

# Affordable Housing and Conservation Pilot Project

**Healthy communities need both an ample supply of affordable housing across all income levels, and conserved land that supports clean water, food production, climate resilience, and outdoor recreation.**

These two goals are well aligned, especially when it comes to advancing smart growth principles, equity, and climate resilience. But too often, housing development and open space preservation are cast against each other, and the advocates for each often see their missions as mutually exclusive.

Through the development of separate strategies, plans, and zoning policies to address priority growth areas and priority conservation areas, municipalities inadvertently widen the divide between housing and conservation efforts. As a result, these two elements of a thriving community are often cast against each other. An integrated approach to planning for housing and open space can bridge the divide between civic leaders and community members and yield complementary results that best serve the community.

The Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation is pursuing innovative partnerships and initiatives to change this paradigm. In 2025, we will lead a pilot project that offers expertise and support to a Hudson Valley municipality interested in seeking innovative solutions to address their community's goals in housing and conservation.

## THE PROJECT TEAM

The project team includes Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress; Pace University Land Use Law Center; Hudson River Estuary Program; the Columbia Land Conservancy and an affordable housing organization that work in Columbia County (to be determined); and Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation co-conveners Steve Rosenberg and Rebecca Gillman Crimmins.



Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation

## TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, THE PROJECT TEAM WILL TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

1

Work with the municipality to establish a project committee composed of current town board members and town committee members, other civic leaders, and engaged volunteers. The project committee will meet up to six times.

2

The project team will examine the municipality's existing documents – comprehensive plans, zoning, open space plans, natural resource inventories, taxing mechanisms, and more – to understand the current legal and planning frameworks that drive land-use and other decisions in the municipality.

3

Planners from Pattern and Pace will provide an updated housing profile to serve as an education tool on housing needs and trends for the community. The Hudson River Estuary Program will provide an overview of existing data pertaining to natural resources, open space, and conservation.

4

The project team will arrange a meeting between the town and several housing developers who can share information about housing development opportunities and challenges, zoning, the current market demand, and other factors that determine where and what they build.

**5** The project team will perform an analysis of specific sites, including those owned by the public, that might be suitable for the integration of conservation and housing.

**6** The project team will host a public education session to:

- Share data about the town's current housing needs and trends
- Review information pertaining to natural resources, open space and conservation
- Educate the public about the framework to support housing and conservation, and the practical methods to integrate both into the town's plans and actions
- Provide opportunities for feedback and brainstorming

**7** As the project team works with the municipality, we will examine specific strategies at a scale and scope that is most appropriate for the community. These might include:

- Hamlet overlay zones and other tools that will concentrate smart growth and affordable housing development in places that already have utilities, sidewalks, and existing housing and businesses, thereby taking development pressure off farms, forests, riparian areas, and other parcels that have a high conservation value.
- High-priority parcels for conservation that include a building envelope for affordable housing that is connected to a nearby village or hamlet without compromising conservation values.
- Pocket parks and trails that incorporate open space into walkable neighborhoods that have affordable housing.
- Financing structures that would create revenue streams for affordable housing and conservation at the local level, allowing municipalities to invest directly in achieving these outcomes.
- The project team will also help the community identify priority sites that would be suitable for affordable housing development and conservation.

**8** These strategies will be informed by a second public meeting, which we will arrange as a charette. We will utilize small-group discussions to explore the integration of housing and conservation in more detail. Each small group will report back at the end of the charette so that neighbors can hear their respective ideas.

**9** The project team will produce a final report that documents the work of the group and feedback from the public, along with an outline of key actions that parties should take to improve the town's position for housing and conservation.

The pilot project will help the chosen municipality create a roadmap to advance affordable housing and conservation objectives through concrete projects that will be identified and supported by members of the community.

The project will be completed within calendar year 2025.