

PHILIPSTOWN Community Congress

Shared priorities for community action

2017 Community Vote Results and Report

November 2017



The Ecological Citizen's Project is a partner organization to the Philipstown Community Congress (PCC) initiative. We work to grow citizen-led campaigns to produce a more just, healthy, democratic and sustainable way-of-life.

Our Philipstown community is the place where some of us were born, where we moved to later in life and had roots take hold, or where we will grow old. Love of our community can unite us. While we have our differences from time to time, we can share in the hope that we will leave our community even better off for the next generation than we found it.

The Philipstown Community Congress (PCC) evolved from the work of volunteers who sought to provide folks with a non-partisan platform to focus on what Philipstown neighbors value and are willing to work for. The idea is that regular people should have the power and opportunity to decide for themselves what's most important to their community. By identifying shared priorities for community action, we have the opportunity to work together, get to know each other better and share the satisfaction of making a difference together.

PCC asked Philipstown residents a simple question: "What do you think should be our top priorities to preserve and promote a strong community?" Over the course of three public forums, community members proposed 40 ideas across a range of issues. We then asked any Philipstown resident age 13 or older to vote for their top 3 priorities online or through a ballot mailed to every home in Philipstown. This report details the results of the 2017 PCC Community Vote.

What's next? Turning most of these ideas into reality will require large scale participation by community members. Many community members who voted indicated that they wanted to learn more about how they can volunteer to help. On Sunday, December 3rd, we'll gather from 2:00pm to 4:00pm (location TBA) to begin to take the first steps to see if Philipstown residents have enough energy to turn these ideas into reality.

To find out more information, please visit: ecologicalcitizens.org/philipstowncommunitycongress.

We hope you'll join us.

Your fellow Philipstown neighbors,

Jason Angell
Jocelyn Apicello
Priscilla Stevens Goldfarb
Jane Marcy

Executive Summary

The Philipstown Community Congress (PCC) organized three public forums in July, August and September 2017. The PCC asked residents of Philipstown, which includes Cold Spring, Garrison, Nelsonville, North Highlands and the Putnam County portion of Continental Village, to present answers to the question: "what do you think should be our top priorities to preserve and promote a strong community?" Forty residents came forward and presented their ideas. The PCC then asked Philipstown residents to identify their top three priorities to help guide community action.

Key results of the community vote include:

- The top community priority amongst respondents was “Biking/walking paths” (415 points), followed by “Clean water” (373 points) and “Teen center” (316 points).
- A total of 790 ballots were cast in the 2017 PCC vote with 755 deemed valid; 471 responses (62.4%) were collected online, 222 (29.4%) were collected through postal mail and 62 (8.2%) were collected at the ballot box locations.
- Forty-three percent of the responses received were from residents who indicated their town/village as Cold Spring; 33.4% indicated they were from Garrison, 10.9% were from North Highlands, 7.1% were from Nelsonville and 5.4% were from Continental Village (9.2% responded as from "Philipstown").
- All Philipstown residents age 13 and older were eligible to vote regardless of party affiliation or registered voter status. While you must be registered to vote and age 18 and older to vote in local elections, the PCC response of 755 ballots represents one-quarter (26.5%) of the voter turnout in Philipstown for the most recent 2015 election (n=2,847).
- Philipstown residents showed a strong desire to engage civically, with 453 respondents (60.0%) providing their email address and/or phone numbers indicating they would like to learn more about how to help work on the proposals they voted for.

Over the coming weeks, the PCC will report these results to community members and the elected bodies of Cold Spring, Nelsonville, and Philipstown and organize a "job fair-style" public forum where all Philipstown residents and community organizations are invited to attend and learn more about how to help work on proposals.

To learn more, please visit: ecologicalcitizens.org/philipstowncommunitycongress.

Methods

Respondents: All residents of Philipstown age 13 years or older¹ were eligible to cast a vote for their top three priorities among the 40 proposed ideas. Philipstown was defined as all non-commercial residences located in zip codes 10516 and 10524. Residents were defined as anyone residing in a household in zip codes 10516 or 10524.

Data collection: Data was collected in three ways.²

(1) Online voting opened on October 1, 2017 and closed on October 31, 2017 at 11:59pm. Online responses were collected via a Google Form which was sent as a link via email and the link was included on the website ecologicalcitizens.org/pcc2017ballot.

