

2024

ANNUAL REPORT



CHESTER
CONSERVATION
ADVISORY COUNCIL

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THE BEGINNING

In August 2023 the Town Board approved a study group of residents spearheaded by EJ Szulwach, who were all concerned about the increase in local flooding when it rained and wanted to find a way to protect the environment with a focus on natural areas (open space) and enhance natural resources (land, water, air) all parts contributing to the rural character of Chester. That group was known as the “Chester Climate Change Advisory Committee”.

In February 2024 by resolution of the Town Board the Climate Change Committee’s requests to form both a Conservation Advisory Committee and a Climate Smart Community Taskforce were approved. The newly renamed committee and all of its members were adopted and appointed to the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) by the new Town Board and Town Supervisor Holdridge.

This was the beginning, the origin of the Chester Conservation Advisory Council.



EJ Szulwach, Founder — Climate Change Advisory Committee and Chester Conservation Advisory Council; life-long Chester resident.

WHAT IS THE CCAC?

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council or CCAC is the official body organized and appointed to serve as the main advisory group to the Town Board on matters relating to the protection and management of open spaces, natural areas, and other environmental issues, and is fully authorized to conduct surveys, studies and inventories of natural and physical features including open spaces and wetlands. [Source: *Resolution to Form A Conservation Advisory Council for the Town of Chester Out of the Climate Change Advisory Committee*, February 14, 2024]

On March 13, 2024 Introductory Local Law 3 was adopted to establish a Conservation Advisory Council pursuant to General Municipal Law of the State of New York, Article 12-F, § 239-x. The members of the Council receive no compensation for their services as members. Working in cooperation with the Town of Chester Planning Board, the Council can recommend from time to time features, plans and programs relating to environmental improvement for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan of the Town of Chester and, similarly, recommend to the Town Board appropriate and desirable changes in existing local laws and ordinances relating to environmental control or recommend new local laws and ordinances.

HISTORIC MOMENT: JUNE 27, 2024



Village of Chester Deputy Mayor Elizabeth Reilly and Town of Chester Councilman Robert Courtenay commemorating the first jointly attended meeting of the Chester Conservation Advisory Council.

The vision for the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) is to serve as an all of Chester (town and village) representative body.

The CCAC proudly boasts representation of residents and liaisons from both the Town of Chester and Village of Chester.

The CCAC has actively undertaken initiatives which both contribute to member understanding of important environmental issues and provide all of Chester with beneficial programs.

Additionally the CCAC has participated in reviewing environmental issues of concern within its scope of work .

THE WORK DONE SO FAR

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council has provided the Town Board with **policy recommendations** about the following:

- **Pricing EV Charging in the Town of Chester**—Based on local pricing data the CCAC recommended that the Town maintain the current 35 cent/kW hour rate for the charging stations.
- **Calculation of Town of Chester Operations GHG Inventory** [GHG = Greenhouse Gas] Analysis of fuel usage data and other factors found the town emitted 360,000 kg of CO₂ or 360 tonnes with major energy consumers being transportation, heating, and electricity. The CCAC recommended that the Town Board consider implementation of the following suggestions: a. Electrifying the fleet as vehicles age-out with a transition to natural gas and/or electricity using variable cost analysis. Grants are available. b. Conduct an energy efficiency audit throughout the town's facilities. c. Share information publicly about current efforts to reduce CO₂, i.e., turning off lights when not in use and installing motion sensors in town buildings; encourage energy conservation efforts d. Consider solar options for town facilities. e. Compare our GHG with other similarly sized towns.
- **Formation of a Tree Commission**—jointly between Town of Chester and the Village of Chester.

Other recommendations included:

- The placement of a Purple Martin Gourd Condo in Knapp’s View near water or passively protective infrastructure
- Move/replace the Red Oak trees outside Town Hall in the Fall, supporting coordination between Parks/Recreation and Highway Department. (Roots too close to pavement and the building.)
- Acceptance and consideration of a prioritized proposal list of properties to be considered for a future Community Preservation Fund
- Establish a requirement related to the commitments made by developers for the monitoring and enforcement of tree and wetland buffers (and any other site plan commitments). The requirement should be subject to approvals with a



CCAC presentation at Village of Chester meeting.

temporary Certificate of Occupancy pending a two-year inspection that would be paid for through a collected fee at the time of site plan approval. [*Rationale: Monitoring and enforcement of required tree/wetland buffers and landscaping plans. The problem? Tree and wetland buffers listed in site plans are often not monitored for compliance. There is no structure in place for enforcement after the fact if specific landscaping or buffers are not actually implemented or maintained.*]

