

Request for Applications: Municipal Technical Assistance for Conservation Overlay Zoning

Cornell University, in partnership with the Hudson River Estuary Program of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, is pleased to announce a free technical assistance opportunity for a municipality in the Hudson River estuary watershed interested in using **conservation overlay zoning** to conserve priority lands and waters to protect biodiversity or wildlife habitat connectivity.

One municipality will be chosen for this assistance opportunity through a competitive application process.

Anticipated program timeline: March 2025 - September 2026

Application deadline: March 3, 2025

Questions? Contact: Christine Vanderlan, christine.vanderlan@dec.ny.gov or 518-402-9424

This technical assistance opportunity is funded by the New York State Environmental Protection Fund through the Hudson River Estuary Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The Estuary Program helps people conserve, restore, and enjoy the Hudson River and its valley, and is guided by a five-year Action Agenda that is implemented through collaborations with many partners including nonprofit organizations, academic and scientific institutions, businesses, local governments, state and federal agencies, and interested citizens. The program focuses on the tidal Hudson and adjacent watershed from the federal dam at Troy to the Verrazano Narrows in New York City, including upper New York-New Jersey Harbor (see map of Hudson River Estuary Program Boundary (PDF)). This RFA is part of the Estuary Program and Cornell University's Conservation and Land Use initiative, which provides training and technical assistance to help municipalities conserve and enhance priority lands and waters in the estuary watershed.

Since 2015, the Estuary Program has assisted numerous watershed communities with inventorying local natural resources, a foundational step that can inform subsequent conservation planning and policy. This opportunity will assist a community with a completed natural resources inventory to take the next step toward enacting environmental policy, and advances the Estuary Program's 2025 goal to support the creation and adoption of at least 25 new practices, plans, and policies by government agencies, NGOs, and land-use decision makers in the estuary watershed to conserve areas recognized as regional conservation priorities for habitat, connectivity, clean water, climate resilience, and scenery. For more information, visit Conservation Planning in the Hudson River Estuary Watershed.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hudson River
Estuary Program



Cornell University

Municipal Technical Assistance for Conservation Overlay Zoning

Background

Conservation overlay zoning is a regulatory tool that creates a special zoning district where an additional set of regulations or incentives is added on top of the rules of the primary zoning districts (e.g., residential, commercial). Overlays may be applied to proactively conserve stream corridors, wildlife habitats, drinking water watersheds, scenic ridgelines, and a variety of other environmentally sensitive areas. Overlay zoning can add substantive restrictions, like changing the allowed uses or dimensional requirements; development setbacks; or required protection of buffer areas or other open space. In addition, overlay zones may include process requirements designed to ensure resources are considered and protected.

Detailed information about conservation overlay zones is available in the following resources:

- guidebook [*Creating Conservation Overlay Zoning*](#)
- recorded webinar [*Conservation Overlay Zoning*](#)
- [*conservation planning website*](#)

Program Overview

The selected municipality will receive legal and planning assistance from Gordon & Svenson LLP to develop conservation overlay zoning, including:

- an introduction to overlay zoning,
- facilitated discussions with the selected community to refine the zoning objectives and policy options
- mapping support to identify and delineate the proposed overlay zone boundaries and define the protected features,
- selection of an appropriate regulatory structure to protect target resources,
- drafting of the overlay zone code and map, and
- presentation of the proposal to the local legislative body and the public.

The municipality will establish a project team consisting of staff and/or volunteers to actively participate in the project. The municipal project team will:

- compile and provide existing plans and studies to identify and evaluate candidate target resources and geographic areas that reflect community conservation priorities (e.g., natural resources inventory or open space plan),
- decide on proposed boundaries of the overlay zone and assist with selecting the regulatory structure,
- review and provide timely feedback on drafts of the zoning,
- attend 6-8 project meetings (1-2 hours each) between April 2025 and March 2026 (meetings involving the project team and the consultants primarily will be held online via Zoom),
- dedicate time between meetings for research, outreach, and document review,
- coordinate public engagement activities including regularly communicating project updates to the public and municipal officials and staff; identifying key stakeholders; soliciting input from stakeholders and the public; and assisting in organizing public meetings.

Anticipated Outcomes

- A draft conservation overlay zoning law, including map.
- Outreach materials to support public participation and understanding of the proposed law, including maps and illustrations.
- Presentation and consultation with the local legislative body, planning and zoning boards, municipal staff, and the public. Presentations and consultations may be virtual, in-person, or hybrid.

Note that the process to adopt overlay zoning may occur outside the project period and is subject to approval by the local legislative body.

How to Apply

Prerequisites:

- Location within the Hudson River Estuary Program boundary
- A municipal natural resources inventory, open space plan, or similar project identifying specific conservation priorities, completed within the past 10 years
- A proposed area or resource to be the focus of the overlay zone.

Please include the following in your application:

1. Name of municipality.
2. Why does your municipality want to establish a Conservation Overlay Zone? What do you hope to achieve through this project? Describe the **specific location or resource of concern**.
3. Is the location or resource of concern mentioned in existing plans (e.g., comprehensive plan, open space plan)? Describe the recommendations related to conservation overlay zoning in municipal plans.
4. Please fill out the checklist of municipal plans, inventories, and policies on the next page.
5. A list of names and board or committee affiliations of at least three people who can commit to working on the project. Provide a letter or email from each confirming their understanding of the commitment and agreement to participate. *Note: Representation from the local legislative board and planning or zoning board is REQUIRED.*
6. Briefly describe any recent environmental or land-use planning initiatives undertaken by members of the project team, or other related experience that is relevant to this project, including public education or outreach.
7. Provide a letter of support from the local legislative body or local executive (supervisor, mayor).
8. Name, email, and phone number of a point person to contact about this application.

Application responses need to be submitted by email **by March 3, 2025** to Christine Vanderlan at christine.vanderlan@dec.ny.gov. The awardee will be notified by March 19 and the technical assistance kickoff meeting will be held in April. The program is free of charge. For questions contact Christine Vanderlan by email at christine.vanderlan@dec.ny.gov or phone at (518) 402-9424.

Inventory, Plan, or Policy	Document title (for plans, inventories) or code reference (for local laws) <i>Please include the full title of the document or local law and the date approved.</i>	Include a web link if it is available online.
community preservation plan		
conservation zoning district		
critical environmental area		
natural resources inventory		
open space inventory		
open space plan		
overlay zones		
rural siting guidelines		
steep slope protection law		
stream setbacks		
stream protection law		
wetland setbacks		
wetland protection law		
other plans or policies		