

## **2025 Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)**

### **Annual Report**

Annual Report to the Mayor & Common Council (CC) for the calendar year ending December 31, 2025.

This document was prepared for the Peekskill Mayor and Common Council as required by the City Code Chapter 24, outlining the activities and accomplishments of the Conservation Advisory Council's (CAC) activities for 2025.

### **2025 CAC Composition**

CAC Members:

1) Janine Melillo (Chair), 2) Lise Prown (Vice Chair), 3) Sarah Aparicio (Secretary), 4) Deborah Bliss, 5) Dana Freedenfeld, 6) Elaine Coccoma, 7) Courtney M. Williams, 8) Kay Barthelmes, CAC Volunteer (not currently holding a formal seat),

City Liaison: Councilman Dwight Douglas

Sustainability Coordinator: Kim Easlick (Center for Economic and Environmental Partnership/CEEP)

## **ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **1) TREE INVENTORY AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

On June 14, 2023, the CAC applied for a Tree Inventory and Management Plan grant through the Urban and Community Forestry Program. On December 22, 2023, the city was awarded a \$75,000 grant. An RFP was issued in September of 2024, and proposals were received in October of 2024. The Eocene Environmental Group (EEG) was awarded the contract on the recommendation of the Planning Department and the CAC, and with the approval of the CC. As of the fall of 2025, EEG completed the tree inventory with the involvement of city staff and the support of CAC members. The results of the inventory was shared via social media and posted on the city website. The primary goal of the inventory was to provide information to increase tree canopy in Peekskill, particularly in the downtown area, to mitigate climate change, reduce the heat island effect, and beautify city streets and urban parks. The results of the inventory triggered concerns that were addressed by the CAC via our letter, *PCAC Letter to the Mayor and CC on Trees 8/2025*, presented to the Common Council in August of 2025, requesting that the CC take five actions to address these concerns. The CC took action on two points by increasing the budget lines available for tree planting in the city and establishing a Tree Board, scheduled to meet for the first time in January of 2026.

## **2) TREE CITY USA DESIGNATION – Fourth Year**

In March 2023, the city was awarded the Tree City USA designation by the Arbor Day Foundation, a community forestry program. In 2025, the work continued to maintain the Tree City USA designation by striving to meet the four core standards of sound urban forestry management; protecting our tree canopy according to the city's tree ordinance, maintaining a tree department, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry, and celebrating Arbor Day.

## **3) EXPANSION OF FOOD SCRAPS DROP OFF PROGRAM**

In 2025, the CAC continued to partner with the city to raise awareness of the city's food scrap program through tabling events and a well-attended, press-covered ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the permanent food scrap toter shelter to the left of the entrance to the DPW yard on Lower South Street. This facility offers the city's residents an attractive, clean, 24/7 accessible location.

## **4) CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITY (CSC) & CLIMATE ACTION PLANNING INSTITUTE (CAPI)**

In accordance with Peekskill's Bronze status as a Climate Smart Community, and its goal of achieving Silver level status, the City Planner, Sustainability Coordinator, and CAC members have been actively developing and implementing the GOCAP Government Organization Climate Action Plan and its recommended policies. Furthermore, the City has made significant progress toward achieving Silver status in the coming year. During 2025, the Planning Department worked closely with CEEP Consultants and the support of the CAC to develop a plan through the winter and spring of 2026 to continue progress toward this goal.

## **5) DRINKING WATER SOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAM (DWSP2)**

The CAC continues to serve as a stakeholder on the *Peekskill Hollow Creek Watershed Management* team, which is charged with implementing the plan to protect the sources of our drinking water. We participated in the Hudson River Lobbying Day in Albany to support state budget decisions that protect our water resources.

## **6) CAC ADVISEMENT ON PLANNING**

The CAC continues to be an active environmental voice for the community regarding development projects. We actively monitor Planning Commission meetings and educate our members on future waterfront development proposals and the city's Master Plan, which is under development.

## **7) MAYOR'S MONARCH PLEDGE INITIATIVE**

Members of the CAC worked with CEEP and the City Manager and staff to implement the city's three-point pledge to protect and increase the populations of Monarch butterflies and other pollinators. The CAC established and identified three

public gardens and several private gardens, and held two public events to promote the initiative and expand pollinator-supporting acreage in the city. Two additional events are already planned for January of 2026 to continue the work.