- An increase in the Town of Chester’s wetland fees to \$5,000.00 from \$2,000.00 to match other towns.
- Town Board engage the Village of Chester Board of Trustees to begin the process for developing an intermunicipal agreement to protect the Village of Chester well head [224 Black Meadow Road] and surrounding area aquifer(s). [*Black Meadow Road Water Station: Long-standing issues with area flooding during rainstorms present a potential hazardous condition for motorists; repeat flooding raises community concern for protection of the area aquifer (drinking water supply) and Village of Chester well head.*] Intermunicipal agreement for protection of the Village of Chester well head should include an expansion of the current protective buffer zone standards in town code for wetlands and streams, and also overlay protection of other nearby lands to better protect the Village of Chester well head.

MEMBERSHIP

Climate Change Advisory Committee

- EJ Szulwach, Founder
- Grayson Sussman, Chairman
- Elizabeth Barrett-Zahn, Secretary
- Susannah Devine
- Martine DiPasquale
- Jane Dysinger
- Justin George
- William “Bill” Greene
- Tracy Schuh



Chester Conservation Advisory Council

- EJ Szulwach, Founder
- Grayson Sussman (moved; resigned)
- Elizabeth Barrett-Zahn
- Susannah Devine
- Martine DiPasquale, Chairwoman
- Jane Dysinger
- Justin George (new job; resigned)
- William “Bill” Greene
- Tracy Schuh
- Leslie Smith

Ad Hoc Committees Members/ Participants

- Clifton Patrick
- Langdon Morris

PROJECTS

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council has organized and through collaboration with local partners effectively delivered a number of new initiatives in 2024.

- The “Coolest Recycling Drive of 2024” event offered in Chester was made possible by partnering with Michael Helme of Sustainable Warwick and founder of New Yorkers for Cool Refrigerant Management. The event helped prevent the equivalent emissions of >150,000 pounds of CO₂ or the equivalent of the emissions from burning 7,656 gallons of gasoline.
- An Arbor Day tree planting of a Sugar Maple donated by Jim Wickes of Wickes Arborists, a Davey Company, in memory of Jack Deshler (long time resident, veteran of US Airforce, dedicated public servant and Chester community volunteer). Chester Highway Department and Parks Department staff assisted in the tree planting at Carpenter Community Park. O&R’s arborist, Mark Beamish, provided free seedlings and planting tips at the event.
- Working with Chester Elementary School to gain the designation of Town of Chester as a New York State “Monarch Town”.
- Launch of “Chester Repair Café” with 17 repair coaches, including several Bellvale Bruderhof community members, altogether aided with blade sharpening, clock repair, electronics repair, lamp repair, sewing and machine repair, ceramic/pottery repair, bicycle repair, vacuum cleaner repair, and more. The end goal of the repair cafés is to curb waste by keeping fixable items out of landfills and in circulation for as long as possible. The partners included the Warwick Repair Café team, Middletown Repair Café team, Village of Chester, Sugar Loaf Community Foundation, Village of Monroe, Preservation Collective, Kiwanis Club of Chester, Chester Historical Society, The Chronicle, Photo News, Town of Chester Supervisor’s Office, Town Clerk’s Office, and the Chester Senior Center.
- Publishing of an informational brochure about the Chester Conservation Advisory Council for general distribution and a mailer insert that explains Purchasing of Development Rights (PDR) to specifically identified property owners.

The **COOLEST RECYCLING DRIVE** of 2024

Date: Sat, April 20, 2024
Time: 10am-2pm
Place: Chester Town Hall
1786 Kings Highway, Chester NY 10918
Cost: Free!

Recycle your: window air conditioners, dehumidifiers, water coolers, mini-fridges, small appliances with refrigerants.

NOTE: They must fit in the trunk of a car.



Graphic design art & photos credit: Susannah Devine



ADVISORY WORK

In addition to the work of providing recommendations to the Town Board on matters related to policy and educational public programming, the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) took its first action related to local development.

The CCAC in response to community residents' concerns about potential peril to trees from a proposed land development project visited their property and submitted recommendations as part of a public hearing, Environmental Assessment report with data and specific code references to the Town of Chester Planning Board.

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Pursuant to the powers granted in Article 12-F, § 239-x, of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York, the CCAC is to advise the Town of Chester in the development, management and protection of the Town's natural resources. Within its advisory capacity, the CCAC shall have the responsibility to provide input, assistance, comments and recommendations regarding environmental assessments and environmental impact statement for proposed actions.

SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT for 1414 Kings Highway/4 lot subdivision

BACKGROUND: On July 1, 2024, the CAC was invited to 20 Well Sweep Lane, the adjacent property owned by the Schilling family to assist in identifying tree species, size and placement relative to the proposed development project to evaluate potential environmental impacts. The residents expressed concern that the health of their mature trees would be put in jeopardy given a proposed water line to be constructed in close proximity to their property line. The Town of Chester recognizes the environmental and economic benefits of trees, therefore delineating a critical root zone would help safeguard Chester's most valuable trees.

Based on our visit to the Schilling residence, our summary of findings and recommendations are listed below followed by references, photos, etc.:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Update site plan: Tree species and measurements of adjacent tree grove need to be verified due to discrepancies based on CAC site visit to Schilling property and what has been noted on the site plans submitted for the public hearing.
2. Add note to site plan for "critical root zone".
3. Add measurement of critical root zone to site plan: We estimate the construction of water line should be at least 30 feet away from the existing mature tree grove along the property line to safely account for the various species and size of existing tree grove and roots. (see calculations and measurements of mature trees below)

There is also a tree on the project site at the corner of the Schilling property along Well Sweep Lane that is not noted on the site plan, which should be in tree survey.

4. Add note to the site plan: The protective critical root zone should be clearly marked with temporary fencing in the field and prior to construction and remain there throughout the construction process. This should apply for wetland buffers as well.

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Below are the calculations from only the largest live trees CAC measured along the Schilling property line:

- #1 - Silver Maple - 108", which equals 9 feet divided by 3.14 = 2.86 x 10 = 28 feet
14 feet is the MINIMUM safe distance away from this tree to dig to avoid cutting critical structural roots. Many foresters use 10 feet as the "critical root zone" so 28 feet would be considered an actual safe distance from this tree on the Schilling property.
- #2 - Red Oak - 8.5 feet divided by 3.14 = 2.70 x 10 = 27 feet
13.53 feet is the MINIMUM safe distance away from this tree to dig to avoid cutting critical structural roots. Many foresters use 10 feet as the "critical root zone" so 27 feet would be considered an actual safe distance from this tree on the Schilling property.
- #3 - Maple - 6 feet divided by 3.14 = 1.91 x 10 = 19 feet
9.55 feet is the MINIMUM safe distance away from this tree to dig to avoid cutting critical structural roots. Many foresters use 10 feet as the "critical root zone" so 19 feet would be considered an actual safe distance from this tree on the Schilling property.
- #4 - Oak - 8.5 feet divided by 3.14 = 2.70 x 5 = 27 feet
13.53 feet is the MINIMUM safe distance away from this tree to dig to avoid cutting critical structural roots. Many foresters use 10 feet as the "critical root zone" so 27 feet would be considered an actual safe distance from this tree on the Schilling property.
- #5 - Catalpa Tree - 6.5 feet divided by 3.14 = 2.07 x 5 = 20 feet
10.35 feet is the MINIMUM safe distance away from this tree to dig to avoid cutting critical structural roots. Many foresters use 10 feet as the "critical root zone" so 20 feet would be considered an actual safe distance from this tree on the Schilling property.

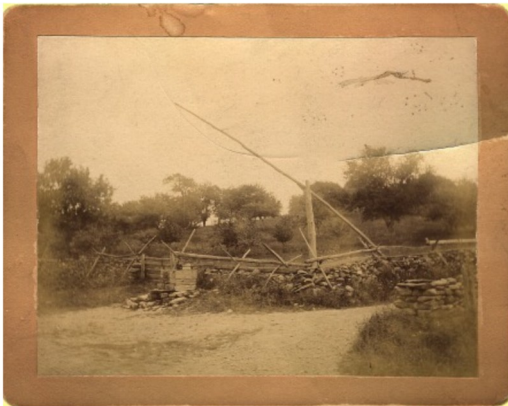
Based on site plan: An existing large maple tree between 1/4 - 1/2 inch (scale) is only 10 feet away from the proposed water main construction. The "disturbance limits" as shown out from the tree they label as "20 inches - Butternut" appear to be 1/2 inch (scale) only 15 feet away. Reference changes in grade and soil compaction notes below.



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View of property line of 1414 Kings Highway and 20 Well Sweep Lane



Old Well Sweep near Sugar Loaf taken Summer of 1892. Photo credit: Mr. and Mrs. Allan Moffat, donated to Chester Historical Society.



2024-08-12 Collapsed well house & sweep over Well Sweep at Well Sweep Lane & Kings Highway.

