

To: Ancram Town Board

From: Ancram Conservation Advisory Council

Subject: CAC Year End Report for 2023

Date: January 16, 2024

2023 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Conservation Advisory Council met monthly and entirely by zoom in 2023.

1. Planning Board: CAC members Erin Robertson and Colleen Lutz provided regular updates on activities of the Planning Board. We provided input on the Montchak, Simons Road, Eisenberg Camp, Green Hill Subdivision, and Carson Road projects. Through our site plan visit and review, we added protections and improvements to the wetlands at the Carson Road site.

2. We made a site visit to **Velazquez project** in March and noted concerns on likely Storm Water Pollution Protection Plan (SWPPP) violations, lack of bank stabilization, and the resulting erosion from the construction of a steep driveway. On August 25, 2023 we sent a detailed review and report of the serious problems with the Velazquez project to the Planning Board. **This report is attached to this Year End Report. We ask that TB members review this report because the issues raised are very relevant to Town planning and oversight and to continued revision of the proposed Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone (SCOZ) revisions that will be undertaken by the ZRC.**

3. We submitted comments to Nan Stolzenburg to help improve Planning Board processes and review. Many of our comments were later incorporated and accepted by the Town Board. We recommended to the PB and TB that there be better **Building and Zoning Enforcements** in terms of both reviewing applications and enforcing permitted applications. The Velazquez property is an example of an applicant not following the PB approved application and the SWPPP.

4. We sent a letter to Ed Ferrato re. the DEC Wetlands permit that was granted to the 28 Underhill Road swimming pool project. Ed replied and noted that this project will likely be reviewed by the ZBA.

5. ZRC and the CAC Proposed Revision to the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone (SCOZ) This project was a **CAC priority for 2023.** We have spent several months reviewing and discussing the current SCOZ revisions. On September 18, we submitted our final proposed revisions to the ZRC. The ZRC devoted 6 meetings to a careful review of our SCOZ proposals between Oct 30 and Dec 11. Hugh Clark and Nan Stolzenburg offered excellent input and support for our SCOZ revisions. Hugh sent us detailed minutes of the six ZRC meetings that dealt with SCOZ so that we could study, accept and rewrite pertinent passages of the SCOZ. As 2023 ended, we were hard at work on our response to the ZRC, particularly on the extension of SCOZ protections to “any development” within the SCOZ and a rewrite to make the development standards clearer and less redundant. We will continue our amended revisions into 2024 with the new ZRC. Given the increased development pressure on Ancram, our continuing goal is to work with the ZRC and with Nan Stolzenburg to update and improve the SCOZ regulations. The CAC would

like to recognize the excellent leadership and support offered by Hugh Clark on making these improvements and working with the ZRC toward consensus. We have kept the goals of the Ancram Comprehensive Plan as our guiding document.

6. Forest Protection - We are working with the **Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC)** to review maps that will show where the forest is currently under permanent protection, easement, and the extent of protection. We hope to see if connectors of forest could be developed between blocks of forest in order to either provide forest corridors, preservation, and/or allow for sustainable use. At our meeting with Heidi Bock and Sarah Peele of the CLC in June 2023, we discussed our ongoing plans to conserve and protect forests and other open spaces that are consistent with Ancram's Comprehensive Plan goals of maintaining the rural character of the Town, conserving wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and climate change resiliency. This meeting was devoted to a discussion of forest protection: programs and grants available to counties, towns, and individual landowners, and potential opportunities for the CAC, Town, and CLC to work together toward protection of open spaces.

7. Deer Management The CAC discussed forest conservation issues related to deer management. CAC member Wally Williamson may set up exclusionary fencing for a portion of the 125 forested acres at Long Lake in order to rejuvenate their woodlands.

8. Steps toward creating a Community Preservation Plan (CPP) and Community Conservation Fund (CCF): The CAC agreed unanimously that Gretchen Stevens (formerly of Hudsonia) will be an excellent consultant and guide for the development of Community Conservation Plan and Fund for Ancram. This will be a long-term project. A first step will be to develop an Open Space Plan for Ancram. We will begin by reviewing our foundational documents such as the Comprehensive Plan, our Biodiversity Assessment, and our Natural Resource Conservation Plan that was approved by the Town Board in 2015. We agreed that there is value in completing an Open Space Plan even if we do not move on to creating a CPP and CPF.

