

**TOWN
OF
BEDFORD**
Westchester County



**TOWN HOUSE
321 BEDFORD ROAD
BEDFORD HILLS
NEW YORK 10507
www.bedfordny.gov**

**CONSERVATION
BOARD**

Chair
SIMON SKOLNIK
232-9457 (HOME)
306-0394 (CELL)

Deputy Chair
Gentian Falstrom

Recording Secretary
Alexandra Pappas

Members
DAVID BECKETT
JAKE CHINTZ, ASSOC.
MEMBER
LESLIE DOCK, ASSOC.
MEMBER
DAN FARKAS
JANEEN SUDAKA-
KARLSSON
NANCY KRONENBERG
ROSEMARY T. LEE
ADAM NAPPI
BETSY WEIR

Member Emeritus
MARIAN ROSE

**TOWN HOUSE
666-5140**

December 31, 2021

To: Bedford Town Board
Re.: 2021 Annual Conservation Board Report

Dear Supervisor Carr and Town Board Members,

This is a report to the Town Board on the activities performed by the Conservation Board in 2021, and what we anticipate for 2022.

As one of our prerequisite duties for Bedford's town government, the Conservation Board reviews applications that come before the various town boards and commissions. In order to fulfill this requirement, our board assigns its members to attend all Planning Board, Town Board, Wetlands Control Commission, Historic Preservation Review Board and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings throughout the year in order to be made aware of what applications are before these regulatory bodies, and which ones involve environmental issues. Topics covered in reports to these governmental bodies this past year include: (a) protection of New York State species of concern; (b) protection of island woodlands in our more heavily populated areas of our town; (c) trying to find alternatives to deer fencing installed along a parcel's entire property line, that in certain neighborhoods may cut-off critical wildlife movement; (d) making sure that construction activities for new buildings don't impact adjoining wetlands; (e) continuing to serve as a town watchdog on cell tower and solar farm construction that affect Bedford residents from work being done in adjoining Mt Kisco along Sarles Street; (f) continuing to be involved with proposed cell towers and a solar farm installation in Bedford; and (g) our involvement with promoting the elimination of aquicides used to eliminate nuisance invasive and native water plants, as well as kill off toxic algae blooms, themselves caused by failed septic systems and overuse of lawn fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals, many of which are toxic, are approved for use by the State of NY, bypassing approval by the Wetlands Control Commission. The problem isn't just what chemical is put on a lawn near a pond, but includes what else is being put into the entire watershed of this pond.

The Conservation Board continues to be heavily involved with mapping Bedford. In all our advisory reports to Town regulatory boards and commissions, we always include partial sections taken from the Conservation Board's "Significant Habitats in the Town of Bedford" map. We do this to give a more regional perspective on an application, while showing what type of natural habitats are to be affected. One of our members, Dr. Dan Farkas, professor of GIS at Pace University, has been

involved with the town's GIS consultant, CAI Technologies, to further the use of mapping for the benefit of the town and its residents. We have continued to update the map to include (a) sightings from iNaturalist users (citizen scientists logging onto the iNaturalist website, which we then transfer to our town map); (b) highlighting residential properties (no address or name of property owner is ever given) who sign up to support "Pollinator Pathways", a project started by the regional group Housatonic to Hudson (H2H); (c) adding layers obtained from Westchester County's GIS Department; and (d) working with members of the town to include specific projects (e.g., it was suggested adding in the locations where our veterans, who could be named and specifics shared, are buried in our town cemeteries, which can be featured on either Memorial Day or Veterans Day).

This year through the leadership of our member Frank Pizzurro and a non-member Louise Gantress (a resident of Mt Kisco, who regularly attends our meetings), our board wrote its first mission statement since its inception in 1968, which appears on the Conservation Board webpage. The webpage, by the way, was updated in 2021.

