

Philipstown Comprehensive Plan Implementation

Natural Resources Committee: Scope of Work (As of December 30, 2004)

Committee Members

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Mission and Purpose

The Natural Resources Committee (NRC), a subcommittee of the Philipstown Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee, will engage in a series of activities aimed to facilitate Philipstown's realization of its natural resources, open space, and rural character objectives. The NRC will build on the foundation set by the Plan's original Natural Resource/Open Space Work Group, whose work is summarized in Appendix F of the Comprehensive Plan.

The "natural resources" that fall under the purview of the NRC are: surface and ground water (and the land that protects both the quality and supply of local water); biodiversity and natural habitats (i.e. the flora and fauna and the ecological processes upon which they depend); outdoor recreation made possible by publicly-accessible open space (e.g. hiking, biking, fishing, and hunting); and scenic community character elements that emerge from both natural features (e.g. the Hudson River, parklands, mountains, ridgelines, and wetlands) and cultural features (e.g. historic sites and working farms).

Long-term Goals

The NRC has four goals aimed at helping Philipstown implement its Comprehensive Plan:

1. Strengthen the inventory and analysis of Philipstown's natural resources (including understanding local trends and regional comparisons), and make this information readily available to Philipstown's citizens.
2. Propose priorities and specific actions for implementing the Comprehensive Plan's natural resources recommendations based on additional analyses (including economic considerations, expert opinion, and citizen input), in order to protect Philipstown's water and biodiversity, and the opportunities that these resources provide for public recreation and scenic community character.
3. Endeavor in all activities to promote the Comprehensive Plan, educate the public and government officials about their local natural resources, build relevant partnerships (including with other municipalities' natural resource groups), and engage in an on-going dialogue with Philipstown residents to better understand the public's perspectives on natural resources and open space issues.
4. Establish methods both to track the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan's natural resources recommendations, and to evaluate the effectiveness of our own Committee. Based on this evaluation, report annually to the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee on natural resources progress, and if necessary, recommend Plan changes and/or necessary research and information needs.

Initial Outcomes

The NRC anticipates three initial outcomes from its work:

1. Produce a "Philipstown Natural Resources Plan" in 2005 that will summarize the state of the town's natural resources, prioritize Comprehensive Plan recommendations, suggest specific action items for the next 3-5 years, and establish metrics to measure progress. For example, suggested action items might include specific zoning changes, new land use regulations, desired research and informational needs, new public incentives programs, and citizen education projects. The Natural Resource Plan is intended from the onset to be a dynamic document with changes and additions incorporated, as needed.

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2. Inform Philipstown residents and government officials about their natural resources, including the benefits that these resources provide to our health and well-being, through a series of public lectures and education materials distributed in print and on the town’s website (possibly in a special “Philipstown Natural Resources” website section).
3. Create a mechanism to provide long-term study and advice to Philipstown on natural resources and open space issues through NRC coordination of local government officials (and their existing town committees, e.g., Conservation and Wetlands), local non-government environmental organizations (e.g. Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Metropolitan Conservation Alliance, NY Department of Environmental Conservation, Scenic Hudson and Open Space Institute), expert advisors (especially those that are Philipstown residents), and other engaged citizens.

Initial Action Items

1. The NRC’s first project will be to produce a Philipstown Natural Resources Plan. This plan, which will be completed with the consulting help of the Conway School of Landscape Design, will build on Appendix F of the Comprehensive Plan by conducting additional analyses to allow the NRC to further define and develop the Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations, suggest priorities for the next 3-5 years, and translate the recommendations into specific action items. The plan will also include a set of measurable metrics (e.g. perhaps, the number of actions completed; water quality indices; number of protected acres per major habitat type; hiking trail use indices; public opinion polls, or number of visits to the natural resources section of the town’s website) that will allow the NRC to track the implementation and success of the plan’s suggested actions. The Committee, again with the help of the Conway School, will engage the community in at least two public forums in 2005 to both inform the public and gather input and set priorities. We anticipate that the Natural Resources Plan will be finished in summer 2005.
2. As a by-product from assembling the natural resources information for Appendix F and for the proposed Natural Resources Plan, the NRC is building a “Philipstown Natural Resources Information Management System.” The idea is to make available via an Internet website (possibly a section of Philipstown’s website or the Hudson Highlands Land Trust’s website) information, analyses, and maps of local resources, and other education materials.

Next Steps (Anticipated Six-month Schedule, January – June, 2005)

January 2:	Begin assembling relevant materials to create inventory of natural resources in Philipstown, identifying information needs, and initiate website-based information system.
January 13:	Meet with Conway School of Landscape Design consultants and Joel Russell to plan specific content of the Natural Resource Plan and to set work assignments. Begin analysis of natural resources.
February 1:	Conduct public forum to educate community on natural resources and associated issues, and to seek input from community on natural resource conservation priorities.
Month of February	Establish priorities for natural resource protection based on public input; identify resulting specific parcels and landscape features to be prioritized. Analyze impact of conserving this priority list of parcels and features.
March 1:	Review first draft of Natural Resource Plan with Conway School consultants.
March 3:	Present interim report to the Town Board and Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee
March 15:	Conduct second public forum to present interim report on the Natural Resources Plan and conservation priorities, outlining parcels and landscape features that are top priorities; seek comments and suggestions.
March 31:	Incorporate comments into draft Natural Resource Plan including parcel and landscape feature priorities for natural resource conservation.
March 15 – April 15:	Develop methods to achieve conservation goals through land acquisition plans, land use regulations and zoning code revisions. Continue analysis of impact of these measures.

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April 15:	Distribute draft for review to community, government officials, and expert advisors; seek comments through May 1.
May 5:	Present interim report to the Town Board and Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee; incorporate comments on draft into plan through May 15.
May 15:	Distribute draft plan for review by the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee.
June 15:	Print draft Natural Resources Plan, distribute and ask Town to set Public Hearing date.
Sept 30:	After Public Hearing review comments and incorporate into Natural Resources Plan.