9. Grant for Invasive Species Education Outreach- Colleen has written and submitted an excellent grant proposal to the DEC for this joint Ancram/CLC educational project at the CLC's Overmountain Conservation Area. We will find out in early 2024 if we get the grant.

10. Homegrown National Park Event - We co-hosted this highly successful and well-attended educational event with the CACs of Copake and Hillsdale, Friends of Taconic State Park, the Ancram Resilient Farm & Garden Group and the Roe Jan Library on April 29, 2023. Landscape architect and CAC member Jamie Purinton, Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia, and Bridghe MacCracken of Helia Design led an informative panel discussion after viewing a video on the importance of protecting biodiversity and the key role that everyone can play right in their own backyard.

11. Colleen Lutz continues to update the **Natural Resource map** overlays so they can be easily accessed by the **Planning Board** and other committees and town agencies. Some of our habitat information stored on our Geographic Information Systems (GIS) account will be shared with Hudson River Alliance for their Characterization. For 2024, Colleen would like to train another GIS map user, preferably a

planning board or CAC member to use ArcGIS Online (AGOL) so they can have access to the maps for review. Ancram updated its \$100 subscription to the GIS software.

12. A **Watershed Characterization Plan** for Punch Brook and the Roe Jan has made good progress and has produced great preliminary maps. CAC members Jamie Purinton, Amy Gold, and Colleen Lutz are participating along with CAC members from Gallatin, Taghkanic and Copake.

13. The **Roe Jan Watershed Association** (RJWA) continued with water sampling by Jamie and Colleen at two locations in Ancram – Wiltsie Bridge by Herondale Farm and the Hall Hill new bridge. In all there are 14 sites from Hillsdale to Germantown along the Roe Jan. Ancram provided funding of \$100 (\$50 each) for these two Ancram sites to be tested five times each, at Bard Labs. The results are posted on the Bard College Water Lab site and the RJWA website, <https://www.roejanwatershed.org/2021/11/30/roe-jan-2021-sampling-results/>.

14. CAC members Jamie Purinton and Choral Eddie continued to monitor **amphibian crossings** in Ancram and to send data to the DEC. They evaluated several sites for possible use in the future, monitored a Wiltsie Bridge location 4-5 times, and sent in 3 reports to DEC including frogs saved and frogs counted crossing. We hope to develop this project into an educational program for local residents.

15. We made recommendations for the **Town Hall property** regarding management of the little bluestem meadow. The little bluestem is a native grass that supports numerous butterflies of conservation concern. We will try again to move mowing of this unique meadow to June rather than the fall in 2024.

16. **CAC membership** Jane Meigs is now the Chair of the CAC, and Jay Lorenz resigned in December, 2023. Choral Eddie moved back to regular membership status. The CAC now has nine regular members. The CAC meets monthly on the second Tuesday.

You may review CAC minutes for 2023 to get more detailed information on any of these projects.

PLANS FOR 2024

1. We will continue to provide input to the Planning Board on projects that have sensitive environmental factors and hope that the town engineer and Nan Stolzenburg will continue to help develop the Town's reviews.

2. We will continue our educational efforts through writing and publishing relevant memos and by planning and hosting educational events for our community.

3. We will urge the town to take advantage of available grant money for energy conservation and climate change resilience.

4. We will make ongoing recommendations on forest preservation and how we can update our regulations, by following model legislation of other local towns.

5. We will work with the ZRC to complete updates and improvements to the SCOZ regulations.
6. We will develop proposals for updating our zoning laws to strengthen protection of ridgelines and steep slopes.
7. We will explore the possibility of designing a Community Preservation Plan and Fund for Ancram. Christine Vanderlan of DEC will be meeting with us at our April, 2024 to begin a discussion of this process.
8. We will continue to discuss and plan for an Open Space Plan for Ancram with leadership from Gretchen Stevens, who will attend our March CAC meeting to help guide us.