We have continued our projects regarding invasive plant species. 2021 was the 6th year of a project to remove from Bedford the newly designated invasive plant, hardy kiwi. New York State has identified 5 sites in the state that have hardy kiwi infestations. It is hoped that with the removal at these five sites, a whole species of an invasive plant will be eliminated from our entire state. This work was paid for entirely by a grant from the Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species, which is part of the New York State DEC. The Conservation Board has continued to coordinate this work. In 2021, unfortunately Covid has continued to hinder our efforts to organize an independent band of Bedford residents to form a volunteer vine-cutter's group to remove from public roads another invasive plant, very similar to the hardy kiwi, but unfortunately ubiquitous to the northeast: the oriental bittersweet vine. By strangling trees, and either weakening them or killing them outright, storms have caused them to fall and potentially create personal and property damage along our public streets. Through our close working relationship with Bedford 2030, the Conservation Board requested and received from this organization a donation of a 10-person vine-cutting tool kit, including safety equipment for use on this project. But in 2021 we have good news to report. Our board's newest member, Adam Nappi, who is trail master for the Bedford Riding Lanes Association, has offered to assist in leading such a group that will work within preserves where the BRLA trails are located. In addition, our board and Bedford 2030 have created a collaboration to actually form such a vine-cutting group, the Bedford Vine-Cutters, to further our goals in 2022. Using Bedford 2030's outstanding reach into our community, we are very optimistic that this group can start working as soon as this spring.

Our board has always been aware of the importance of trees to our town. From the Bedford Oak to the native maples along Maple Avenue to our amazing expanse of forests and woodlands, the Conservation Board has worked diligently to maintain the health of these vital town assets. In furtherance of this goal, the Conservation Board in 2021 has done the following: (a) Worked with the Department of Public Works, the Recreation and Parks Department and the Tree Planting Committee to utilize the \$50,000 grant initiated and obtained by our board for the maintenance of public trees. It

should be noted, that the matching funds required by the grant came from money already allocated by the Town in its annual budget. The Town was not required to expend any additional funds for this project. (b) Because of complaints received by the Conservation Board from residents unhappy with the existing Tree Preservation Ordinance, the Conservation Board created a sub-committee of its members, led by David Beckett and consisting of Gentian Falstrom, Janeen Sudaka-Karlsson, Jake Chintz, Susan Roos, and myself, to tackle a review of the existing ordinance and determine any changes to improve its performance. Starting in January, 2021, our group met frequently and began the long process of reviewing over 30 municipal tree ordinances from Westchester County and beyond, winnowing down the better aspects of those other ordinances, and finally making those changes that we felt would make the ordinance workable, fair, and enforceable within our town. After a review of this draft ordinance with the full Conservation Board, we sent in December the finished draft ordinance to every town department, regulatory and advisory board, committee and commission, as well as to Bedford 2030 and Heathy Yards for their comments and suggestions. We've given these groups until the end of January, 2022, to respond. After reviewing those responses, our board will submit to the Town Board our draft version of a revised Tree Preservation Ordinance for your consideration.

As Covid dragged on into 2021, the Conservation Board again embarked on the highly successful "Sunflower Project" it sponsored in 2020. With the generosity of our member Susan Roos, who donated almost 10,000 sunflower seeds, rather than only give them out to the general public as was done in 2020, this year we expanded our outreach and gave 100 sunflower seed packets to all of the elementary schools within Bedford Central School District, including both the Pound Ridge and Mt Kisco schools, and the Katonah Elementary School, which is part of the Katonah-Lewisboro School District. Our board received letters of thanks from both the administrators and students from these schools.

