

Town of New Paltz ~ Clean Water and Open Space Program  
PROJECT RATING FORM

**INTRODUCTION:**

The following guidelines will be used by the Town of New Paltz Clean Water and Open Space Preservation Commission as a screening system for all conservation projects. A project is not expected to meet all of the criteria within this document. Some projects may have a single purpose (such as farmland protection or stream protection). Other projects may provide multiple benefits – such as a farm property adjacent to a stream with views of the Shawangunk Mountains. Projects will be evaluated for their significance in a single category or categories as well as their cumulative benefit to the community.

Some of the questions in this document will require on-site analysis of the property as well as discussions with the landowner. Time should be allocated for at least one site visit. Two visits may be required depending on the time of year and other factors. The results will be reviewed with the landowner.

**A summary of the evaluation categories and maximum score follows:**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Maximum Score</b>
<b>1. Working Farms</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2. Water Resources</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>3. Biodiversity and Ecological Resources</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>4. Scenic and Cultural Resources</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5. Recreational and Educational Opportunities</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>6. Project Viability Subtotal</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>7. Discretionary Points</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CUMULATIVE BENEFIT SUMMARY (TOTAL POSSIBLE SCORE)</b>	<b>480</b>

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**Instructions:** Record information about the project being evaluated below. Use the following pages to evaluate the project in each of the seven categories. Use the project rating summary sheet to tally the score.

Project name and location:

Parcel number(s):

Primary contact:

Name of person who prepared this form:

Date:

**CATEGORY 1: WORKING FARMS**

**10 QUESTIONS; MAXIMUM SCORE = 100 POINTS**

**NOTE: SKIP THIS SECTION IF PROJECT DOES NOT INVOLVE A FARM PROPERTY**

1. Is the parcel in a “**core farm area?**”

- > 1,000 – 10 points (block #1)
- 750 – 999 acres – 8 points (block #2)
- 500 – 749 acres – 6 points (block #3)
- 300 – 499 acres – 4 points (blocks 4 & 5)
- <300 acres – 2 points (block #6)
- No core farm area – 0 points

Explanation: Large clusters of working farms have the conditions and support systems that are likely to maintain agriculture in the long-term.

Note: see the “core farm areas” map.

2. What is the **size of the farm property** (or properties)?

- More than 200 acres – 10 points
- 151 – 200 acres – 8 points
- 101 – 150 acres – 6 points
- 51 – 100 acres – 4 points
- 26 – 50 acres – 2 points

Explanation: Preserving large farm properties helps to retain more land for agriculture.

3. What **percentage of the farm property is actively being farmed** or used for agricultural purposes (such as field cops, pasture, row crops, orchard, etc.)?

- 80% or more – 10 points
- 60% to 79% – 8 points
- 40 to 59% – 6 points
- 20-39% – 4 points
- Less than 20% – 2 points

Explanation: Lands actively being farmed are a good indication of the percentage of the land available for agriculture in the future.

4. Does the parcel receive an **agricultural exemption** or is it within an **agricultural district** (or to be included upon district revision)?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Participation in the agricultural district implies that there is some level of commitment to agriculture on the part of the landowner (even if temporary).

*Agricultural district number (if applicable):*

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5. How much of the farm property contains **prime farmland soils** (as designated by the USDA)?

- More than 80% of the property contains prime farmland soils – 10 points
- 60% –80% of the property contains prime farmland soils – 8 points
- 40 – 59% of the property contains prime farmland soils – 6 points
- 20 – 39% of the property contains prime farmland soils – 4 points
- Less than 20% of the property contains prime farmland soils – 2 points

Explanation: According to the USDA, "Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods." *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2007. National Soil Survey Handbook, title 430-VI. [Online] Available: <http://soils.usda.gov/technical/handbook/>.*

6. How would you characterize the level of **on-farm investment** (barns, storage buildings, fruit trees, processing equipment, etc.)?

- High level of on-farm investment – 10 points
- Average level of on-farm investment – 6 points
- Low level of on-farm investment – 2 points

Explanation: The level of investment in on-farm equipment is one indicator of the farm's ability to survive into the near future.

