chamber, Forest View, The Peekskill Coffee House (~450 brochures) |
| CAC Liaison with Other City Committees | Various | Ongoing | CAC members regularly attended monthly meetings hosted by Parks Board, Planning Commission and Business Improvement District (BID) |
| Peekskill CAC Facebook site | Online | Ongoing | CAC maintained a Facebook site for pertinent information, announcements, and events |

b. Training & Education

| Event Title | Sponsoring Organization | Date | CAC Role |
|---|--|-------------|--|
| Municipal Summit: Building Decarbonization and Advancing Clean Energy Codes | Sustainable Westchester | 3/03/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| CLCPA Scoping Plan and Ways to Provide Input to Final Plan | NYSDEC's Office of Climate Change (OCC) | 3/12/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Bee Line Micro-Mobility Public Meeting | Sustainable Westchester | 3/18/2022 | CAC attended in person; Peekskill Central Firehouse, Peekskill, NY |
| Pesticides & Pollinators | PCAC EFS | 4/06/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Seeing the City for the Trees: Urban Tree Canopy Trends and Local Strategies | NYS DEC | 4/23/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| NYS Climate Action Council Public Hearing | NYS Climate Action Council | 5/12/2022 | CAC members presented statements in person; Paramount Theatre, Peekskill, NY |
| CompostED Tour | Westchester County Environment and Recycle | 5/18/2022 | CAC, Chris Gross and Kathie Talbot attended tour in person; Valhalla, NY |

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| Win-Waste Wheelabrator Tour | Westchester Alliance for Sustainable Solutions (WASS) | 7/08/2022 | CAC members helped organized and attended the in-person tour; Wheelabrator, Charles Point, Peekskill, NY |
| Commercial Clean Heating and Cooling Roundtable | Sustainable Westchester | 8/10/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Habitat Assessment Workshop | Hudsonian | 9/23/2022 | CAC attended in person; Ward Pound Ridge nature preserve, Pound Ridge, NY |
| PlantIT Geo Tree Inventory and Management Plan Software | PlantIT Geo | 10/03/2022 | CAC attended meeting |
| 2022 New York Conference on the Environment | NYSACC | 10/06/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Climate Change Impacts on Water in the Hudson Valley | Hudson River Watershed Alliance | 10/25/2022 | CAC attended in person; FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY |
| NYS Bond Action Rally | Riverkeeper and others | 11/01/2022 | CAC attended in person; Peekskill Riverfront Green |
| Planting Trees in Disadvantaged Communities After Ash Tree Loss | NYS DEC Urban Forestry | 11/02/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Moving Westchester County towards Zero Waste | Westchester Alliance for Sustainable Solutions (WASS) | 11/15/2022 | Webinar; Hosted by CAC member, Courtney Williams, founder & lead of WASS |
| ReLeaf Region 3 Event | Lower Hudson Valley Region 3 DEC ReLeaf Committee | 12/03/2022 | CAC attended in person; Lasdon Park, Katonah, NY |
| Regulations for Large Municipal Waste Combustion Roundtable Discussion with public comments | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) | 12/06/2022 | CAC attended webinar |
| Peekskill Drinking Water Source Monitoring Sessions | Peekskill, Riverkeeper & PACE University water monitoring group | 12/09/2022; | CAC attended in person at City Hall, Peekskill, NY |

2023 CAC GOALS

- Complete Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) with consultants MJ Engineering
- Food Scraps / Composting System / Zero Waste initiatives
 - Set up Food Scraps Drop Off Site for residents at DPW yard
- Support the Protection and Conservation of the City's Drinking Water
 - Support completion of the DWSP2 report
 - CAC to participate as a stakeholder in the DWSP2 Implementation Team
 - Support Riverkeeper's DEC 2-year project to monitor the Hollow Brook and its tributaries
- Urban Forestry Initiatives
 - Help obtain and celebrate Tree City USA designation
 - Apply for the Urban Forestry Grant for Tree Inventory & Management Plan
 - Help establish and participate in a Tree Board
 - Expand Heritage Tree Program
- Partner with the Sustainability Coordinator on DEC's Climate Smart Communities (CSC) and NYSERDA Climate Energy Communities (CEC) initiatives
- Participate with Climate Action Planning Institute (CAPI) to develop Peekskill's greenhouse gas emission inventory ("GOGHGI") and climate action plan ("GOCAP")
- Continue to manage and host the Environmental Film Series
- Continue to advise the Mayor, Council and Planning Commission on environmental issues
- Continue to advise on the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) proposals and advocate for environmental design elements to help ease the urban heat island effect and increase the green canopy in the city
- Continue Community Outreach and Education with various groups - Parks Board, Planning Commission, BID, NAACP, Youth Bureau and others