

Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) Annual Report

Report to the Mayor and Common Council for Calendar Year Ended December 31, 2017

The following document was prepared for the Peekskill Mayor and Common Council as required by the City Code as it pertains to the CAC's activities for the year ending on December 31, 2017. For more detailed information, please refer to appended copies of the CAC's monthly meeting minutes,

2017 CAC COMPOSITION

Members of Peekskill's CAC include: Kay Barthelmes, Chair, Jeff Miller, Vice Chair; Leigh Draper; Dorothy Leslie; John Drake, Lise Prown; Vanessa Agudelo; Courtney M. Williams; and Michael Shank. Terms expire for Miller and Draper in 2017, while Barthelmes, Drake, Agudelo, Williams, Leslie and Shank expire in 2018.

Change in membership: Dorothy Leslie passed away in July; John Drake left the CAC to take a new position in Virginia in September; Michael Shank moved to Vermont in November; and Vanessa Agudelo was elected to be a member of the Common Council in the general election on November 7th.

Jesica Youngblood, City Planner – Dept. of Planning & Department, was our regular City liaison and recording secretary.

A liaison from the Parks Advisory Board often attended meetings due to overlapping areas of concern, and their input was invaluable during discussions.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Developed Weatherbook Project

Dedicated to Jerome S. Thaler, author of "The Westchester Weather Book," c1977, the Peekskill Weatherbook is intended to continue the discussion and promote sharing of weather information specifically for Peekskill. In his book, Thaler included mean temperatures and rainfall totals by month for Peekskill from between 1945 and 1975, as well as

much more detailed weather information for Scarsdale, Bedford, Westchester County Airport, Carmel, and other municipalities. The Weatherbook does not include high and low temperatures and extremes, wind data and snow data for Peekskill.

This book reviews and analyzes the most recent data for Peekskill, compiled daily by its author for the years 2009 to 2016; and then compares data against historical and regional trends. Conclusions may assist city officials and staff in their attempts to mitigate "heat island" effect and flood potential due to changing rainfall patterns, which data show have become more intense even though total annual precipitation has declined.

Spearheaded and Ran the Solarize Peekskill Campaign

The CAC, as the core team, launched and ran the 12-week outreach campaign in collaboration with the solar installer, and the Solarize Westchester Team, to develop and implement a strategy for community outreach. Activities included a pre-launch meeting, the launch event on March 15, 12 weeks of outreach aimed at reaching as many homeowners and commercial property owners as possible, publicizing the program deadline date, conference calls with all parties to communicate about the program and participating in a survey to inform future rounds of Solarize Westchester. At the conclusion of the solarize campaign, there were 27 residential and 3 commercial contracts signed. Because of the success of this program, Peekskill became a NYSERDA Clean Energy Community

NYS DEC's Community Air Screen Program

Peekskill was one of 11 communities and the only Westchester County community selected across New York State to participate in the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) 'Community Air Screen Program.' This community-based program works with volunteers from local communities to screen for toxic air pollutants. The goal of the Community Air Screen program is for community groups and citizens to partner with DEC to collect local-scale air samples to address some local air quality concerns. The sampling measures Volatile Organic Compounds known as VOCs. Details on the program can be found at the link below.

The CAC tested four sites in Peekskill to address air quality concerns identified by residents as identified below.

- Main Street in Peekskill in front of Bohlmann Towers: Bohlmann Towers is considered high-density housing, is across the street from a playground, and sits at the intersection with a stop light. The concern was automobile emissions from traffic passing through or idling at the stop light.
- Near Dunbar Heights/City's Water Treatment Plant: The concern was odors in the area from the plant.
- Intersection of Lower South Street and Albany Post Road at the site of the "Algonquin" Transmission Pipeline Metering and Regulating Station: The transmission pipeline consists of a 30" and 42" gas pipelines carrying fracked gas from Pennsylvania to New England for export to Canada. Fracking was outlawed in New York State because of the health risks it poses to residents, yet gas infrastructure is permitted. The concern was odors and a constant hissing sound noticed by residents.
- Charles Point Park, near the Wheelabrator facility: DEC is aware of Wheelabrator as they do have an air permit for the pollutants that they emit. The community concern was the extremely loud venting that happens, along with smog that is noticed on certain days. We were unable to capture such venting, but sampled near the plant on a typical day of operations. Sampling was started on August 31st and completed October 5. The CAC now awaits results from the DEC.

Launched the Environmental Film Series

A series of six films on environmental issues were organized and sponsored. They were shown once a month at Westchester Community College in Peekskill, beginning in September. In addition to being free of charge, refreshments were served. A guest speaker guided a discussion after each film. Attendance was excellent and included many Peekskill High School Students who are members of the Environmental Club. The titles of the films were: *This Changes Everything*, *Racing Extinction*, *Merchants of Doubt*, *Food, Inc.*, *Tapped*, and *The True Cost*.

Continued to Develop Open Space and Wetlands Inventories

Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) digital mapping data, the CAC has identified and generated a database for all wetlands, open space, and vacant parcels citywide. The database contains various attributes,

including ownership, development potential and existing environmental features (steep slopes, wetlands, floodplains, etc.) for each individual parcel. The database links to a corresponding map that enables a comprehensive view of the city's environmental resources in unprecedented ways. Council members are now prioritizing lots and developing a format for making field verification more efficient.

