

Rockland Riverfront Communities Council 2019 Year-in-Review

The Rockland Riverfront Communities Council (RRCC), officially established on January 16, 2002, is an inter-municipal organization comprised of the Towns of Clarkstown, Haverstraw, Orangetown, and Stony Point; the Villages of Grand View-on-Hudson, Haverstraw, Nyack, Piermont, South Nyack, Upper Nyack, and West Haverstraw; the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the County of Rockland. The Council's mission is to protect, enhance, and utilize the unique assets of the Hudson River and nearby parks through inter-municipal cooperation between riverfront communities and other appropriate agencies in Rockland County. In furtherance of this mission, the Council encourages and promotes the preservation of natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources; environmental education; sustainable economic development and public access to the river, where possible.

The Council is an outgrowth of a \$150,000 Quality Communities grant from the NYS Department of State. Rockland County, Westchester County, and Pace University Land Use Law Center received the grant to encourage inter-municipal partnerships between riverfront communities.

The RRCC continues to work closely with the Hudson River Valley Greenway. The Council reviewed the updated Greenway Trail map, and discussed where other trail locations could be designated in the future. Each municipal representative was asked to determine whether Greenway Trail signage was present along their designated trail sections, the condition of the existing signage, and whether additional signage was warranted.

Members were also notified of potential grant opportunities that related to the goals and objectives of the RRCC. Municipalities that applied for grants, reached out to the Rockland Riverfront Communities Council for letters of support. This year, three letters of support were written. The first letter of support was written for the Village of Nyack for their Downtown Revitalization Initiative application. The second letter of support was written for a grant from the Office of Climate Change for the Village of Nyack for the preparation of a Climate Action Plan. The third letter written was for the John Green Preservation Coalition for their application to the Environmental Protection Fund for \$400,000 to help to shore up the foundation.

The municipal project list was updated for 2019. This listing contains projects that have been completed as well as projects that are underway or proposed. The projects are reflective of the goals and objectives of the Rockland Riverfront Communities Council, and provide the Council with a listing for grant application purposes.

Many land use issues were discussed at the RRCC meetings, including: the Nanuet Transit Oriented Development rezoning, Bartaco in Nyack, Nyack College Campus, Living Christ Church, the Northern Valley Greenway Trail Plans, the Hudson Valley Regional Housing Market, Repair Café, Rockland Conservation & Service Corps opportunities, Nyack Beach State Park parking area, Upper Nyack boat yard, new village park in Upper Nyack, Summit School trees, Piermont Bridge, Piermont Lighthouse, LED lights, climate-adaptive design opportunity in Piermont, solar-powered boat, Resiliency Award to the Village of Piermont, Joule Energy, and Climate Smart Communities.

Focus meetings were started in 2015 to improve the council member discussions. Each monthly meeting has a specific topic for discussion, or guest presenters, for round table discussions. In 2019, the focus meetings included: 1) a presentation by Nicole Laible on the various work responsibilities through the Rockland County Division of Environmental Resources. After providing the mission of the department and the other agencies under their auspices, she indicated that Rockland County was in the process of creating an agricultural district and hopes that the lands identified will be adopted by the Legislature to be part of the District. Nicole then provided details about the various tasks that she led. These included the professional stream biomonitoring (PEERS), storm drain marking program, road-stream crossing assessments, rain garden demonstration site network, the American Eel project, the Wild Oyster Survey, environmental education, and the Water Assessment by Volunteer Evaluators (WAVE). Lastly, she mentioned other projects that she was responsible for, which included the Minisceongo Creek Watershed Alliance, green infrastructure projects, the Soil and Water Conservation Service, and the Environmental Management Council.; 2) a presentation by Mayor Bonnie Christian from South Nyack on the Shared Use Path (SUP). Bonnie discussed that information was available on the Village's website. Originally the SUP was supposed to end abruptly at Village Hall, but the Village fought to have a better design concept adopted, and ultimately Concept "F" was chosen, as this was the least intrusive and provided parking and other facilities inside the exit loop. Now the SUP will connect to Clinton Avenue and head towards Village Hall and north towards the Village of Nyack. She also indicated that native landscaping is proposed along the SUP.; 3) a presentation by David Zornow was provided, which discussed how he got involved in the Greater Nyack Bike Walk Master Plan. After starting to organize bike rides in Nyack to provide greater awareness about safety issues to both riders and vehicle drivers, a six-month study of walking and cycling was conducted in the Nyack School District as well to raise awareness. Safety measure that were identified to increase safety and awareness was to narrow roadway widths, painting lines along the roadway to visually narrow the road, providing a "Leading Pedestrian Interval" at traffic lights, and more biking events, including the planned "Rolling by the River" that was geared to all levels of riders.; 4) the history of the John Green House by Win Perry.

