

## **Mount Kisco Conservation Advisory Council (MK CAC)**

### **2021 MK CAC Annual Report**

#### **Summary**

During the year, the CAC advised and assisted our municipal government with various environmental and land-use issues, and conducted many educational events for members of the community. Members and volunteers also worked with local and regional organizations on environmental initiatives, and attended workshops to expand our knowledge and expertise. We planted dozens of trees, worked with neighborhood residents to care for and improve the Laura Flewellyn Pollinator Garden and our trail network, and shared our love and concern for the environment with hundreds of children and adults in our Village.

#### **CAC Members**

John Rhodes, Chairperson  
Harry McCartney  
Alan Antin  
Nicole Sturomski  
Robin Buco  
Frank Pizzurro

During the year, the Village Board of Trustees unanimously accepted the applications of Robin Buco and Frank Pizzurro to become members of the CAC. In March we mourned the passing of long-time CAC member and Tree Preservation Board Chairman Jim Gmelin. In June the CAC held a memorial service in Leonard Park to honor Jim. Dozens of friends, family and public officials, as well as one Great Blue Heron and a Great White Egret, gathered to share memories of Jim and to pay tribute to his lifetime of dedicated work for the community and the environment. We also planted a Serviceberry tree, one of Jim's favorites, in his memory. He was a rare human being and a good friend, and will be missed.

Although all CAC members participated in our zoom meetings and public events, individual members also focused on specific areas of interest. Alan Antin, who led our Reusable Bag Initiative, focused on composting/recycling and waste reduction issues, and also was involved in Trail Team activities. Robin Buco who was also deeply involved in our composting program, was very effective in organizing family-oriented and educational activities, including the MKES Earth Day event, MK Earth Day, family hikes, and Community Day at the Flewellyn Garden. Nicole Sturomski came up with the idea of a GoGreen initiative for the town, and we developed and distributed GoGreen materials to help residents take action to improve and preserve the local environment. The CAC also participated in the new Mount Kisco Farmers Market, organized by Nicole and WMN United, with an info table at each of the first four Farmers Markets. Long-time CAC member Harry McCartney who is also the Village Historian, Trail Team Lead, and

Tree Board member, effectively shared his expertise and passion regarding environmental preservation and education with the community. Working with Harry and other Trail Team Members, we also participated in invasive species removal and other trail maintenance, and helped to conduct several Nature/History walks on our beautiful trails. Frank Pizzurro, our newest CAC member, brings his architectural expertise and experience on the Bedford CAB to bear on important local land-use issues, and his presence substantially enhances the capabilities of the MK CAC.

We'd also like to acknowledge the amazing volunteers, Village Staff, businesses, and other partners who helped make 2021 such a positive year for the environment in Mount Kisco. There are too many to mention here, but this wonderful group includes Mike Kirsch, Ruth Moy, Ken Famulare, Kyle Thornton, Shonan Noronha, Lilian Burgler, Ralph Vigliotti, Judy Terlizzi, Michael's Nursery, Bob Liebman, Mimi's Cafe, our DPW staff, and Jessica Alba of the Watershed Agricultural Council.

### **Earth Day**

The CAC organized and participated in a number of events to celebrate Earth Day. On April 22nd, Robin Bucu led an initiative to host Earth Day activities at the Elementary School Community Garden in Mount Kisco. Working with the school's administration and teachers (including Emily Leon-Prado and William Hunter), Dr. Sue Rubin and other volunteers, Robin hosted Green Learning and planting activities for more than 250 children. All students who attended decorated their own recycled planter, sowed it with native vegetable or flower seeds, and took it home to their families. Robin also led the effort to create CAC Instagram and Facebook pages and designed a wonderful new CAC logo to help with our outreach and education efforts.

On April 24th, the CAC organized a live Earth Day celebration at Fountain Park outside Village Hall with more than one hundred participants. Many local organizations and businesses, including the Historical Society, the Tree Board, the Arts Council, and Sustainable Westchester took part. The event featured children's craft activities, live music from Dan Blake and friends, information about pollinator pathways, renewable energy, healthy yards, composting, local hiking trails, growing your own food, and our GoGreen initiative. A high point of the celebration was the tree sapling giveaway—all interested families received a baby native tree with planting instructions.

Fr. John Budwick from St. Francis of Assisi Church opened the event with a prayer in thanksgiving for the unique aspects of our community and our beautiful environment. After a greeting from Mayor Picinich, keynote speaker Dr. Nigel Sizer, a local resident, forest ecologist, and Chief Global Officer of the Rainforest Alliance, shared some simple ways to make every day Earth Day. He stressed the importance of preserving biodiversity in Mount Kisco and around the world, and explained the close connection between the loss of wildlife habitat and deadly pandemics.

The event was enjoyed by residents, visitors, and environmental leaders including County Executive George Latimer. Congressman Mondaire Jones and Assembly Member Chris Burdick also addressed the gathering.

