

**JOHN EALER**  
Chair, Village of Croton-on-Hudson Conservation Advisory Council  
Chair, CLEAN Subcommittee

**January 2, 2025**

Dear Manager Healy, Mayor Pugh and the Board of Trustees,

On behalf of the Croton Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC), I am pleased to submit our year-end report for 2024. This document outlines the council's activities, accomplishments, and contributions to environmental conservation and sustainability within our community.

Thanks to our amazing committee members for a year filled with service. A special thanks again to our former chair, Janet Monahan for her leadership. And thank you for your continued support of our initiatives. We look forward to advancing our shared environmental goals in the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Ealer', written over a light blue horizontal line.

John Ealer  
Chair, Croton-on-Hudson Conservation Advisory Council

## **I. Meetings**

The CCAC held **10 meetings** in 2024, with sessions conducted on the following dates:

- January 23
- February 13
- March 12
- April 9
- May 9
- June 11
- July 9
- September 10
- October 8
- December 10

## **II. Membership**

Currently the committee only has 6 out of its possible 9 slots filled, hence recruitment is an ongoing priority.

**Year-End Members:**

- John Ealer (Chair after December 1)
- Rachel Bernstein
- Sherry Horowitz
- Eva Thaddeus
- Lance Amato
- Halle Clarke (active participant since mid-Year, formally appointed in December)

**Other members during 2024**

- Janet Monahan (Chair until December 1, then resigned)
- Terry McGarty (resigned December 20<sup>th</sup>)

**Liaisons**

- Steven Krisky (Planning Board Liaison)
- Nora Nicholson (Village Trustee Liaison)
- Brian Pugh (Mayor and Village Liaison)

### **III. Key Accomplishments**

**Earth Day 2024**

The CCAC organized its most successful Earth Day event to date, with over 500 attendees and 38 vendors. Activities included a tree giveaway, educational workshops, and family-friendly entertainment. Emphasis was placed on sustainability, banning single-use plastics and encouraging environmental sustainability.

**Repair Café**

The Repair Café initiative provided a space for residents to repair household items, diverting waste from landfills. An event in July featured approximately 50 attendees and successfully fixed about 70 percent of the items they brought, totaling 49 mechanical, sewing, and electronic repairs.

**Tree Committee**

The Tree Subcommittee completed a review of Croton's tree ordinance, providing recommendations to strengthen enforcement and protect local trees. A key suggestion included the establishment of a certified arborist role.

**Trails Committee**

The Trails Committee continued to maintain the Village's extensive network of trails.

**CLEAN Croton Campaign**

The CLEAN team adopted Route 9A for ongoing maintenance, conducted many clean-ups, and collaborated with local organizations, removing over 1,000 pounds of waste throughout the year.

**Dark Skies Initiative**

A Green Living Series presentation on light pollution educated residents about its environmental impacts. The committee proposed village-wide guidelines for outdoor lighting to preserve natural habitats and reduce energy waste.

**Leadership Change**

John Ealer took over from departing Chair Janet Monahan in December, emphasizing continuity and continued expansion of the committee's efforts. The "ex officio" members of the committee were taken off the books to align the committee's membership with enabling laws.

#### **Open Space Inventory and Natural Resource Inventory**

Updating and executing these will be priorities in 2025.

## **IV. SUBCOMMITTEE SUMMARIES**

### **Tree Subcommittee**

The Tree Subcommittee of the CCAC, led by Rachel Bernstein and Sherry Horowitz, evaluated and recommended updates to Croton's tree preservation policies to the Village Board of Trustees. This work stemmed from the recognition that urban forests provide critical environmental benefits, including carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and enhanced biodiversity. The team benchmarked local ordinances, particularly those from Greenburgh, to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in Croton's policies.

A detailed review of the current Croton tree ordinance revealed that, while generally adequate, enforcement mechanisms needed enhancement. The subcommittee recommended hiring or contracting a certified arborist to assess the health of trees and provide guidance during construction projects. The team also proposed revising construction regulations to ensure clear labeling of trees to be preserved, minimizing accidental damage. Additional suggestions included mandating tree replacement during development and strengthening penalties for violations.

A focus for 2025 will be continuing to work with the Board of Trustees as they review and update the Village's tree policies based on the committee's feedback.

### **Trails Committee**

The Trails Committee, led by Terry McGarty, continued its mission to maintain and enhance Croton's extensive trail network in 2024. These trails, essential for recreation and environmental education, faced challenges such as erosion, invasive species, and the aftermath of severe weather events. The committee prioritized these issues while also expanding public awareness of the trails system.

