OCPD Newsletter is Going Digital

While previous newsletters produced by the OC Planning Department have been exclusively in print, we are going digital! Copies of the Resource, the new Orange County Planning Department Newsletter, will be available through email and online at our website. We hope you enjoy the new format.

Reference Documents Now Available Online

As a staff, the Orange County Planning Department will be producing Reference Documents to assist municipalities on various relevant topics as it pertains to agriculture, zoning, economic development, environmental planning, etc. These documents are for your benefit, and can be found on the Orange County Planning Department website. Summaries of the articles can be found on the following page. If you have any topics you would like to see featured, email suggestions to Lburns@orangecountygov.com

Long Range Transportation Plan / Air Quality Conformity Determination Adoptions

The Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC) adopted the OCTC Long Range Transportation Plan and Updated Transportation Air Conformity Determination for Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) on Tuesday, November 17th. The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is one of the products developed, along with the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), as part of the conditions for receiving Federal transportation funding.

As part of this process, OCTC staff must also prepare a transportation/air quality conformity determination regarding fine particulate matter. This analyzed the potential impacts on air quality of transportation projects in the plan, as well as the OCTC TIP. The Conformity process is required by the Clean Air Act and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations to show that transportation projects in both the Plan update and the TIP will not cause new air quality violations, worsen existing conditions, or delay timely attainment of National Ambient Air Quality Standards in accordance NYS Implementation Plan to improve air quality and EPA regulations.
**Complete Streets** are streets that have been designed for all users, not just motor vehicles. The Complete Streets Act, signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo on August 15, 2011, encourages local and state governments to consider implementing Complete Streets design concepts in transportation projects. Complete Streets will look different in each community and can include easy implementation efforts, such as restriping a crosswalk or adding curb cuts so people who use a wheelchair or motorized scooter are able to access the sidewalk. The numerous benefits of implementing Complete Streets include an increase in safety, improved health for people who are now able to walk to more destinations, and economic revitalization.

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban and suburban areas, carrying trash, bacteria, heavy metals, fuel residue and other pollutants at high speeds through a piped collection system to receiving waters that can be rapidly degraded as a result. **Green Infrastructure** is a technique that manages stormwater more naturally, by allowing it to infiltrate into the ground as close as possible to where the rain has fallen. This decreases the stress on stormwater collection systems during large storms, which can typically decrease flooding and property damage. Green Infrastructure solutions range from low-tech and low-cost options like disconnecting your gutter downspout, to higher-tech and higher cost solutions like paving large parking lots with permeable pavement.

As **solar power** continues to expand in the United States, large solar farms have been popping up across the country. While the expansion of renewable energy is undoubtedly a good thing for the nation’s energy portfolio, solar farms are becoming a source of conflict between local residents and solar advocates.

**Form Based Codes** (FBCs) emphasize design concepts aspired by a community’s vision through illustrations and simple diagrams, clearly conveying a community’s intentions for an area. Outlined extensively through websites such as formbasedcodes.org, the FBCs exemplify one of the many free resources available online. These resources can be especially useful for municipalities looking to update their zoning code. Effective September 1st, 2015, the City of Newburgh adopted four Form Based Districts into their zoning code, making the City of Newburgh the first municipality in Orange County to adopt Form Based Codes.

In Orange County, as in other suburban areas, subdivisions are often built on land that was farmland, former farmland, or woodland prior to the development. Such expansion has led to what some might consider “subdivision sprawl”. Widespread residential, commercial, and industrial development degrades the aesthetic value of an area, negatively impacts the environmental resources within an area, and reduces the viability of agriculture in the area. An alternative to conventional subdivisions is the **conservation subdivision**. Within a conservation subdivision, the same number of units are permitted, but the lots are smaller to allow for open space. Also known as “clustering” design, this helps retain the rural aesthetics of the site by retaining open space, thereby reducing aesthetic, environmental, and agricultural impacts on an area.
Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program (HVAEP)
NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets

Maximum Award Amount: No award shall exceed $2.0 million
Deadline: January 29, 2016 at 4:30 p.m. EST via Grants Gateway
Purpose: This grant opportunity is offered to enable eligible applicants to specifically implement Conservation Easement Projects with owners of viable agricultural lands that are at risk of conversion to non-farm uses within the Hudson Valley Region.