### **Trees and Arbor Day**

During March and April, we worked with Boys & Girls Club and Neighbors Link to educate kids and families about the importance of trees to the health and wellbeing of the community and our environment. We continued and expanded the MK Tree Preservation Board's successful Annual Tree Art project, and held Arbor Day activities outdoors at Leonard Park on Saturday, May 1st. Mayor Gina Picinich read Mount Kisco's Tree City Proclamation and presented certificates of merit to those who had created exceptional works of art. The kids then participated in native tree planting near Wallace Pond. With help from the Watershed Agricultural Council and NYSDEC's Saratoga Nursery, we planted dozens of native trees in Leonard Park, Marsh Sanctuary, and other locations around town.

### **Photo Exhibition**

In October, the CAC, working in collaboration with the Mount Kisco Arts Council, the MK Historical Society, and the MK Tree Preservation Board, organized our 4th Annual Mount Kisco Photography Exhibition, The Nature, Culture, and People of Mount Kisco. This year, a special category for Pandemic Photos was added. More than 50 photographers of all ages submitted nearly 200 beautiful photos, 75 of which were selected for display in the MK Public Library for the month of October. All submitted photos can still be viewed on the Exhibition's website at [www.KiscoPhoto.org](http://www.KiscoPhoto.org).

### **Board of Trustees, Planning Board, and Village Management**

The CAC provided our Board of Trustees, Planning Board, and other members of Village government with information and guidance regarding several important issues during the past year.

The CAC provided the Village Board with information and recommendations regarding the Kirby Commons proposal to help village trustees to make the best decisions regarding this important initiative. While receptive to the prospect of sustainable development at that location, the CAC researched and documented several environmental issues that we believed had not yet previously been fully addressed.

The CAC also provided information and advice to the Village Board on the proposed Gas-Powered Leaf Blower Legislation, supporting and expanding upon the scientific data and other information provided by resident Lilian Burgler and Trustee Peter Grunthal.

With regard to development proposals before the Planning Board during 2021, the CAC and its members provided extensive written and verbal comments and recommendations on the proposals from Sunrise Solar and Homeland Towers to build a solar farm and a cell tower on CD-zoned forested land at 180 South Bedford Road / Sarles Street. Advice was also provided on other applications, including the expansion of The Arc facility, where the initial proposal had included the removal of a number of specimen Oak trees.

Working with the Assistant Village Manager Kenneth Famulare, the CAC helped to extend the reach of the Food Scrap Composting initiative by distributing information, displaying food waste collection bins and answering questions at various public events, including SeptemberFest and the Farmers Markets. We also offered suggestions on improving walkability and traffic in the Village, and worked with Ken and Village Manager Edward Brancati to reduce air pollution and gas emission by moving toward enforcement of the County's No-Idling law.

### **Organizations**

The CAC was also active in several key regional organizations, including the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions (NYSACC) and the Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership, H2H/RCP.

As a member of the NYSACC Board of Directors, I worked for several months with NYSDEC, Westchester County, and CACs from around the State to organize this year's Annual Conference on the Environment. The mostly virtual 3-day conference included more than 30 workshops and presentations on land use, climate change, energy and waste, and environmental justice, as well as a State Legislative Roundtable. The NYSACC conference was attended by more than 400 conservationists and government officials from all over NYS. Keynote speakers included DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos, County Executive George Latimer, and State Assembly Member Steve Otis. Working with CAC members from Croton and New Rochelle, I helped to organize the conference's Environmental Justice Track, covering EJ issues from Mount Vernon to the Tuscarora Nation. NYSACC also worked with a consultant to design a permanent, virtual conference hall on the GatherTown platform, providing an exceptionally immersive, flexible and interactive meeting experience. ([www.nysacc.org](http://www.nysacc.org))

H2H is a Regional Conservation Partnership made up of dozens of Land Trusts, CACs, government officials, Audubon Chapters, Nature Preserves, and other area conservation groups—working together to protect the natural environment in Westchester and Putnam counties and western Connecticut. As a member of the Executive Committee of H2H-RCP, I organized a virtual regional All Partner Meeting with our mentor Jim Nordgren as key speaker. He discussed the challenges and successes of many important area environmental initiatives, including the Mount Kisco NRI (which he co-authored), as well as the MK Trail Network and No-Mow Zones. ([www.h2hrpc.org](http://www.h2hrpc.org))

### **Into the Future**

The plans of our CAC for the coming year include the completion of an Open Space Inventory, improvements for the Flewellyn Garden and the MK Pollinator Pathway, helping the Climate Smart Committee to develop a Climate Action Plan and implement GHG reduction strategies for our Village, and working with the Historical Society and other organizations and volunteers to improve and expand the MK Historic/Nature Trail Network. We will continue to organize Earth Day and Arbor Day celebrations, a Fifth Annual Photo Exhibition, and expanded Tree Plantings Programs. We also plan to increase our environmental outreach and education efforts, with a Family Green Film

Series, our work with Trout in the Classroom, and other youth-oriented programs, along with a renewed focus on environmental justice and local climate resiliency. We hope to provide even better research, guidance, and support for the Village Board, Planning Board, other local governmental officials and community organizations. Other priorities for 2022 expressed by CAC members include expansion of the composting and other waste reduction programs, reduction of local air and water pollution, and restoration of local biodiversity and forest health.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Rhodes,  
Chairperson, Mount Kisco Conservation Advisory Council