## 8) **TEACHER'S PARK ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION**

Members of the CAC continue to work with the Westchester Land Trust, the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, and the Trust for Public Land to restore the acquired property at 1410 Crompond Road into a safe, accessible, panoramic green space that Peekskillians can enjoy. Multiple consultations have been held with experts and organizations to help us identify grant options and other strategies to restore this park.

## 9) **LAKE MITCHELL COLLABORATION**

The CAC worked with the City Manager and staff, CEEP, the Parks Board, and the Parks and Recreation Department to identify and pursue a grant to help the city remove invasive species from Lake Mitchell. The CC recently passed a resolution to seek a grant to purchase a dredging machine to remove invasive phragmites from the lake, as well as other debris that contributes to eutrophication and disturbs its ecosystem. The CAC also met with the Parks and Recreation Staff to discuss a return to more sustainable, non-chemical means for preventing and reducing algal blooms in the lake.

## 10) **CAC LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

<b>Letters of Support</b>	<b>Collaborators</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type of Letter</b>
<b>Grant for Depew Park and Veterans Memorial Pool</b>	City staff, CEEP, New City Parks	6/2025	CAC provided letter of support
<b>Grant for Climate Smart Communities Grant Program, Comprehensive Plan with Sustainability Elements.</b>	City staff, CEEP	7/2025	CAC provided letter of support
<b>Grant for Invasive Species Removal</b>	City staff, CEEP, Parks Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Department	12/2025	CAC provided letter of support

## 11) **Outreach, Education, Training, and Lobbying**

### **a. Outreach and Education**

<b>Outreach Event</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
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<b>Parks Cleanup and Arbor Day Celebration - CAC Presentation and Tabling</b>	Peekskill Riverfront	4/2025	CAC Vice Chair presentation on Tree Planting, Con Edison Sapling Giveaway and CAC tabling
<b>Food Composting Site Ribbon Cutting</b>	DPW Facility on South Street	4/2025	CAC planned a ribbon cutting event for the formal opening of the 24/7 food scrap site
<b>CAC, Peekskill100, and Peekskill Pride Collaboration on Zero Waste Center</b>	Pugsley Park	6/2025	CAC collaborated at the Peekskill Pride Month event to provide an option for recycling, returns, and composting to attendees
<b>Mothapalooza</b>	Veterans Memorial Pool parking lot	7/2025	CAC held its first annual Mothapalooza event in support of <i>National Moth Week, Friends of the East Brunswick Environmental Commission</i> , to educate residents about the importance of insect populations for ecosystems.
<b>CAC Tabling for Food Scraps Education and Recruitment</b>	Farmers Market, Esther Place, Saturday Academy	10/2025 11/2025	Tabled to educate residents about composting, recycling, and to recruit new members and volunteers
<b>CAC Events for Mayor's Monarch Pledge Initiative</b>	Garlic Festival committee, Peekskill Regeneration Farm, Peekskill100	11/2025	CAC had a station at the Garlic Festival's Peekskill Regeneration Farm stop to plant seeds in the new garden and educate children and adults about the initiative; ; a Hell Strip Walk event was held in collaboration with Peekskill 100 to encourage private garden planting
<b>CAC Liaison with Other City Committees and Environmental Organizations</b>	Various	Monthly	CAC members regularly attend meetings hosted by the Parks Board, Planning Commission, Peekskill Walks, and Peekskill100, Sustainable Putnam, Hudson Highlands CAC Roundtable
<b>Peekskill CAC Facebook and Instagram pages</b>	Online	Ongoing	CAC maintains a Facebook and Instagram presence to communicate pertinent

			information and events to the public
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**b. Training**

<b>Event Title</b>	<b>Sponsoring Organization</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>CAC Role</b>
<b>Hudson River Advocacy Day Prep Session</b>	Riverkeeper, Clearwater, Scenic Hudson	2/2025	Preparation for March lobbying day in Albany
<b>Tree Care Principles &amp; Proper Planting/Pruning Techniques</b>	NYS Urban Forestry Council	12/2025	Vice Chair/CAC future Tree Board member attended

**c. Lobbying**

<b>Event Title</b>	<b>Sponsoring Organization(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>CAC Role</b>
Hudson River Advocacy Day	Riverkeeper, Clearwater, Scenic Hudson	5/2025	Chair participated in the lobbying event in Albany, NY to protect our water resources
County Budget Hearing	Westchester County	12/2025	Chair made unofficial comments in favor of budgetary measures to prevent pollution of the city and county's air and water resources