(2) Paper ballots were collected at two ballot box locations: Desmond-Fish Library and Butterfield Library. Locked ballot boxes were located in the libraries from October 16 to October 31, 2017 and submitted ballots were retrieved regularly by the data analyst.

(3) Paper ballots were mailed to every non-commercial residence in zip codes 10516 and 10524 on October 16, 2017 (n=4,368 ballots). Each paper ballot included a space for two (2) household members to cast their vote; additional household members were encouraged to vote online. These paper ballots could be mailed back to the PCC with a first-class stamp or could be dropped off at the ballot box locations. Ballots postmarked by October 31, 2017 were included in the sample.

Further recruitment efforts included: (1) sending regular reminder emails to the PCC email list, which included asking recipients to forward the ballot information to their local networks; (2) PCC volunteers tabling in front of Foodtown in Cold Spring on October 22, 2017 to raise awareness of the vote; (3) hanging posters at local business establishments; (4) writing letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers, the PCNR and the Highlands Current, with voting details; (5) placing half-page advertisements in the local newspapers, the PCNR and the Highlands Current, with voting details; (6) making phone calls to remind people to vote; (7) sharing voting details on local Facebook groups.

Measures: The following data were collected on all ballot forms: (1) top priority; (2) second priority; (3) third priority; (4) first and last name; (5) village/town of residence; and (6) an option to stay connected and learn more about how to help work on the proposals voted on, including a space to provide email address and/or phone number. The online ballot collected the following additional

¹ This age limit was selected because it is similar to the age eligibility for community-wide participatory budgeting initiatives in New York City and Hartford Decides.

² Research evidence suggests that online data collection methods underrepresent older adults and low-income adults. For this reason, the PCC implemented both postal/paper ballot methods and online voting.

information: (1) street address; and (2) confirmation that the respondent was 13 years or older. Full name and street address were collected for resident verification purposes.

Priorities were arranged on the paper ballot and online ballot in numerical order in the order they were presented at the Philipstown Community Congress forums. There were forty proposals in total and they are available for review on the website ecologicalcitizens.org/pccproposals. Respondents wrote-in the numbers one (1) through forty (40) on the paper ballot to indicate their selection for priorities. The online ballot utilized a drop-down list of proposals with the same number identifiers and respondents clicked on their selection.

Data analysis: Online vote data was exported as an Excel spreadsheet. All data was saved on a password-protected computer and only the data analyst and an independent reviewer were allowed to review the data. Paper ballot data was entered by the data analyst into an Excel spreadsheet. All data was saved on a password-protected computer and the paper ballots were stored in a locked filing cabinet. The two data files were then merged and the analyst analyzed data using Microsoft Excel and the statistical software SPSS.

The data analyst cleaned the data accordingly: (1) the analyst checked the data for duplicate names (if duplicated, the analyst deleted entries that had entered the same priority choices and contacted respondents with discordant entries to confirm their selections; if respondents did not respond the analyst selected the most recent entry); (2) the analyst checked for multiple votes from a single street address (if any address indicated four or more votes from that address, the analyst would contact the household to verify eligible voters; four addresses were flagged with four entries and the analyst verified they were unique respondents); (3) the analyst randomly selected 50 reported street addresses and verified that they were true street addresses in zip codes 10516 or 10524; (4) if a priority entry was difficult to interpret (e.g., number written on a paper ballot was difficult to read; respondent entered more than one number on the priority line, respondent wrote-in a response other than the 40 valid response options), the analyst first attempted to contact the respondent for verification; if the respondent did not report an email/phone, the data was entered as missing; (5) if a ballot did not have full name and/or street address it was excluded from the aggregate results as an invalid entry because the analyst could not verify residency in Philipstown. The PCC consulted with an independent reviewer to review the process and be present during a phase of the data entry and cleaning.