7. Is the farm a "**Bicentennial Farm**" or "**Century Farm**" as designated by New York State Agricultural Society or locally?

- State designated bicentennial farm (currently none in New Paltz) – 5 points
- State designated century farm – 4 points
- Locally-known century farm – 3 points

Explanation: Farms with a history of family ownership are often deeply rooted in the community and likely to remain into the future.

Notes: A bicentennial farm is one in operation by the same family for 200+ years. A century farm is one in operation by the same family for 100+ years. There are currently no *designated* century farms or bicentennial farms in New Paltz.

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8. Does the farm have **community ties and/or visibility** (CSA, farm stand, farm market, agri-tourism opportunities or similar)?

Explanation: People may be more likely to support local agriculture when they have a connection to the land that grows their food.

- Yes – up to 5 points
- No – 0 points

9. Are **conservation practices** or low-impact farming practices such as the use of buffers, conservation tillage, crop rotation, or nutrient management practiced on the farm?

Explanation: The use of conservation practices in agriculture helps to balance the protection of agricultural lands with the protection of natural resources.

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No, but landowner has agreed to integrate conservation practices into this conservation project – 5 points
- No – 0 points

10. What is the **likelihood that this farm will continue to remain a farm** in the future (next 50 years)?

Explanation: The goal of farmland preservation is to maintain the best farmland for food and other crops into the future. This is a discretionary judgment based on many factors, including the farm ownership and generational transfer opportunities, level of investment in the farm, surrounding development pressure, etc.

- Highly likely – 10 points
- Moderately likely – 6 points
- Unsure or unlikely – 2 points
- Very unlikely – 0 points

11. Is the farm a **primary source of income** for a farmer?

- Farm is owner-operated and serves as a principal source of income for the owner -10 points
- Farm is leased to a farmer that generates a principal source of income from the farm - 8 points

Explanation: Farms that serve as a primary source of income for a farmer are an indication of commitment to agriculture. They are also important to the economy.

**SUM OF CATEGORY 1: WORKING FARMS:**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 100 POINTS**

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**CATEGORY 2: WATER RESOURCES**

**7 QUESTIONS; MAXIMUM SCORE = 80 POINTS**

1. Would the project preserve **frontage on the Wallkill River**?

- 1,000 feet or more – 10 points
- 500 to 1,000 feet – 8 points
- 100 to 500 feet – 6 points
- Less than 100 feet – 2 points
- No frontage – 0 points

Explanation: Preservation of frontage on the Wallkill River would provide riparian buffer protection, flood protection and many other associated benefits.

2. Would the project preserve **frontage on a permanent river or stream** other than the Wallkill River?

- 1,000 feet or more – 10 points
- 500 to 1,000 feet - 8 points
- 100 to 500 feet – 6 points
- Less than 100 feet – 2 points
- No frontage – 0 points

Explanation: Preservation of frontage on permanent rivers provides riparian buffer protection, flood protection, and many other associated benefits.

3. Would the project preserve a **large wetland and buffer area** for a state (DEC)-regulated wetland, a wetland mapped by the National Wetland Inventory, or another local wetland or pond?

- Buffer area – up to 20 points
- No buffer/wetlands – 0 points

Explanation: Wetlands help to improve water quality by removing toxins and sediments. They also help to moderate the effects of flooding, recharge groundwaters, provide habitat for many important species, and offer recreational benefits.

4. Would the project preserve a significant area of **100-year floodplain**?

- More than 40% of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 10 points
- More than 30% of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 8 points
- More than 20% of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 6 points
- More than 10% of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 4 points
- Less than 10% of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 2 points
- No portion of site within FEMA 100-year floodplain – 0 points

Explanation: The 100-year floodplain is our storage bank for floods. The floodplain holds water during floods preventing costly damage to homes, roads and other built features.

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5. Would the project preserve a significant area of **500-year floodplain**?