For additional information:
https://www.grantsgateway.ny.gov/intelligrants_NYSGG/module/nysgg/goportal.aspx?NavItem1=4&ngoID=5000413
OR www.agriculture.ny.gov/RFPS.html

FY16 Guidelines for Brownfields Assessment Grants
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

EPA provides brownfields funding for three types of grants:
1. Brownfields Assessment Grants – provides funds to inventory, characterize, assess, and conduct planning (including cleanup planning) and community involvement related to brownfield sites.
2. Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Grants – provides funds for a grant recipient to capitalize a revolving fund and to make loans and provide subgrants to conduct cleanup activities at brownfield sites.
3. Brownfields Cleanup Grants – provides funds to conduct cleanup activities at a specific brownfield site owned by the applicant.

Maximum Amount: 223 grants nationally for a total of $54.5 M:
151 Assessment Grants - $34.1 M
60 Cleanup Grants - $11.9 M
12 RLF Grants - $8.5 M

Purpose: EPA’s Brownfields Program provides funds to empower states, communities, tribes, and nonprofits to prevent, inventory, assess, clean up, and reuse brownfield sites.

For More Information: http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/apply-brownfields-grant-funding

2015 Hudson River Estuary Grants
for River Access and River Education
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Maximum Amount: $100,000
Deadline: December 16, 2015

Purpose: To assist Hudson Valley municipalities and organizations build their capacity to implement the Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda Benefit 6: Education, River Access, Recreation and Inspiration.

Monhagen Brook Watershed Planning Process to be Kicked Off this Winter

The Orange County Water Authority was recently awarded a $50,000 grant through the NYS DEC’s Hudson River Estuary Program to complete a comprehensive Watershed Plan for the Monhagen Brook, a subwatershed of the Wallkill River and Hudson River Estuary, which encompasses almost all of the City of Middletown and portions of the Towns of Wallkill and Wawayanda. The Plan will focus on the restoration of the Brook’s banks and channel, protection of the Monhagen Lake drinking water reservoir, identification of strategic locations for green infrastructure and connected green space, improvement of flood resiliency, restoration of habitat, as well as prioritizing sites for riparian buffer protection. As part of the project, OCWA will be assembling a coalition or team of stakeholders, agencies, municipal officials, and project partners to guide the planning process.

A watershed is an area of land that drains precipitation into one location such as a stream or lake. These water bodies supply our drinking water, water for agriculture and manufacturing, offer opportunities for recreation (canoeing, fishing and swimming), and provide habitat to numerous plants and animals. Unfortunately various forms of pollution, including runoff and erosion, can interfere with the health of a watershed. Clean, healthy watersheds depend on an informed public to make the right decisions when it comes to the environment and actions made by the community.

The NYS DEC identified the Monhagen Watershed as an “Impaired” waterbody. “Impaired”, according to the NYS DEC, means that the water body does not support one or more of its intended uses. This could mean that the water is not suitable to drink, swim in or to consume the fish that was caught there. Support of aquatic life, recreational use and aesthetics in Monhagen Brook have all been identified as impaired by various pollutants from point and urban nonpoint sources. Leading causes of pollution may be sediments, bacteria (such as E. coli) and excess nutrients (such as nitrogen and phosphorus). Although nutrients sound like things that belong in a healthy environment, they can cause big problems in a poorly managed watershed. For instance, sediment can suffocate fish by clogging their gills and the presence of bacteria alone can indicate that other viruses and germs can be found in the water as well. Erosion, runoff of animal waste and overflowing of combined sewers are just a few ways these pollutants reach our waters. There is good news though. Many efforts, either big or small can have a positive impact on its health. Through the planning process, the water authority and its partners hope to gain a better understanding of the Monhagen Brook and its Watershed and what short- and long-term steps can be taken to protect and improve water quality.
Where is the Monhagen Brook Watershed?

The Monhagen Brook originates in the Town of Wallkill near Monhagen Lake which serves as the City of Middletown’s water supply reservoir. From there it flows east and south through the Town of Wallkill, the City of Middletown and Wawayanda before entering the Wallkill River, approximately 8 stream miles from its origin. Its visual characteristics change dramatically as it flows through residential neighborhoods, the City’s downtown area, Business Improvement District between Main Street and SUNY Orange, wetlands, and eventually greeting the Wallkill River just north of Goshen.

How Can I Stay Informed?

The Water Authority will be setting up a coalition or team this winter to guide the planning process. To participate and share your ideas, expertise, and passion for your community and the environment please contact the Water Authority at ocwa@orangecountygov.com or call (845) 615-3868. A new webpage will also be set up to provide instant access to the project related material, news, reports, and findings.

Turbidity

Is a measure of relative clarity of a liquid.

Material that causes water to be turbid include clay, silt, finely divided inorganic and organic matter, algae, soluble colored organic compounds, and plankton and other microscopic organisms.


Photo Credit: Eenika Cruz