The priority choices were ranked (top choice, second choice, third choice), so data was weighted to indicate the ranking. For example, top choice proposals received a score of "3;" second choice proposals received a score of "2;" and third choice proposals received a score of "1." This coding gave the top priority a higher "score" and the third priority the lowest "score." Once aggregated, the proposal with the highest total score is considered the "top priority" amongst community

respondents; the proposal with the second highest score is considered the "second priority;" and so on.³⁴

The response number was also tallied. Philipstown has a 13-and-older population of 8,182 according to the 2015 American Community Survey. While paper ballots were mailed to each Philipstown household (4,368 ballots mailed) and the online ballot was open to all residents, this is not a probability sample. Thus, the results reported indicate the priorities *among those residents* who voted only. The results may not be representative of the entire Philipstown community.⁵

³ Votes were also tallied in a non-weighted fashion. That is, each priority selection was counted as one (1) vote. Some respondents could have interpreted the instructions as selecting three (3) priorities total that they support, not necessarily ranking them. The non-weighted ranking was checked against the weighted ranking for discrepancies and found none in the top five selections.

⁴ De-identified data is available upon request.

⁵ For example, residents who do not read English will be underrepresented in this sample because ballot materials were available in English only. Another example, residents who do not live in Philipstown full-time may not have been in Philipstown during the one-month voting window to receive their ballot and are thus not represented in the sample.

Results

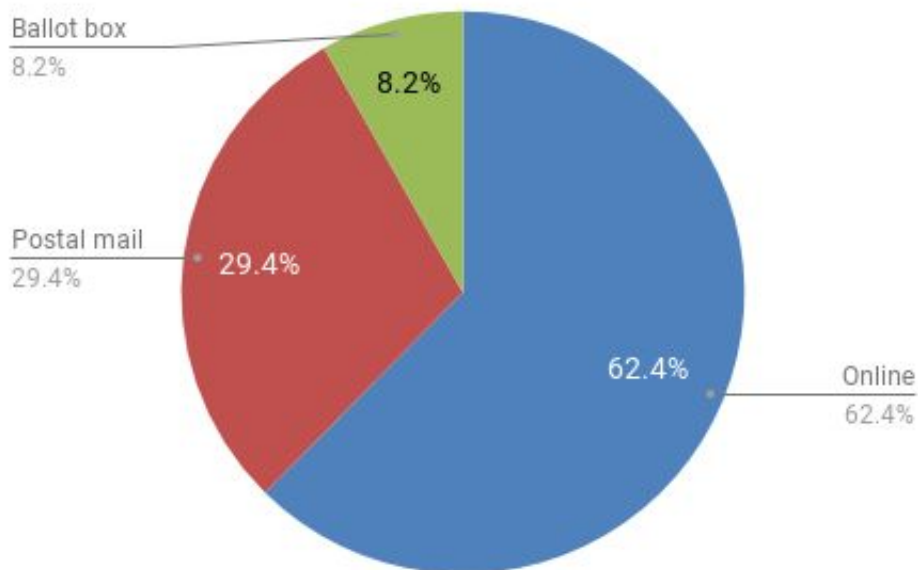
Community Participation

A total of 790 ballots were cast in the 2017 PCC. Thirty-five ballots could not be included in the vote tally because (a) they were duplicate ballots (n=9); (b) all priority responses were invalid selections (i.e., write-in responses or did not select a number from 1 through 40; n=8); (c) the respondent did not provide a name/address for residence verification (n=7); or (d) their postal ballot was postmarked after October 31 (n=11). This left 755 valid responses and suggests a "response rate" of 9.2% among residents age 13 and older. All further results are reported as priorities *among those residents who voted only* and do not represent the entire Philipstown community.

Furthermore, Philipstown residents age 13 and older were eligible to vote regardless of party affiliation or registered voter status. While you must be registered to vote and age 18 and older to vote in local elections, the PCC response of 755 ballots represents one-quarter (26.5%) of the voter turnout in Philipstown for the recent 2015 local election (n=2,847).