As mentioned earlier, Covid has taken a toll on our efforts to provide all of the services and goals that we had intended to do this year. One of them was the maintenance of the Rain Garden in front of the Town House. For much of 2020 and one-half of 2021, our Town's Rain Garden had fallen into serious disrepair due to Covid restrictions. A Rain Garden is a depressed garden specially designed and planted to absorb storm water run-off by from impervious surfaces (at our Town Hall, it's the roof, while in other areas, it can be parking lots) allowing the rain to percolate back into the ground where it belongs, rather than be collected by a more conventional and costly hardened stormwater system, that picks up salts, pesticides and other harmful material that can enter into our environment. As in many times, where there is a problem, there is usually an opportunity. Our board decided to take a hard look at the garden to see if it could be improved. Under the leadership of our member Nancy Kronenberg working with Janeen Sudaka Karlsson, we hired the services of a town resident to re-design it to be even more beautiful and useful than the original. Because we understood that we could not start work this year, we were able to pre-purchase plantings for the new garden from our 2021 budget for use as a "nest egg" in 2022. We hope to work with other groups in Bedford to form a "Friends of the Rain Garden" to assure that maintenance of our lovely garden will be managed into the coming years.

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Aware of our responsibilities to reach out to the public, our board worked along with the Recreation and Parks Department in publishing four articles for the Town's seasonal newsletter, entitled Bedford Owls, Locally Grown Foods in the Bedford Area, Before You Cut Down Trees Around Your Home...Think First!, and The Town of Bedford Conservation Board Green Awards. Louise Gantress, an accomplished writer, provided the newsletter with text, while the town's graphic artist provided beautiful photographs, with one exception. Member Susan Roos took the fantastic "sunflower" photo for our Green Awards article for the 2022 Winter edition. In addition, Frank Pizzurro has continued to host a Bedford Conservation Face Book page.

Our board has reached out to other groups to form partnerships and build relationships. In 2021, we have invited the following groups to our meetings: (a) Sustainable Westchester, regarding its solar initiatives, (b) The Invasive Project – Pound Ridge, regarding the possibility of starting in Bedford a similar project, (c) Bedford 2030, to develop plans to collaborate with our board in 2021: (d) Westchester Land Trust, to also develop plans to collaborate in 2021; and (e) the Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee, to both create diversity within our own board, as well as collaborate with them on projects helpful to our communities of color.

In 2021, our members continued to be part of other groups, ranging from the local to the state level. David Beckett and I are on the Bedford Master Plan sub-committee covering Climate Change Resiliency, and Rosemary Lee is on the Master Plan sub-committee covering the hamlet of Bedford Hills. Jake Chintz is working with Bedford 2030 on their carbon sequestration project. I continue to be the president of the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions, which the Bedford Conservation Board is a member. This year NYSACC held its virtual 2021 Conference on the Environment and hosted by Westchester County conservation advisory boards. Many of our members were involved as assistants during the days of the conference. We continued in 2022 to maintain a close working relationship with the Pound Ridge Conservation Board (via Susan Roos) and the Mount Kisco Conservation Advisory Council (via Frank Pizzurro), which has resulted in a valuable transfer of environmental programs and information between our adjacent towns that has benefitted Bedford.

2021 was a banner year for grant getting when the Conservation Board submitted (via the Town) and received approval for a grant application to the NYS DEC under their Hudson River Estuary Land Stewardship program, in which our town received nearly \$31,000 to hire an environment consulting firm to take our board's "Significant Habitat" map and create an overlay map of wildlife corridors, that connect our town's large habitat areas. Once this phase is completed, this same firm will work with the town to develop a draft ordinance that will provide protection and preservation to these critical areas of open space. Because of our excellent working relationship with Bedford 2030, we can combine their carbon storage project with open space preservation, and create large areas of undeveloped space within Bedford that will be expanded to become a very important local means of combating Climate Change.

Both 2020 and 2021 were years that our board did not nominate candidates in Bedford for our coveted

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Green Awards. However, that is about to change in 2022, as our nominating committee of members Rosemary Lee and Susan Roos have come up with an exciting list of recipients to be given their awards on or around Earth Day 2022. The Conservation Board's criteria for becoming a Green Award recipient is that they are either individuals, schools, private firms, or not-for-profits, who have not received recognition before regarding projects that directly benefit our town. This program was initiated in 2011.