Once completed, the inventory will serve as the foundation to prioritize and recommend implementation strategies to preserve and protect the city's critical vacant lands, open spaces, and wetlands. It will also contain advanced mapping capabilities that can be incorporated into the city's goals and objectives.

Continued Maintenance at MacGregory Brook South Bank

The CAC continued to maintain the restoration site on the south bank of MacGregory Brook between the railroad tracks and the Hudson River. There was a growth of an invasive plant called sweet autumn clematis covering some of the plantings on the western portion of the area. Although it was removed by hand, the CAC recommends carefully managing this area next year.

Produced a Rain Garden Video

As part of CAC's ongoing educational outreach to residents, three members shared a variety of backyard projects that resulted in maximizing rainfall runoff within the resident's property to avoid adding runoff to city storm drains. Will be posted on the City of Peekskill website.

Participated in Annual Citywide Clean-up of City Parks

On Saturday, April 29, CAC members met staff and volunteers at Depew Park, Fort Hill Park, and the Riverfront to clean up trash. DPW picked up the refuse throughout the day.

Scenic Vista at 1410 Crompond Road

As an ongoing initiative, the CAC continue to consider the possibility of turning this vacant lot into a scenic vista for Peekskill. The CAC received word from Westchester Land Trust (WLT) through its President Lori Ensinger, that their land committee made a recommendation to their board to set aside \$35,000 for its purchase. This money would be used as an offer for the 0.83-acre parcel on Crompond Road. The CAC will continue to stay actively involved in the development of this property as a scenic vista and in

communication with the WLT. Ultimately, the CAC will make a recommendation to the Council regarding a viable option for usage of this property. To date the CAC explored possibilities with the city, as well as interested organizations in Peekskill.

Liaison to Charles Point Trail Committee

As the City continues to expand its walking path from Riverfront Green, south to Buchanan, a member of the CAC, Jeff Miller, is a participant in the Charles Point Trail Committee, which seeks to move this project forward, secure buy-in from local businesses and establish the walking path per state requirements.

Prepared the grant application for a City-wide tree inventory

CAC members applied for a grant to conduct a tree inventory through 2016 Urban and Community Forestry Council funding along with the NYS DEC in the City of Peekskill. The project is a comprehensive, GIS based street tree and park tree inventory in the City of Peekskill which will include a tree risk assessment based on the ISA Best Management Practices and an invasive insect and other pest and disease detection survey by incorporating the USDA Forest Service early pest detection protocol (IPED) at the time of data collection. An educational component regarding invasive insects and other pests is important to include with a tree inventory. In light of the recently discovered oak wilt in New York State and other invasive pests such as EAB, the inventory will be developed and maintained in order to implement an ongoing urban forest health monitoring and early pest detection program. Although funding was not received, the CAC intends to reapply when funds become available in 2018. Alternatively, the CAC will investigate developing a tree inventory for a smaller geographic area as a basis for analysis (downtown).

Prepared and submitted to the Council a health report on Riverfront plantings and overall landscape maintenance.

CAC members studied the conditions of the landscaping at the new Riverfront Parks. They found an alarming condition overall because staff had not been assigned to care for the plantings properly. The report was intended to inform the city so that remediation could take place and more training provided for city staff.

Other Outreach, Training, and Education

- 1/1/17 – 3/30/17 Prepared Weatherbook
- 2/19/17 – 5/15/17 Advised DPW on tree trimming at Monument Park
- 2/6/17 The City of Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council partnered with NAACP Peekskill Chapter's Climate Justice Committee and Peekskill-based Safe Energy Rights Group (SEnRG) to apply to participate in the NYS DEC's Community Air Screen Program.
- 2/11/17 Eaglefest in Peekskill at Riverfront Park
- 2//15/17 Geothermal Heating Workshop, Peekskill
- 5/2/17 Met with Scenic Hudson at Riverfront to review weed and plant issues.
- 6/5/17 NYS Indian Point Decommissioning Task Force meeting, Cortlandt
- 9/21/17 Zero Emissions Summit on Citizens' Role in Mitigating Climate, NYC
- 9/28/17 NYS Indian Point Decommissioning Task Force meeting, Peekskill
- 10/17/17 Meeting our Climate Goals: Renewable Heating and Cooling Croton-on-Hudson
- 10/2/17 Attended Urban Forestry Conference "RELEAF," SUNY Orange-Newburgh Campus, Newburgh, NY
- 11/3/17 Invasive Species Summit: Restoration Long-Term Management co-presented with Lower Hudson PRISM, Bronx, NY
- 12/11/17 Presentation: Health & Community Impacts of the Southeast Compressor Station, North Salem, NY

Objectives for calendar year 2017

- Complete Open Space and Wetlands inventory as mandated in Chapter 24 of the City Code.
- Explore grants for a street tree inventory. Or develop a tree inventory for downtown as an alternative.
- Monitor and maintain MacGregory Brook planting at the Riverfront.
- Participate in the annual Clean-up of City parks.
- Sponsor a public education outreach program on a conservation issue.

Advise Common Council on conservation issues and development impacts as they occur.

Apply for “Tree City USA” certification.

Continue the environmental film series

Maintain the Weatherbook

Study and share results of the Community Air Screening

Monitor overall health of City parks