

Project Background

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 planning firm DiMella Shaffer, and a Preserve staff-board-partner task group that included Town of New Paltz liaisons, 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 project also advances 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.

Mohonk Preserve's 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. Improvements planned for the Mohonk Preserve Foothills parcel include 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 Testimonial Gateway Trailhead Project: The proposed 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 ultimate long-term 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.

The 2013 grant funded a portion of the consultant fee from Barton & Logudice, P.C., which was selected through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) to lead a public planning process for stakeholders and community members to develop concepts and design alternatives for access, stewardship, interpretation, and conservation of the Testimonial Gateway. The objective of the 2013 grant planning and design process was to attain site plan approval for the new trailhead from the Town of New Paltz. Site plan application is anticipated to be submitted to the Town Planning Board on May 28.

The planning process has provided – and will continue to provide – ample opportunity for the residents of the Town of New Paltz to help shape the site plan. The site plan aims to: improve access to the Shawangunks, and encourages healthy lifestyles, public safety, community spirit, economic development, and civic engagement, and ensure that the special sense of place and sensitive natural and cultural land features of the site are fully considered.

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:** During peak weekends and the fall foliage season the trailhead 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 implement the plans to mitigate dangerous traffic and parking patterns, and rejuvenate an iconic historic structure and surrounding landscape that has been neglected for many years. 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.