- More than 40% of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain\* – 10 points
- More than 30% of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain\* – 8 points
- More than 20% of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain\* – 6 points
- More than 10% of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain\* – 4 points
- Less than 10% of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain\* – 2 points
- No portion of site within FEMA 500-year floodplain – 0 points

*\*Not including any portion within the 100-year floodplain*

Explanation: The 500-year floodplain is an extended storage bank for floods. The floodplain holds water during floods preventing costly damage to homes, roads and other built features.

6. Would the project protect wetlands associated with the headwaters of a stream or river (**headwater wetlands**)?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Headwater wetlands are associated with a first or second order stream (a headwater or source of a stream). Headwater wetlands are significant for water quality protection, groundwater recharge, and natural habitat, as well as many other functions.

7. Is the project within a mapped or publicly-identified **priority aquifer, groundwater recharge area, or wellhead protection zone**?

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Protecting drinking waters provides a tangible community benefit and is also more cost-effective when compared with the potential costs of treating and distributing water to town residents.

**SUM OF CATEGORY 2: WATER RESOURCES**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 80 POINTS**

**CATEGORY 3: BIODIVERSITY AND ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

**6 QUESTIONS; MAXIMUM SCORE = 60 POINTS**

1. Is the project within a **large forest block** (one that is not fragmented with roads or other features) or stepping stone forest?

- Within a global forest system (greater than 15,000 acres) – 10 points
- Within a regional forest system (500 – 1,000 acres) – 8 points
- Within a local forest system (200 – 500 acres) – 6 points
- Stepping stone forest (100 – 200 acres) – 4 points
- Adjacent to one of the above – 2 points
- Not within one of the above – 0 points

Explanation: Large unfragmented forest areas provide many benefits for wildlife and people. They help to cleanse and purify air and water. They also serve as critical habitat for many plant and animal species. The Shawangunk Mountains are considered a global forest system because of their size and significance in the regional landscape. Smaller forest blocks serve as “stepping stones” for wildlife between large forest blocks.

2. Is the project located within one of the **Northern Wallkill Biodiversity Areas**– as designated in Northern Wallkill Biodiversity Plan?

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: The *Northern Wallkill Biodiversity Plan*, completed by the Metropolitan Conservation Analysis, identified several areas in New Paltz (and adjacent towns) that are significant for their biodiversity.

3. Does the project site harbor documented **endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (Federal)**?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: The Federal Endangered Species Act and the NYS Environmental Conservation Law are both aimed at protecting imperiled species on the federal and state levels. Preserving lands associated with these species will contribute to their long-term recovery or survival.

**OR**

- Does the project site harbor documented **endangered, threatened, rare, or special concern species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law (State)**?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

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4. Does the project contain **NYS Natural Heritage Program Important Area(s)**?

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: The New York State Natural Heritage Program maintains a database of Important Areas, which includes natural communities, plants and animals. The Natural Heritage Program data indicate opportunities for proactive preservation of important areas, however the data should be reviewed and discussed with resource experts to determine the relative significance of an important area (hence the discretionary point system).

5. Are there any **unique/important features** present (cliff, bog, etc.)?

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Unique features, such as the Bonticou Crag, that may not be identified in other rating categories can be important natural or geological features.

6. Is the area within or adjacent to the **Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area** (break in slope)

- Within Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area – 10 points
- Adjacent to Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area – 5 points
- Not within or adjacent to Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area – 0 points

Explanation: The Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area is the area of the Shawangunk Mountains within the break in slope (the topographical line at which the percent slope dramatically increases). The Shawangunk Ridge Protection Area is significant for its unique combination of climate, soils and geology which supports a very diverse assemblage of species and natural communities.

**SUM OF CATEGORY 3: BIODIVERSITY AND ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 60 POINTS**

**CATEGORY 4: SCENIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**6 QUESTIONS; MAXIMUM SCORE = 60 POINTS**

1. Would the project preserve significant **scenic views** to or from Shawangunk Mountains; or would the project preserve a significant vista, landscape or views of a cultural feature (such as the gate house)?

Explanation: Scenic views are important to the New Paltz community and they also help to support the region's tourism initiatives. Scenic viewpoints were systematically mapped as part of the *New Paltz Open Space Plan*.

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

2. Does the project preserve significant frontage along the **Shawangunk Mountains Scenic Byway** (state-designated scenic byway)?

