

The Mohonk Preserve Foothills Initiative

In October 2011, the Open Space Institute (OSI) acquired 857 acres from Mohonk Mountain House. Following OSI's acquisition, the Mohonk Preserve took over management of the entire property and entered into a contract with OSI to purchase 534 acres which includes the Testimonial Gateway area. The Preserve also undertook an extensive planning process that included with input from the local community, to create a comprehensive Land Asset Management Plan for the entire Foothills property. This process was supported in part by funding from the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, administered by the Land Trust Alliance and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

The resulting 2012 Land Asset Management Plan provides maps detailing existing conditions, outlines the vision, and recommends ideas and alternatives for the conservation and management of visitor access to the Foothills landscape. The plan also recommends improvements and restorations of various physical plant elements including the rebuilding of 1.5 miles of historic carriage roads and renovation of the Lenape Lane Bridge to allow for connection of the Preserve with the Village of New Paltz, the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, and Route 299, a New York State-designated Scenic Byway. A building conditions survey will also be completed for the Testimonial Gateway tower, which will allow for future restoration.

The ultimate goal of the broader *Foothills Initiative* is to enhance responsible public recreational use of one of the Town's most iconic, historic, and scenic open spaces. Attainment of this goal will also serve to advance priorities of the Shawangunk Mountains Scenic Byway, Town of New Paltz, Ulster County, NYS, and Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council by leveraging natural resources to attract and retain high-quality jobs in key industry sectors.

The Testimonial Gateway Trailhead Project

The proposed trailhead project is a vital phase in the broader multi-year *Mohonk Preserve Foothills Initiative* to protect ecologically important lands and provide connectivity to external trails owned/managed by the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, OSI, Town of New Paltz, and Mohonk Mountain House. The trailhead will be easily accessible from downtown by car or bicycle, and will help MP to better distribute visitation during peak times, serving to protect the ridge and surrounding roadways from overuse. The project will also improve visitor safety by mitigating current dangerous traffic and parking patterns at the proposed trailhead location.

The grant will fund a portion of the consultant fee from Barton & Loguidice, P.C., who was selected through a competitive RFP process, to lead a public planning process for bringing stakeholders and the community together to develop concepts and design alternatives for access, stewardship, interpretation, and conservation of the Testimonial Gateway tract in the Mohonk Preserve Foothills. The objective of the current planning and design process is site plan approval for the new trailhead from the Town of New Paltz.

The process will provide ample opportunity for the residents of the Town of New Paltz to help shape the site plan so that it meets goals for improved access to the Shawangunks, and encourages healthy lifestyles, public safety, community spirit, economic development, and civic engagement, while also ensuring that the special sense of place and sensitive natural and cultural land features of the site are fully considered in design alternatives.

The need for the trailhead can be articulated in three words: **1) Access:** The project will create a prominent point of entry – easily accessible from downtown New Paltz by car or bicycle – to MP lands and carriage roads, the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, and Scenic Byway. **2) Capacity:** The trailhead will generate 10,000 to 15,000 more visits each year, resulting in new and sustainable net revenues for the Preserve through new memberships and day entrance fees. During peak weekends and the fall foliage season it will serve to redirect visitors from the over-crowded ridge to the villages, trails, farm stands, and other nearby attractions. **3) Responsibility:** The project will develop detailed plans to mitigate dangerous traffic and parking patterns, and rejuvenate an iconic historic structure and surrounding landscape that has been neglected for many years. The project will provide an important bridge between two phases of MP's *Foothills Initiative*, addressing key issues of trailhead design, traffic and parking safety, trail connections, visitor accommodation, historic gatehouse stabilization, and community buy-in. Once completed, the project will enable MP to move to the next phase of the Initiative: Gatehouse repurposing; design and installation of interpretive and educational exhibits; and restoration of the oak alleé, ponds, and carriage roads.

Note: The *Testimonial Gateway Trailhead Project* is referred to as the *Historic Mohonk Gatehouse Trailhead Project* in the November 21, 2012 letter of support.