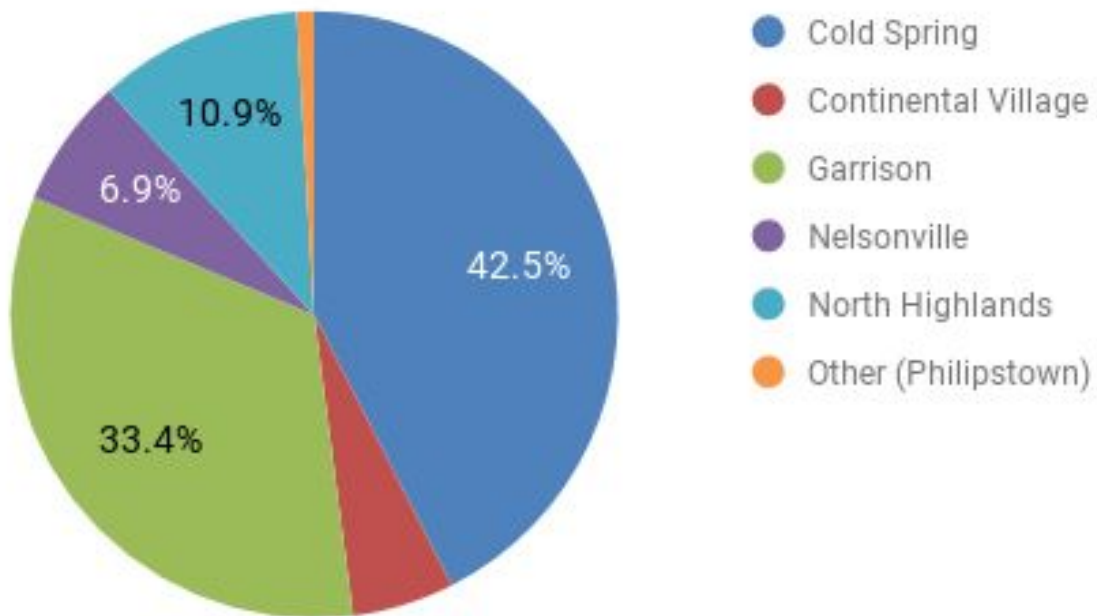
Among the valid ballots, respondents cast their votes using the following methods: 471 responses (62.4%) were cast online; 222 (29.4%) were collected through postal mail; and 62 (8.2%) were collected at the ballot box locations (Figure 1).

Figure 1. How did respondents cast votes?



Forty-three percent of the responses received were from residents who indicated their town/village as Cold Spring; 33.4% indicated they were from Garrison, 10.9% were from North Highlands, 6.9% were from Nelsonville and 5.4% were from Continental Village (9.2% responded as from "Philipstown"). See Figure 2.⁶

Figure 2. Who voted?



⁶ These percentages must be interpreted with caution: because residents living in Continental Village are accustomed to writing "Garrison, NY 10524" for their postal address, they may have under-selected Continental Village on this ballot. Similarly, because residents of Nelsonville or North Highlands are accustomed to writing "Cold Spring, NY 10516" for their postal address, they may have under-selected Nelsonville and/or North Highlands on this ballot.

Community Priorities

The "Biking/walking paths" proposal received the highest total score (415) and is the top priority among those Philipstown residents who voted. "Clean water" received the second highest total score (373), followed by "Teen center" (316). The following proposals represent the fourth through tenth priorities: "School consolidation," "Climate smart community,"⁷ "Sales tax distribution," "Rec center improvements," "Essential care at Butterfield," "Drug czar," and "Comprehensive plan" (Table 1). All 40 of the proposals received some votes; the full ranking is presented in Appendix A.

Table 1. Top 10 proposals in the 2017 Philipstown Community Congress vote (n=755).

Rank order ⁱ	Proposal	Proposal summary	Rank score ⁱⁱ	Potential volunteers ⁱⁱⁱ
1	Biking/walking paths	Invest in safe biking and walking paths throughout Philipstown.	415	144
2	Clean water	Create community support for ensuring clean water for the future.	373	91
3	Teen center	Create a teen center in Cold Spring, run by students and supervised by adults.	316	97
4	School consolidation	Explore the possibility of consolidating the Haldane and Garrison School districts.	284	87
5	Climate Smart community	Help Philipstown create a sustainable future, join the Climate Smart Community Project.	266	82
6	Sales tax distribution	Demand more sales tax dollars from the county to support and improve Philipstown.	265	70
7	Rec center improvements	Improve the Philipstown Rec Center, e.g., by adding a pool, tennis courts, or fitness center	229	75
8	Essential care at Butterfield	Provide essential emergency services at the former Butterfield Hospital medical center site.	223	51
9	Drug Czar	Create an elected or appointed paid Town position of Drug Czar to address the epidemic in Philipstown.	213	62
10	Comprehensive Plan	Continue efforts and update Philipstown's Comprehensive Plan.	149	46

ⁱ All 40 proposals were ranked but only the top 10 are presented here; full ranking is available upon request.