- Parcel has 1,000 feet of frontage along scenic byway – 10 points
- Parcel has more than 800 feet of frontage along scenic byway – 8 points
- Parcel has more than 600 feet of frontage along scenic byway – 6 points
- Parcel has more than 400 feet of frontage along scenic byway – 4 points

Explanation: The Shawangunk Mountains Scenic Byway is a state-designated scenic byway. It is 87 miles long and loops around the Shawangunk Mountains. It passes through nine towns and two villages and many historic hamlets. Preservation of frontage along the scenic byway will help to maintain the intrinsic character of the byway. In New Paltz, the byway travels along Route 299, Route 208 and Route 7 (Springtown Road).

3. Does the project preserve significant frontage along a locally-identified **scenic road or travel corridor**?

- Parcel has 1,000 feet of frontage along scenic roadway – 10 points
- Parcel has more than 800 feet of frontage along scenic roadways – 8 points
- Parcel has more than 600 feet of frontage along scenic roadways – 6 points
- Parcel has more than 400 feet of frontage along scenic roadways – 4 points

Explanation: Preservation of road frontage will help to retain the scenic character of the road or corridor. See *Cultural Resources Map in the New Paltz Open Space Plan* for more information on Scenic Roads.

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4. Does the project protect or enhance the experience or **character of historic hamlets**?

- Yes – up to 5 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: The hamlet surrounded by the countryside (town-country) is an important settlement pattern in the town.

5. Is the parcel, or portion of parcel, listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**?

- Yes - 20 points
- No, but it abuts a National Register listed parcel – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: The National Register includes historic districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects. These historic places have a significant role in the New Paltz community, and their permanent preservation is important. Preserving buffer lands adjacent to historic resources is also an important community goal.

6. Does the project protect resources within a **local historic district or landscape**?

- Yes – up to 5 points
- No – 0 points

**SUM OF CATEGORY 4: SCENIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 60 POINTS**

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**CATEGORY 5: RECREATIONAL AND  
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**4 QUESTIONS; MAXIMUM SCORE = 40 POINTS**

1. Is there potential for **active or passive recreational use** of parcel (park)?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Projects that provide opportunities for active recreation (structured activities such as baseball or soccer) or passive recreation (such as bird watching, hiking or canoeing) provide a community benefit. Not all properties will be suitable for recreational use due to their sensitive environmental nature or because they are being used for agriculture or other private use. Public access and/or recreation is NOT a requirement for any project.

2. Does the project provide **potential for trail connections** in one of the following categories below? (select one only – 10 points total)

A. Does the parcel abut Wallkill Valley Rail Trail or can it provide expanded connections to the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail (such as from other trails, parks, destinations, or neighborhoods)?

- Yes – 10 points
- No – 0 points

Explanation: Trail connections provide a community benefit and opportunities for recreation, exercise and connection with nature.

B. Does the parcel provide for trail connections from the village to natural resources or parks?

- Yes – 8 points
- No – 0 points

C. Does the parcel provide new or expanded trail connections in the countryside (i.e., not in village or direct to rail trail)?

- Yes – 8 points
- No – 0 points

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3. Does the project provide opportunities for **natural or cultural interpretation or education** (environmental/agricultural/historical, etc.)?

- Yes – up to 10 points  
 No – 0 points

Explanation: Opportunities to leverage the natural or cultural assets of a property or resource provide large community benefits. For example, the use of a site for a natural history lesson might help to connect school children to the landscape in a meaningful way.

4. Does the project provide opportunities for public **waterfront access** areas (trails, boat launch areas, fishing access, etc.)?

- Yes – 10 points  
 No – 0 points

Explanation: There are currently few waterfront access sites in the Town of New Paltz. One of the goals of the *New Paltz Open Space Plan* is to develop a system of waterfront access points for people to enjoy the Walkkill River through kayaking, fishing, and other activities.