CAC Professional Training during 2023

CAC Members completed the NYS Sexual and Workplace Harrassment for 2023.

June 13—CAC Meeting/Training with Columbia Land Conservancy on Forest Protection. Presented by Heidi Bock and Sarah Peele of CLC. Attended by Jane and Jono Meigs, Wally Williamson, Jamie Purinton, Erin, Robertson, Amy Gold, Colleen Lutz, Jay Lorenz

Amy Gold

Punchbrook Watershed Project-Ongoing meetings

Nov 14—DEC Municipal Options for Financing Open Space Protection

Colleen Lutz

Jan 12 Webinar "The Culvert Connection: Reconnecting Our Streams" 1-2pm

Feb 28 AM&RC Project - 2023 Virtual Volunteer Training 5-630 pm

Mar 31 Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America 7pm

Jun 15 Webinar - Combining and Integrating Ecological Data 10-11 am

Aug 11 InHabit Training Webinar 2-3pm

Sep 23-27 NYS Invasive Species Expo

Sep 26 Presenter at HVCAN coffee hour

Oct 17-19 Northeast Natural Heritage Conference

Oct 16 Protecting Wetlands and Streams in Your Community

Oct 27 Climate Adaptation and Vision Workshop Columbia Co. CARP SOUTH

Nov 14 Municipal Options for Financing Open Space Protection 2-4:30pm

Columbia County EMC Meetings- 10 out of 11 Columbia County EMC meetings

Punch Brook Watershed Characterization Planning and Columbia County Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Planning (CARP) planning in 2023.

Jane Meigs

Jan 12—Webinar: The Culvert Connection: Reconnecting Our Streams

Jan 14—Homegrown National Park-Online Video Presentation

Mar 2—Intro to Hudson Valley Habitats and Biodiversity Conservation

Nov 14—DEC Municipal Options for Financing Open Space Protection

Jamie Purinton

Feb 22-23—2 Day Conference Ecological Landscaping Alliance on Native Plants and Sustainable Design

Mar 22—Claverack Panelist for Backyard National Park

April 27—Roe Jan Library Panelist for Backyard National Park

June 26—Rain Garden construction class

June 27—Stormwater Design class

Aug 23—Farmscape Ecology Invasive Plant Management Volunteer at Forge

Oct 22—Stuyvesant Town Hall Panelist For Backyard National Park program

Nov 23—Farmscape Ecology Native Plant Seed Collecting Workshop Volunteer

Wally Williamson

Feb 13 Webinar: How Deer Shape Forest Ecosystems and Current Management Options

Feb 15 Webinar: A Briefing on Oak Regeneration Ecology

Mar 23 Video: Asian Jumping Worms: Another Forest Foe May 23 NY Forest May 13 Owners Association WoodsWalk, 449 Steam Mill Road, Ellenburg, NY: Creating and managing early successional wildlife habitat; managing for a healthy and diverse forest; funding programs to offset costs; seeking and working with like-minded wildlife organizations that share goals

Jul 19 Webinar: Assessing Pesticide Hazard and Risk: Glyphosate, A Case Study. Cornell ForestConnect.

Sep 9 Live presentation: Sustainable Landscapes and Best Management Practices for the Local Landowner

Sep 20 Webinar: Recognizing and Restoring Degraded Forest Stands. Cornell ForestConnect

Master Forest Owner Program. Two MFO Program visits. These are multi-hour affairs: I learned what the woodland owner's goals are for his/her property; I walked the forested property with the landowner, discussing observations; I supplied the landowner with a multi-page typewritten report summarizing my observations based on the owner's goals.

Land Use Law in a Nutshell, by Patricia E. Salkin and Jennie C. Nolon, 3rd ed. (West Academic 2021). Wally read this 400-page textbook to understand the legal context applicable to potential zoning regulations to protect Ancram's forests, and prepared a 9-page typed summary of the book relevant to these issues which he circulated to the CAC.