

Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council

Report to the Mayor and Common Council for Calendar Year Ended
December 31, 2015

As required by the City Code, this annual report summarizes the actions of the Conservation Advisory Council for 2015. For more detailed information, please refer to copies of calendar year 2015 minutes, which are attached to, and made part of, this report.

Composition of CAC in 2015

Members of the Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) are: Carol Capobianco, Chair; Kay Barthelmes, Vice Chair; John Drake, Leigh Draper; Dorothy Leslie; Jeff Miller, and Lise Prown. Peekskill resident Vanessa Agudelo, a recent college graduate who is interested in conservation issues, attended most of this year's meetings and has since applied to be on the Parks Advisory Board.

Michael Welti, Director of Planning and Development, attended meetings as the city's liaison and recording secretary through April, when he departed. Garrett Burger joined the city's staff as Assistant Planner and became the CAC liaison beginning in June.

Since its inception in January 2014 and through April 2015, the Parks Advisory Board had sent a representative to CAC meetings to keep both commissions abreast of matters of common interest.

The CAC presented to the Common Council's Committee of the Whole on January 20 to discuss the CAC's projects, accomplishments, and recognition for its water quality education with a commendation by Westchester County's Soil and Water Conservation Achievement Awards.

Activities and Achievements

Continued to Develop Open Space and Wetlands Inventory

The CAC continues work on its GIS map, database, and narrative. The database links to a corresponding map that enables a comprehensive view of the city's environmental resources in unprecedented ways, bringing together information from several existing databases from federal, state, county, and local levels.

Once completed, the Open Space and Wetlands Inventory will serve as the foundation to prioritize and recommend appropriate use of the areas, including preservation and protection of the city's critical vacant lands, open space, and wetlands. It will also contain advanced mapping capabilities that can be incorporated into the city's planning efforts.

CAC members have prioritized areas for which to write descriptions. The Open Space sub-committee met on May 30 with new members to discuss the narrative for the report.

In fall 2015, the CAC was offered free technical assistance in developing the city's Natural Resources Inventory—which comprises the Open Space and Wetlands Inventory—from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program and the Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance of Teatown Lake Reservation. With the city's permission, the CAC submitted the application on October 12. Representatives of both assisting organizations attended the CAC meeting of November 12 to create a work plan.

The CAC continues to monitor the status of vacant properties in the inventory that are slated for development or up for sale. The CAC also is periodically asked to comment on development projects on those parcels with regard to natural resources.

On April 10, the CAC chair and vice chair met with the directors of Land Preservation, Stewardship, and Conservation for the Westchester Land Trust to show them vacant parcels of conservation interest in Peekskill. The sites visited were the “Route 202 Overlook” at 1410 Crompond Road, with its stunning views that the city itself has recommended for preservation; the 13.2 acres at 1130 Frost Lane, and the steep slopes of 956 Lockwood Drive, behind the Hat Factory along Peekskill Hollow Brook. The Trust is interested in helping the city pursue ideas for these properties.

Tree Conservation

- Proposed a policy regarding the removal of trees on city property; sent to department heads of Planning/Parks/DPW and City Manager (January 11).
- Advised the city on the protection of three grand trees targeted for removal at Riverfront Green (January 20).
- Wrote and received a grant of \$1,495 from the New York State Urban Forestry for the planting of five trees in Depew Park. Recommended tree species and coordinated an Arbor Day celebration, with city officials, NYS DEC forester, and schoolchildren among the 50 members of the community in attendance.
- Met with DPW, Parks, and Planning Department heads and Councilwoman Kathie Talbot on June 15 to discuss: the transfer to DPW of maintenance of the MacGregory Brook plantings, pursuit of a city tree inventory, the proposed inter-departmental tree policy, DPW interest in a citywide tree ordinance, Monument Park tree pruning, NY State’s new invasive species regulations, fall leaf cleanup, and assisting DPW with identification of empty tree wells for new street trees.
- Provided DPW chief, as requested, a list of possible locations for new street trees and a list of potential street tree species on October 4.
- Met with DPW chief at Monument Park in July to advise on tree health and pruning to address city concerns.
- Explored new Trees for Tribes planting as potential to fulfill mayor’s request for 75 new trees in recognition of the city’s anniversary

Monitored Restoration Site of MacGregory Brook

CAC members continued to check on the health and needs of the restoration site on the south bank of MacGregory Brook between the railroad tracks and the Hudson River. The CAC initiated and led this project through a grant, culminating with the planting in October 2011 of 120 shrubs and trees provided by the Trees for Tribes program. CAC members had been maintaining the site, including weeding the area on July 19 and August 21. However, now that the plants are established, the City’s DPW has agreed to assume maintenance of the site as part of its Riverfront Green parks maintenance program.

A representative from the NYS DEC’s Trees for Tribes program visited the site on July 31 with the CAC’s vice chair and praised the maintenance and tree survival rate and encouraged future projects through the program.