As a continuation from 2020, 2021 saw our board move from the idea stage into possible site selection for one or more community gardens in Bedford. Covid has shown that our food supply chain is fragile, and that Climate Change will present even more of a challenge to our residents to obtain adequate food. It is our goal as a board to find means of growing food locally. Under the leadership of member Leslie Dock, along with members Janeen Sudaka-Karlsson and myself, we are working with local groups and town departments to identify sites in Bedford for community gardens, as well as land to be used by local farmers. We are moving into 2022 with high expectations of starting a community garden in our town this year.

While individual members in past years have participated in the Hudson River Estuary Program to protect amphibians crossing roads between their upland homes and vernal pools for reproduction (this occurs in late winter or early spring, when nighttime temperatures reach the 40's, the ground is no longer frozen, and rain is falling), this year member Gentian Falstrom, one of whose passions is amphibians, led the board in an organized effort. One of the highlights of this year's Amphibian Crossing Project was having Town Board member (Supervisor-elect) Ellen Calves and her daughter help a Spotted Salamander (not a common sight in Bedford) safely cross a road. Kudos to Ellen and her daughter!

The Conservation Board ventured out for the first time since the pandemic and set up a table at Bedford's 2021 Earth Day celebration, where we gave away sunflower seeds, had sign-up sheets for potential vine-cutters, displayed our interactive map called "Have You Seen Me?", where residents use colored pins associated with wildlife sightings, and gave a number of hands-on demonstrations, including how to grow micro-greens year-round. We especially thank member Betsy Weir for her staying the full day as a representative at our table.

We proudly acknowledge voting Gentian Falstrom as our Deputy Chair in October.

2021 has also been a year when we have reflected on our membership changes: As mentioned earlier, Adam Nappi in late December joined our board as a full member, replacing Frank Pizzurro who resigned when he moved to Mt Kisco, (and is now a member of their conservation advisory council and still Bedford's Conservation Board's Face Book manager!), Susan Roos resigned to better give her the time to follow new and exciting interests, and Rosemary Lee resigned to become the Bedford Zoning Board of Appeals' newest member. As the chair of the ZBA, and ex-member of the Conservation Board, Peter Michaelis has said if you want to understand how Bedford works,

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become a member of the Conservation Board. With Rosemary's resignation, we have an opening, which we would like filled as soon as possible. Each member of our board meets a vital function in making our group helpful to both the Town and its residents. Lastly, I am retiring as of today, after 25 years (broken into two periods of time) as the chair of this board. I am staying on as a member, which as of 2021 means I have been a member for 36 years. In that period of time, I have seen the Conservation Board grow into a group of volunteer "citizen scientists" who have been part of the reason that Westchester County and New York view our town as one of the most environmentally sensitive communities in the state.

It would be an incomplete report if we didn't mention Alex Pappas, who has volunteered from the community to be an unpaid secretary to our board since 2019. The Conservation Board had a paid secretary from its inception up until the 2008 Great Recession, and we have been struggling for years rotating the recording secretary's role from member to member before Alex appeared. The Town Board should resolve in 2022 to consider funding a recording secretary again, especially since we are the only town advisory board whose enabling legislation came from New York State, which requires mandatory minutes kept of each of our meetings.

As part of that state mandate, the Town Board is to review this report, and once approved, file it with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Looking forward to 2022, we hope to (a) update the town board resolution creating our Conservation Advisory Council in 1968, which was elevated to a Conservation Board in 1975, by writing a new ordinance that better serves the interest of our board as it's changed over the past 53 years; (b) preparing a budget to reflect our board's varied interests to protect and preserve Bedford's natural environment, especially as it relates to the impact of a changing climate and more severe weather events; and (c) suggest to the town board to institute quarterly meetings between chairs of all of Bedford's regulatory and advisory boards, commissions and committees, as well as department chiefs.

As this will be my last correspondence to the Town Board as chair, I wish all in Bedford a Healthy and Happy New Year, and wish the new town board, especially Ellen Calves as our new Supervisor and the newest members, all the best in your goals and desires for keeping Bedford the wonderful community we know and love!

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Skolnik', with a stylized, cursive script.

Simon Skolnik
Chair