ⁱⁱ A "top priority" vote earned 3 points; a "second priority" vote earned 2 points; a "third priority" vote earned 1 point; then points were totaled across all ballots received.

ⁱⁱⁱ The number of residents who voted who indicated they would like to learn more about how to work on the priorities they voted for by providing email and/or phone number contact information.

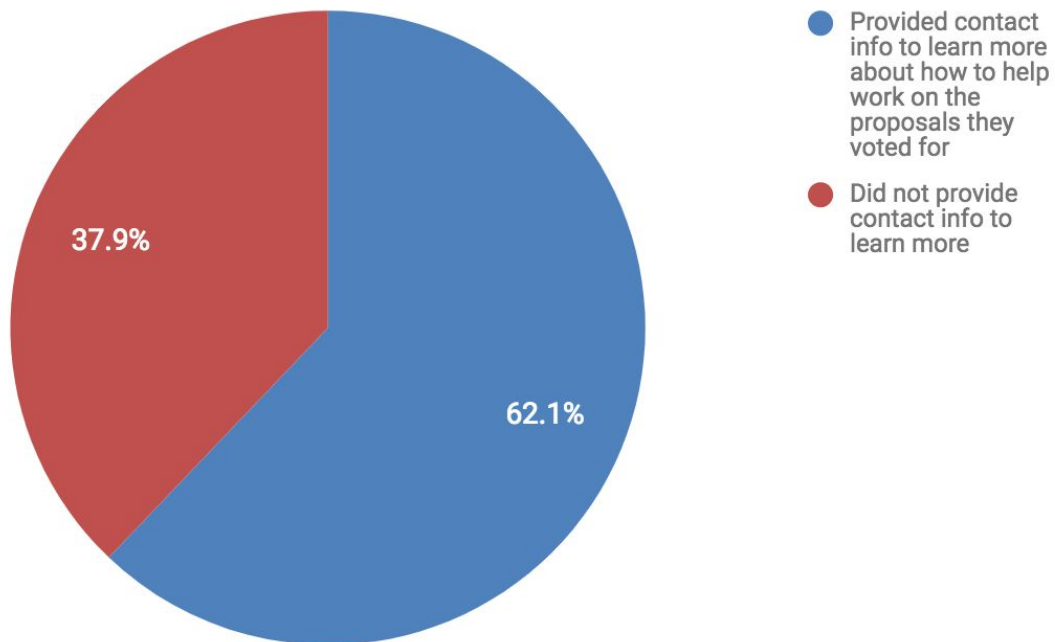
⁷ The PCC was committed to letting each proposal remain independent for the vote if the proposer chose to do so. That said, proposals could arguably be combined. For example, proposal "5. Climate smart community" and "14. Sustainable township" are similar in their descriptions and one could consider consolidating them. If these two proposals were consolidated, a new proposal of "Climate smart community/Sustainable township" could have a total rank score of approximately 356 (there were 12 respondents who selected *both* 5 and 14), making it a higher priority.

Potential Civic Engagement

While one core goal of the PCC was to identify shared community priorities, a second core goal was to create opportunities for community members to volunteer to turn the proposals they care about into reality.

Of the 755 total respondents, 469 (62.1%) provided their email address and/or phone numbers indicating they would like to learn more about how to help work on the proposals they voted for (Figure 3). In fact, all 40 proposals had respondents indicate they would like to learn more. Table 1 indicates the number of potential volunteers for each of the top ten proposals among those residents who voted.

Figure 3. Potential Volunteer power



Next Steps

The PCC seeks to provide a nonpartisan platform for Philipstown residents to share ideas about how to “preserve and promote a strong community” and use the voting process to identify shared priorities for community action. The PCC will report these results to the elected bodies of the Village of Cold Spring, Village of Nelsonville and the Town of Philipstown at their November/December public meetings. In addition, the PCC will report these results publicly through press releases, directly to participants in the PCC public forum and voting process, and by posting on local Facebook groups and the Ecological Citizen's Project website (ecologicalcitizens.org).

All of these proposals would have varied paths towards progress: some would require leadership by engaged community members and organizations, others would require local government leadership and many would require a mix of both. In fact, several of the issues proposed through the PCC process are already being worked on by our local governments, private citizens, and local coalitions and organizations. We hope the PCC process helps catalyze greater civic engagement across many of these issue areas, bolstering existing efforts and seeding new ones if community support emerges.