Win gave background about the house, stating that it was built in 1819 as a lumber yard, docks, lime house, general store and outhouse before it was subdivided. After years of neglect, the house became structurally unsound. In 2015 the John Green Coalition was formed to raise funds for the restoration of the house, and which resulted in the bank giving the Historical Society the house, as it was in foreclosure. Since then, the support beams were installed, the floors and roof were stabilized, sheet rock and plaster and lathe removed, non-historic materials removed, including a concrete block wall. Scheduled volunteer work days have been implemented, and the house is now included in the walking tour for the riverfront.; 5) a presentation by Zev Oster, a jeweler by trade and a beekeeper and blueberry grower as his hobby. Mr. Oster discussed the history of how he started beekeeping, and how his business has expanded from one site with two hives on 1.3 acres to multiple sites throughout the County with 100 hives and 3-5 million bees. He now harvests over 1,500 pounds of honey from his hives. His sons now help with the bees, and they have expanded to doing bee removals/relocations of hives. He loves to provide education on the importance of bees, and has created several websites.; 6) a presentation by Dr. Bianca Wentzell and Rob Hornberger on micro-plastics in the Hudson and watershed. Dr. Wentzell is an assistant professor of biology, specializing in wetland ecology and plant biology at St. Thomas Aquinas College (STAC) and Mr. Hornberger is a senior at STAC majoring in biochemistry. He spent over a year and a half investigating microplastics in wetlands of the Sparkill Creek Watershed. Results of the study showed that the highest plastic concentration was at the Piermont Marsh, and that the most predominant type of plastic found were the polypropylenes (which generally comprise bags).; and 7) a presentation by Kerri Scales, the Solid Waste Educator for the Rockland County Solid Waste Management Authority was provided about the overview of the Waste Authority, each facility that they oversee, waste prevention and the waste stream, global risk with the market, domestic plants, and the future and what that means to Rockland residents. She mentioned that the solid waste facility is being renovated, so is currently closed, but will reopen in the future with state of the art equipment. The biggest challenge is the market flow, due to the changes in the market.

Various flyers and documents were distributed to members of the RRCC and to municipalities and/or made available to the public when deemed appropriate. These flyers addressed and included the Hudson River Valley Greenway Newsletter, Palisades Parks Conservancy Annual Report, Hudson River Estuary Program seminars, programs being sponsored by the Rockland Farm Alliance, Trail Walker, the Bear Report, grant information, and an assortment of flyers announcing related organizations dinners and public events. In addition, information about the Rockland County Conservation & Service Corps program was presented, and assistance was requested in both finding sites with projects where students can be hosted, and in recruiting students to work on the various projects.

The Rockland Riverfront Communities Council will continue to network with like-minded organizations, such as Keep Rockland Beautiful, the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference, the Rockland County Health Department, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Hudson River Estuary Program, and will continue its close relationship with the Hudson River Valley Greenway Council. The RRCC will continue working to connect sections of the Greenway Trail and designate existing routes along the riverfront. The RRCC will continue to provide support for Palisades Interstate Park Commission improvements and plans in Rockland. The RRCC will continue to develop model ordinances, when needed, and will encourage Rockland's municipalities to adopt all or parts of the Ridgeline Model Ordinance. Ongoing support and assistance with getting the Greenway Compact Plan adopted by the Rockland municipalities will be provided. As always, the RRCC will continue to work diligently to develop strong foundations to further cooperation among Rockland's riverfront communities and organizations.