**SUM OF CATEGORY 5: RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 40 POINTS**

**CATEGORY 6: PROJECT VIABILITY**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 100 POINTS**

1. Has **the landowner demonstrated commitment to the project** through one of the following actions?

- Yes – up to 10 points  
 No – 0 points

Explanation: The landowner's commitment to the project is a major indicator of the long-term success of the project. Commitment can be demonstrated through signing a letter of intent, offering a bargain sale, or through other ways.

*Describe how the landowner documents interest in conservation:*

2. Is the **conservation value of the property is in imminent threat** of being lost (such as to development pressure)?

- Yes – up to 20 points  
 No – 0 points

Explanation: Properties of conservation value that are under immediate threat should be prioritized for preservation. Threat can be documented in many ways: a development proposal has been submitted to the planning board; a landowner has property listed for sale; a landowner has an offer from a developer; generational transfer is about to take place, etc.

*Describe threats that have been documented:*

3. Is there a **strong expression of community support** for project?

- Yes – up to 10 points  
 No – 0 points

Explanation: Community support can be documented through phone calls or letters of support. Support should not be limited to adjacent property owners but should represent broader public sentiment.

*Describe how the community has expressed support for the project:*

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4. Is the project sponsored by a **partner conservation organization** (such as a land trust)?

- Yes – up to 10 points  
 No – 0 points

*Identify the name of the land trust and contact person:*

Explanation: In many cases, a partner land trust will be needed to hold and steward a conservation easement on the property. Conservation easements require a long-term commitment from a land trust. A land trust commits to a conservation easement only when it meets particular conservation goals and has funds committed for the future stewardship of the property. The participation of a land trust indicates that the project has long-term value and will engender a partnership approach.

5. Is the project identified as a **priority in regional or state plans** (such as the NYS Open Space Conservation Plan)?

- Yes – 10 points  
 No – 0 points

*Identify the name of the priority area and page reference of New York State Open Space Plan:*

Explanation: Currently, the only regional or state plan that lists priority projects relevant to New Paltz is the *New York State Open Space Conservation Plan*. Projects that have already been identified as priority at the state level would also most likely be eligible for state funding.

6. Is the project adjacent to, or will it **expand an existing open space/conservation area**?

- Yes – 20 points  
 No – 0 points

*Identify the name of the park/protected area that the project expands or abuts:*

Explanation: Expansion of existing open space areas enlarges or buffers the area under protection, providing significant benefits to the resource under consideration.

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7. Is **outside funding available** to support the project (such as state or federal grants for farmland protection or Hudson River Estuary Grants)? In other words, is there a grant program that can be applied to for this project within the next year?

Explanation: In order for the Town of New Paltz to leverage its funds to the highest capacity, all additional sources of funding will be explored. Outside funding is a key consideration in the selection of a project for advancement.

- Yes – up to 10 points
- No – 0 points

*Identify potential outside funding sources, such as the names of state or private grant programs:*

8. What is the requested/anticipated **town share** of the project?

Explanation: When the town's share of the project costs is relatively low, it is able to accomplish its goals at a minimal cost and leverage its funds to complete more projects.

- No cost or minimal cost – 30 points
- Less than 25% of project cost – 20 points
- 25% to 50% of project cost – 10 points

*Describe how the requested/anticipated town contribution was determined:*

**SUM OF CATEGORY 6: PROJECT VIABILITY**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 120 POINTS**

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**CATEGORY 7: PROJECT IMPACT**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 30 POINTS**

This category captures the overall impact of the project on the town's Clean Water and Open Space Program. It offers an opportunity to discuss aspects of the project that may not be captured in the above criteria, as well as the opportunity to look holistically at the project's role in the town's Clean Water and Open Space Program.

In this category, the landowner and commission may discuss and add additional points as necessary for the project's overall impact on conservation, provided that they represent a benefit to the town or the community. In other words, the benefits can not be isolated to the landowner or his/her surrounding neighbors. Points can also be given to projects that alone may not score highly in these criteria, but when considered in a larger context, may be important.

Example: A small parcel of land may not score high in isolation, but may be critical in closing a gap in a trail or conservation network. The larger benefit to the town and region should be supported.

Points should be documented below.

**SUM OF CATEGORY 7: PROJECT IMPACT**

**MAXIMUM SCORE = 30 POINTS**