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# Larson Fisher Associates, Inc.

Historic Preservation and Planning Services

P.O. Box 1394  
Woodstock, N.Y. 12498

845-679-5054  
[www.larsonfisher.com](http://www.larsonfisher.com)

## MOHONK PRESERVE FOOTHILLS PROJECT New Paltz, New York

### ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL ADVERSE IMPACTS TO HISTORIC RESOURCES WITH PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES

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#### INTRODUCTON

The Lake Mohonk Mountain House and its associated land were listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. The property was elevated to National Historic Landmark status in 1985, and at that time the boundary, which had been roughly delineated on U.S. Geological Survey maps, was made more precise using tax parcel maps. By this latter date, the area between the mountains and Butterville Road, now known as Mohonk Foothills, was clearly contained within the boundaries of the historic landmark designation. It is because of this distinction, as well as others, that the projects proposed by the Mohonk Preserve constitute a Type 1 Action under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). Type 1 Actions are those with the potential to have adverse impacts on significant environments including properties listed on the National Register. To comply with SEQRA regulations, an Environmental Assessment Form needs to be completed for Type 1 Actions to describe the impacts the project will have on historic resources, evaluate the significance of the impacts, and indicate how potential adverse impacts will be mitigated to protect the integrity of historic resources.

In the case of historic resources, potential impacts to buildings, landscapes and settings (viewsheds) are assessed using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects. These standards were issued with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as guidelines to protect and preserve historic properties involved in Federal projects. Since then, the SOI Standards have served as the basis of professional (and legal) evaluations of impacts at the state and local level. Their intention is to direct projects to preserve the historic integrity of buildings and landscapes to the greatest extent possible in terms of location, design, setting materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The area defined as the Mohonk Foothills is historically significant in the contexts of buildings and landscape. The entire area was documented in 2006 by Larson Fisher Associates for the Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in a project to identify historic resources within Open Space areas in the town. An overview was written and fifteen properties were recorded on NYS

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inventory forms.<sup>1</sup> The project report recommended that the entire area be considered for local historic district designation as one of the few intact rural landscapes in the town. The scenic value of the district also was recognized as a contributing factor in the district's significance. No action was taken on this proposal. The Mohonk Preserve Foothill's *Land Asset Management Plan* (LAMP) contains a number of historical inaccuracies when compared to this survey report. None of them are serious, but they create or sustain some misconceptions about the early history of the area.

### HISTORIC BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES

Two historic buildings are directly impacted by the proposed project: the Testimonial Gateway and the so-called Hasbrouck House. The historic Wawarsing Turnpike also will be impacted.

#### *Testimonial Gateway*

Built in 1906, The Testimonial Gateway is universally recognized as a local landmark worthy of preservation. In fact, it already has been designated a local landmark requiring any proposed changes to the building obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HPC.<sup>2</sup> In the Mohonk Foothills project, it is proposed to stabilize the exterior envelope of the building—masonry walls, clay tile roof and windows and doors. The building will exist as an object to be regarded in the views and vistas of Old Gatehouse Road. The interior of the building will not be open to the public and interior restoration and reuse is not a factor in this project.

- The potential impacts of this action will be mitigated by plans developed by an architectural firm recognized as qualified for historic preservation projects (Crawford & Stearns, Architects) and the requirement to follow the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Preservation Projects and obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HPC prior to the execution of any work. With these conditions the potential impacts to the building are appropriately mitigated under the Town's SEQRA obligations. The building has been allowed to deteriorate over the years and this action will have a significant effect on the preservation of this valuable landmark.

Another potential impact to the Testimonial Gateway is the proposed addition of a parking area for up to 90 cars with spaces for school busses or recreational vehicles. Sited in a wooded area southeast of the Testimonial Gateway, a conscious effort has been made to screen it from the building. Pathways have been routed through the woods to points both east and west of the building so that visitors emerge from the parking area on Old Gatehouse Road at vantage points set back sufficiently to permit good perspectives of the building and its tower. However, the access point to these trails, with their appurtenances, i.e., information kiosk, vault toilet building, bike rack, are sited in a location closest to the building and in sight of it. There is little existing screening in this location and although, new plantings are proposed to enhance the buffer between the parking area and the open area south of the building, the concentration of features in this area will be visible from the building in the current plan. In addition to having a potentially adverse visual impact on the historic building, the preview of the

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<sup>1</sup> This project was partially funded by a matching grant from the NYSHPO through its Certified Local Government Program. The report is filed with the Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). This documentation has been overlooked in the preparation of planning documents and proposals for the Mohonk Foothills. For instance, see page 83 of the *Land Asset Management Plan* where it is proposed by the HPC that inventory forms should be prepared.