Monthly work sessions tackled various trail maintenance tasks. Volunteers cleared fallen trees, repaired eroded pathways, and installed wooden walkways in perpetually muddy areas. Significant work was completed on the Upper North Highland Trail, where drainage improvements and stabilization efforts were implemented.

A key challenge for 2025 will be replacing Terry, who resigned in December.

### **Garden Club**

The Garden Club's 2024 agenda focused on enhancing Croton's green spaces, promoting pollinator-friendly gardening, and engaging the community through educational initiatives. Eva Thaddeus led the Garden Club, with Halle Clarke's help.

The Garden Club Sponsored or co-sponsored three presentations:

1. "Gardening 101" at the library in February
2. "Planting and Caring for Dahlias" at the Municipal Building in March
3. "Composting and Sheet Mulching" at the Municipal Building in July

The Garden Club also held four garden visits. Three at the homes of members, and one being a walk around the village to visit all four public gardens the club maintains.

Furthermore, the club:

1. Added a small garden at Dobbs Park to the gardens they maintain.
2. Dug our plants out of the Cleveland median strip to keep them safe until the area was redesigned.
3. Maintained our public gardens through monthly work sessions.

Looking ahead, the Garden Club plans to expand its educational programming with winter seminars and spring planting events. The goal is to inspire more residents to participate in creating sustainable landscapes that benefit both the community and the environment. An ongoing project is the development of Pollinator Pathway signs to recognize contributions to sustainable gardening practices.

## **CLEAN Subcommittee**

The CLEAN Subcommittee, led by John Ealer, dedicated 2024 to litter abatement, beautification projects, and public outreach. Adopting Route 9A under the New York State Department of Transportation's Adopt-a-Highway program was a highlight of the year. This initiative formalized the group's commitment to maintaining a critical corridor, ensuring it remained litter-free and visually appealing. In addition to litter abatement, the group planted a pollinator garden at the Senasqua off-ramp, adding notable visual appeal to a key entry point to the community which was otherwise overgrown with invasive Japanese Knotweed.

More than a dozen cleanup events attracted over a hundred participants, including local families, school groups, and civic organizations. These efforts removed over 1,000 pounds of waste from streets, parks, and waterfronts, including roadsides, parklands and public spaces. In particular, hundreds of yards of cable sheath left on the roadside by Verizon were removed.

Notable cleanups included a pre-Earth Day effort at Senasqua Park, which saw record participation, and a September collaboration with Temple Israel and Repair the Sea, focusing on the train station and Croton Bay areas. The subcommittee also piloted a "100-Yard Trash Challenge" during Earth Day, encouraging residents to clean 100 yards around their homes. Public education campaigns highlighted the environmental impacts of litter and microplastic pollution, using social media and community bulletin boards to spread the message.

Looking forward, the subcommittee aims to deepen partnerships with local schools, nearby CAC's and community groups to amplify its work.

## **Repair Cafe Subcommittee**

The CCAC hosted a successful Repair Café in July, with over 50 members of the public attending and presenting over 70 items for repair. Janet Monahan, working with Sherry Horowitz and Lance Amato, spearheaded most of organizational work for this successful event, which has had a very positive response from the community.

The goal of the committee is to conduct two cafes per year, a schedule it plans to return to in 2025.

With Janet's resignation, Sherry and Lance will take over the organization of future events.

## **Green Living Series**

Lance Amato led the effort for a very successful public presentation on Dark Skies at the Croton Library, a presentation that we hope will be the first steps toward an update of Village laws and ordinances to limit light pollution.

The Green Living series will be expanded and refreshed in 2025.

## **Gas Powered Leaf Blower Law Updates**

In 2024, the Croton Conservation Advisory Council (CCAC) continued its efforts to address environmental and community concerns surrounding the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. These devices have long been criticized for their significant greenhouse gas emissions, noise pollution, and detrimental effects on public health. The CCAC's work in this area focused on policy refinement, public education, and collaborative discussions with the Board of Trustees.

A key focus of the CCAC's work was strengthening the enforcement mechanisms of the existing partial ban. The council proposed requiring that landscapers hired by the village exclusively use battery-powered or electric blowers. This measure aimed to set an example for private residents and encourage broader compliance.

### **Collaboration and Future Goals**

The CCAC worked collaboratively with neighboring municipalities, gathering insights from successful policies in Larchmont, Irvington, and Bedford. These communities have implemented stricter regulations on gas-powered leaf blowers, including year-round bans, which provided valuable models for Croton's future efforts.

Looking ahead, the council plans to use 2025 to educate the community on the environmental and physical hazards of gas-powered leaf blowers (as well as all 2-stroke engines) while also promoting awareness and compliance with the law. This educational campaign will be followed in 2026 by a renewed effort to strengthen and expand the Village's existing law.