

Beekman council aims to protect environment

Volunteers work with government, do outreach

By Marsha Leed

As one of the earliest settlements in Dutchess County, Beekman is rich in history and natural beauty.

In recent years, this area has gone from primarily agricultural and rural to more suburban.



Marsha Leed

The Town of Beekman Conservation Advisory Council has been active locally for nine years and is described as a "voice for the environment."

These dedicated volunteers bring diverse experience and life skills to help protect the natural environment.

Conservation advisory councils are volunteer groups created by municipalities to advise in the development, management and protection of natural re-



An information booth by the Beekman Conservation Advisory Council displays information about owls. COURTESY PHOTO

sources, as organized under New York State General Municipal Law. Conservation advisory council members are appointed by the local legislative body and cooperate with other officials.

The Beekman Conservation Advisory Council has been actively involved in a wide variety of local environmental activities, including those concerning land-use decisions. In coordination with the planning board and the town engineer, all new projects that come before

the town planning board are reviewed by conservation advisory council members.

These include streams, wetlands, steep slopes, soils and unique habitats. It often involves Geographic Information System mapping of natural resources. The Geographic Information System organizes geographic information to find interactions and relationships between different types of land-use data.

Several years ago, the Beekman Conservation Advisory

Council was instrumental in receiving a grant from the Hudson River Estuary Program to provide habitat mapping for the town with Hudsonia, a nonprofit environmental research institute. The town matched the grant, and valuable habitat maps have now been completed. Beekman Conservation Advisory Council members also served on a committee to comprehensively review the town zoning code to provide more environmental protections, including increased standards for local wetlands and waterways.

Additional environmental initiatives have included bringing the "Trees for Tribs" program to Beekman. Conservation advisory council members coordinated efforts in November 2011 with 20 Arlington High School volunteers to plant more than 170 native trees and shrubs provided by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. The plantings took place along the east bank of the Whaley Lake Stream to provide shade to the stream and to help stabilize the eroding bank, filter pollutants before they enter the stream and increase

overall biodiversity.

In the past few years, the Beekman Conservation Advisory Council has expanded its membership and gained focus. The committee presently has an opening for one more volunteer member. It has participated in the Beekman Community Day for the past three years and plans to continue public outreach with an upcoming poster about "Beautiful Beekman." Members are also helping revise regulations for timber harvesting to make them more adaptable to landowners and local officials.

There are 19 conservation advisory committees in Dutchess County. All of these committees work with the Environmental Management Council. Since its formation in 1972, the Dutchess Environmental Management Council has been the county's official citizen advisory board on matters affecting the local environment.

Marsha Leed is a registered architect, a LEED accredited professional and a member of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council.