<sup>2</sup> During the SEQRA review of the subdivision of the Mohonk Foothills from the Mohonk Mountain House lands in 2011, the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation recommended that any future development be subject to SHPO review, but their role is only advisory where the HPC oversight is established by ordinance.

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building from this oblique angle will diminish the desired effect of planned vantage points where the trails meet the Old Gatehouse Road. Additionally, the focal point inadvertently created by the concentration of visitor services in the proposed location will encourage trailblazing through the limited screening and across the open space leading up to the building.

- The potential adverse visual impacts the proposed parking area will have on the Testimonial Gateway are not adequately mitigated in the plans provided. The applicant should be requested to shift the congregating area and visitor services to one side or the other of the proposed site and out of direct view of the historic building. This may result in some re-routing of the pathways leading to the Old Gatehouse Road. A more detailed plan for enhancing the buffer screening the parking area from the building is needed with a strategy for preventing trailblazing. The pictorial simulation provided with the plan show a stone barrier and fencing, which are appropriate measures to keep visitors on the trail. These features should be added to the plan.

Old Gatehouse Road will be rehabilitated and opened to public access for the first time in many, many years. There are plans to level and resurface the roadway for walkers. A nursery has been created to grow trees to replace those dead and dying along the roadway. While the ponds near the Testimonial Gateway will not be restored, trails and interpretive signage is planned for the current habitat. A large summer house will be built and tucked out of view of the building.

- The proposed actions will not have any potential adverse impacts on the historic building nor that requires any mitigation to reduce physical or visual effects. The proposed actions will improve public access and the public experience of the landmark building.

### *Hasbrouck House & Wawarsing Turnpike*

This property was documented on a NYS Inventory Form in 2006 with the following historical background. The first house built on this property was destroyed by fire in April of 1870. A portion of the existing house was built shortly thereafter. Both houses were built by Wessel B. Polhamus. His father, Henry Polhamus, owned a farm just south of this location in Libertyville. Wessel owned the house and farm until around 1890 when Josiah J. Hasbrouck purchased the property. Hasbrouck put an addition on the house in 1893. The Lake Mohonk Corporation purchased the farm in 1906.

The project proposes no physical changes to the house, but it will widen the existing dirt driveway, a portion of the historic (and abandoned) Wawarsing Turnpike, to 20 feet to permit two-way traffic to and from a new 21-car parking area in the northeast corner of a meadow beyond the house with an information kiosk, vault toilet building and, although the plan does not show it, probably a bike rack. The view of the parking area from the house, meadow and Wawarsing Turnpike will be screened by plantings.

- The proposed road widening will not have a significant physical impact on the Hasbrouck House. However, the conversion of the road from a driveway to an access road with constant use will have a potential adverse impact. This impact cannot be mitigated, but the current function of the house as a staff residence, as opposed to a historic landmark such as the Testimonial Gateway, does not demand a strict preservation of its context.
- The Wawarsing Turnpike is a significant historic feature that will be significantly altered by the proposed project. The section providing access to the Hasbrouck House appears to be

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essentially intact to its historic dimensions and features. Widening the road will have a potential adverse effect as will the proposal to construct a 10-ft.-wide “dry swale” along the easterly side of the roadway. Every effort should be made to preserve the historic road materials and roadside features to mitigate the potential adverse impacts of the road widening. An alternative to the proposed paving is needed, as well as more detailed plans for the preservation of the roadside. The portion of the roadway proposed to be bypassed by a new entry from Rt.299 should be preserved as-is rather than “reclaimed as upland meadow.”