Participated in Annual Citywide Cleanup of City Parks, April 25

In addition to CAC members participating in the cleanup at various parks, CAC members coordinated an Arbor Day celebration that day in Depew Park, highlighting the trees purchased with the Urban Forestry Grant awarded through the CAC's work, noted above.

Developed and Sponsored a Public Education Outreach Program

To raise public awareness of environmental issues as they impact Peekskill, the CAC continued an initiative to educate residents about the city's natural resources and how to protect them through an insert in their water bills. The initiative began with the distribution of a flyer about Peekskill's drinking water in the December 2013/January 2014 water bills. In December 2014/January 2015, the second informational flyer, on stormwater, was published and mailed. The third and final flyer in the series, on Peekskill's watershed, began mailing in December 2015. All three flyers also included Spanish translation and original artwork and were posted to the city's website.

In addition, the CAC provided critical comments and mapping support to help the non-profit Clearwater organization close out its Peekskill Urban Watershed Project under an EPA grant. Representatives of Clearwater presented its final report to the public at the Field Library on July 30 and to the CAC at its August 13 meeting, at which Councilwoman Talbot was in attendance.

Advised Common Council and Planning Commission on Conservation Issues

As issues and development projects arise throughout the year, the CAC advises the Common Council and Planning Commission on protecting natural resources. This year the CAC provided guidance on the following:

- Preservation of trees at Riverfront Green (as noted above).
- CAC Vice Chair served on the Waterfront Advisory Committee developing the new Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan. Several CAC members took active roles at both public workshops.
- Shared information (July 19 & November 7) from a county legislator who is requesting support for a plastic bag ban.
- Visited the site (July 9) and provided comments (July 27), as requested by the Planning Commission, regarding 653/657 Central Avenue development proposal.
- Visited the site (August 13) and provided comments (August 21), as requested by the Planning Commission, regarding 1244 Brook Street.
- Wrote a letter (October 25) in support of the draft budget proposals to fill the vacated Planning Department position as well as the newly proposed DPW park maintenance position.
- As requested by a council member, reviewed and commented on sludge incineration for a draft agreement with Wheelabrator.
- At the request of a Planning Commission member, CAC provided a list of native species groundcovers for use in a proposed project (October 18).
- At the request of the Planning Department, attended the public workshop (November 4) and recommended tree species for the Brown/South Streetscape project (November 7).

Research native plants initiative

This goal was tabled for 2015 and will be renewed as an objective for a future year.

Other Outreach, Training, and Education

- January 20: Presented to the Committee of the Whole.
- February 7: Attended EagleFest at Riverfront Green.
- March 11: Attended county-sponsored FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map meeting.
- March 30: Participated in LWRP public workshop.
- April 2: Attended the county-sponsored workshop on NYS's new invasive species legislation that went into effect March 10, 2015.
- April 10: Hosted staff of Westchester Land Trust for a tour of locations of conservation interest in Peekskill.
- April 25: Coordinated Arbor Day Celebration with tree planting in Depew Park.
- April 25: Participated in annual citywide cleanup of city parks.
- May 14: Attended the NYS GIS Association User Group meeting at SUNY Purchase.
- June 15: Met with DPW, Parks, and Planning Department heads to discuss various conservation issues.
- June 16: Participated in LWRP public workshop.
- June 25: Attended the Environmental Leaders Learning Alliance workshop on creating a Natural Resources Inventory.
- July 19: Weeded and cleaned up MacGregory Brook restoration plantings.
- July 24: Met with DPW chief in Monument Park to advise on trees and pruning.
- July 30: Attended Clearwater's presentation of its Peekskill Urban Watershed Project final report at the Field Library.
- July 31: Met with NYS DEC Trees for Trib staff for a site review of the MacGregory Brook restoration plantings.
- August 21: Stabilized, re-staked MacGregory Brook trees.
- September 2: Attended the DEC Dam Safety and Removal Seminar.
- October 22: Attended *The Hudson River at Risk* film screening and panel discussion at Ossining Library.
- November 4: Attended the Brown/South Streetscape project public meeting.
- December 12: Submitted a letter of support to Clearwater for its DEC grant application to digitize its publication of Hudson River fishes.
- December 16: Attended the Mayor and Common Council's gathering for City commission volunteers.

Objectives for calendar year 2016

Work on developing a Natural Resources Inventory, which will comprise the Open Space and Wetlands Inventory as mandated in Chapter 24 of the City Code.

Confirm maintenance by DPW of MacGregory Brook restoration site.

Participate in the annual cleanup of city parks.

Research grants for conducting the city's tree inventory.

Advise Common Council and Planning Commission on conservation issues and development impact as they arise throughout the year.

Fulfill the Planning Department's request for a recommended list of native plants for developers.

Sponsor a public education outreach program on a conservation issue.