In addition to the potential negative impact on the mature trees was also specific note of an historical heritage well (photos on left) from the 16th century. NOTE: The Chester Historical Society provided more detailed information to the Planning Board. Here excerpted is text from an archived letter dated March, 9, 1989 written to Eugene P. Kolman, P.E. Deputy Commissioner Dept. Public Works, Orange County.

"... (T)he well was dug sometime in the late 16th century to serve members of the Algonkian nation passing along the Wawayanda Path, connecting their two meeting grounds, outside Philadelphia and Newburgh. We also believe that the well was reconstructed in c. 1735 during the building of King's Highway and was given a 'sweep' at that time. Since the early 19th century, it was used by the Holbert and Vance families as well as by wagon drivers carrying coal between Easton, Pa. and New England. It has been a Sugar Loaf and Kings Highway landmark for many generations and it is probably one of only three surviving Well Sweeps in Orange County.

Subsequent to the CCAC inaugural effort to exercise the powers and duties of conservation advisory councils pursuant to the powers granted in Article 12-F, § 239-x, of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York, the Town of Chester updated its "Owner Authorization Form" to include the CCAC in the grant of permissions to conduct site visits on properties with applications under consideration by the Planning Board.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Recognizing that each member of the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) brings both personal and professional experiences to bear in navigating its work, the CCAC is able to leverage available talent to increase both knowledge and understanding of important environmental and conservation related concerns.

Members share articles and relevant literature with each other from both primary and secondary sources. Additionally, members have participated in at least one educational in-person informational or webinar/meeting hosted by New York State Association of Conservation Commissions, Hudson Valley Regional Council, Hudson Highlands CAC Roundtable, and other organizations. Members have also made use of public events such as nature trail and restoration/conservation walking tours, field ecology days, and recorded online panel discussions to learn more about conservation issues and best practices. CCAC members have increased their knowledge and understanding about dry ponds, vernal pools, wetlands and streams, PDR programs, definitions of endangered habitats for the purpose of scoping potential development impacts on flora and fauna, tree commissions, and the various types of implementing regulations + statutes + local codes which direct both conservation and environmental protection efforts in New York.



Photo credit: Langdon Morris

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council is a working body comprised of volunteers from varied professional backgrounds with a shared interest and commitment to protecting the open spaces, historical heritage, and natural resources of Chester for the use of generations to come. Each member is committed to advancing the work and duties of the CCAC as a conservation advisory council, and engages in learning new information and skills needed to gain critical experience and expertise. CCAC also works with subject matter experts as part of that effort to undertake and engage in substantive professional development while fulfilling its duties.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) in its inaugural year made strides in organizational function and delivering worthwhile recommendations to the Town Board and in at least one instance the Planning Board, as well as in offering public events.

In the next year, the CCAC anticipates new opportunities to undertake its work and overcome challenges as it grows in its capacity to fulfill its duties. The CCAC is ready to engage and learn from the successes of other similar bodies formed in nearby towns and villages across Orange County— as well as subject matter experts in regional and nonprofit agencies.

Motivated by a vision for the future informed by the hopes, dreams, and concerns of the residents of Chester, the Chester Conservation Advisory Council looks forward to the work ahead.

Let's see what the Chester Conservation Advisory Council can accomplish in 2025!



Chester Conservation Advisory Council website URL

<https://chester-ny.gov/town-department/conservation-advisory-council>

Town Email

CAC@thetownofchester.org

Town Hall Address

1786 Kings Highway
Chester, NY 10918

ONE MORE THING



Special thanks to Town of Chester Supervisor Brandon Holdridge and Village of Chester Mayor Christopher Battiato for their commitment to the future of Chester and support of the vision for the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC).

The CCAC also thanks Town of Chester Deputy Supervisor Tom Becker and other members of the Town Board — Hon. Antonio Ardisana, Hon. Robert Courtenay, and Hon. Larry Dysinger; Village of Chester Deputy Mayor Elizabeth A. Reilly (Liaison) and the other Village Board of Trustees — Hon. Alan Battiato, Hon. Brian J. Boone, and Hon. Anthony LaSpina.

Additional thanks to Town of Chester Clerk Linda Zappala, Town of Chester Comptroller Neil J. Meyer, and Village of Chester Clerk/Treasurer Angela O'Neill for their policy insights and timely administrative assistance.

The public programs of the Chester Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) in 2024 benefitted from the hard work of Matthew Kenny (Parks Department), Kristin Palmer (Parks Department), John Reilly III (Highway Department), Brian Bell (Highway Department), and Michele Deshler (Recreation Department) whom each provided expert logistical and technical assistance.