- The construction of a “new vehicle turnaround” at the northeasterly end of the Wawarsing Turnpike will also have a potential adverse impact on the integrity of the historic roadway. The need for the “turnaround” should be reconsidered. Removing it and preserving the scale, materials and roadside characteristics would eliminate the need to mitigate this potential adverse impact.
- An alternative that would remove any potential adverse impacts to the Wawarsing Turnpike would be to construct a new road along the tree-line on the easterly side of the meadow east of the turnpike. This impact would be mitigated by the preservation of the historic turnpike and the reduced visual impacts to the house
- The proposed parking area will not have an adverse physical impact on the Hasbrouck House or the Wawarsing Turnpike (with the exception of the “new vehicle turnaround”). Visual impacts can be mitigated by vegetative screening; a more detailed planting plan will be needed to determine what screening will be adequate.

### HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

The proposed project has potential adverse impacts on historic landscapes in the Mohonk Foothills area. The parking areas planned for public access at the Testimonial Gateway and the Hasbrouck House will be additions to the landscape. In addition the rehabilitation of Old Gatehouse Road impacts that historic landscape.

#### *Testimonial Gateway Parking Area*

This paved 90-car parking area loops through a wooded area southeast of the Testimonial Gateway. It is planned to be screened from the building by a buffer of existing and added trees. The forest characteristics have been professionally evaluated and determined to be different from and less significant than an adjoining oak forest, planted when the gateway was built, on the south. Arborists have identified trees in the project area worthy of preservation.

- The woods where the parking area is proposed to be constructed are not part of the planned oak forest and are not historically significant. Any potential adverse effect is mitigated by the restoration of the Testimonial Gateway and the rehabilitation of the Old Gatehouse Road, which is undertaken as a result of opening up the area to public access.

#### *Hasbrouck House Parking Area*

This 20-car gravel parking area is located in the northeast corner of a meadow (hay field) east of the Hasbrouck House. It is bordered on the north and east by existing woods and it will be screened on the south side by new plantings. A “turnaround” is planned to connect the parking area with the historic Wawarsing Turnpike; this feature is larger than the parking area.

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- The parking area and access roads will be constructed on the periphery of a meadow with associations with the Foothills’ agricultural heritage. The potential adverse impact of these new features will be mitigated by the preservation of other farm lands in the project area.
- The proposed parking area will be adequately screened from significant landmarks and vantage points so as not to have potential adverse impacts on the viewshed.
- The proposed “turnaround” is of a scale and design that have a potential adverse impact on the historic landscape. Alternatives that mitigate this impact should be considered (see above).

### *Old Gatehouse Road*

Old Gatehouse Road will be rehabilitated and opened to public access for the first time in many, many years. There are plans to level and resurface the roadway for walkers. A nursery has been created to grow trees to replace those dead and dying along the roadway. While the ponds near the Testimonial Gateway will not be restored, trails and interpretive signage is planned for the current habitat. A large summer house will be constructed and tucked out of view of the Testimonial Gateway building. A deteriorated bridge with concrete sides crossing Butterville Road will be reconstructed with more picturesque timber railings.

- The proposed actions will not have any potential adverse impacts on the historic landscape nor require any further mitigation to reduce physical or visual effects. The proposed actions will rehabilitate existing conditions and improve public access and the public experience of the landmark building and the vistas of the mountains and foothills.

### OTHER HISTORIC BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, LANDSCAPES AND VIEWSHEDS

Other actions proposed in the project do not appear to have potential adverse impacts on historic resources either physically or visually.

### CONCLUSION

As presented, the Mohonk Preserve Foothills Project has been carefully planned to avoid potential adverse impacts to historic resources within the Lake Mohonk Mountain House National Historic Landmark District. The two parking areas proposed to be constructed in the project have the greatest potential for adverse impacts as both involve historic buildings and structures. This assessment cites amendments that would lessen the potential impacts, but in both cases the benefits of public access and the restoration of the exterior of the Testimonial Gateway are considerable mitigations. As a result, the extent of the potential adverse impacts to historic resources is not significant. These impacts are sufficiently addressed and mitigated in the EAF to make an Environmental Impact Statement unnecessary.

Respectfully submitted,



President