Beyond serving as a facilitator for the proposal of ideas and identification of shared community priorities, the PCC plans to help facilitate further civic engagement by organizing a "job fair-style" public forum where all Philipstown residents and community organizations are invited to attend and learn more about how to help work on the proposals. The people who proposed the 40 ideas will be contacted to verify if they will be willing or able to coordinate the planning and implementation of their proposed ideas. Those who can will attend the forum and be able to meet with other Philipstown residents who would like to help. All proposals that Philipstown residents voted on can be represented at the public forum because each proposal received public support through the voting process.

The public forum will present an opportunity for those already involved with the issues to share their work and broaden their network. Furthermore, some of the proposals might be appropriately consolidated, depending on resident interest, which could streamline implementation and build a larger pool of community volunteers willing to work on initiatives. If you, or an organization or group you are working with, are interested in working together on initiatives with other interested community members, we encourage you to attend the forum to broaden support for your work.

Appendix A: Final ranking of the 40 proposals in the 2017 PCC

Table A. Final ranking of the 40 proposals in the 2017 Philipstown Community Congress vote (n=755).

Rank order	Proposal	Proposal summary	Rank score ^{i,ii}
1	Biking/walking paths	Invest in safe biking and walking paths throughout Philipstown.	415
2	Clean water	Create community support for ensuring clean water for the future.	373
3	Teen center	Create a teen center in Cold Spring, run by students and supervised by adults.	316
4	School consolidation	Explore the possibility of consolidating the Haldane and Garrison School districts.	284
5	Climate Smart community	Help Philipstown create a sustainable future, join the Climate Smart Community Project.	266
6	Sales tax distribution	Demand more sales tax dollars from the county to support and improve Philipstown.	265
7	Rec center improvements	Improve the Philipstown Rec Center, e.g., by adding a pool, tennis courts, or fitness center	229
8	Essential care at Butterfield	Provide essential emergency services at the former Butterfield Hospital medical center site.	223
9	Drug Czar	Create an elected or appointed paid Town position of Drug Czar to address the epidemic in Philipstown.	213
10	Comprehensive Plan	Continue efforts and update Philipstown's Comprehensive Plan.	149
11	Ban plastic bags	Ban plastic bags from all stores in Philipstown.	139
12	Emphasize education	Encourage a renewed emphasis on education.	125
13	Heroin Speaks	Create a harm reduction coalition - Heroin Speaks - to address the opioid epidemic in our community.	124
14	Municipal composting	Create a municipal composting program that would convert mountains of trash to mountains of mulch.	120
15	Sustainable township	Work collectively to minimize environmental impact and live healthfully.	114
16	Improve road maintenance	Encourage a dialogue on road maintenance and expenses and improve on what exists.	102

17	Community garden	Create a community garden in Philipstown that includes a workshop and greenhouse.	85
18	Ban cell tower	Ban the building of a cell tower overlooking the Cold Spring Cemetery.	84
19	Finding common ground	Create a debate series, book club for neighborly discourse between left and right.	79
20	Ban Styrofoam	Eliminate single use polystyrene/Styrofoam packaging from Philipstown.	78
21	Participatory budgeting	Institute a process where community members directly vote on how to spend part of a public budget.	74
22	Local hydroelectric power	Investigate use of existing water infrastructure to generate micro-hydroelectric power.	71
23	Public transportation	Provide public transportation on the West side of the County.	66
24	Aging in place	Create a "senior census" of the town to ensure seniors can be evacuated in an emergency.	63
25	Local civic engagement	Encourage participation in the community, through voting, attending Town Board meetings, etc.	58
26	EV charging stations	Install publicly accessible electric vehicle charging stations in Philipstown.	52
27	Opt-out electricity	Require Central Hudson to enroll new accounts in local renewable electricity plans.	55
28	Localize Main Street	An initiative to encourage locals to park it and walk, shop locally, and meet neighbors on Main Street.	47
29	Cold Spring boatyard	Move forward with a shovel-ready project to build a boatyard on the CS waterfront.	42
30	Performing arts center	Build a Performing Arts Center where after-school classes and performances will take place.	38
31	Picking it up	Encourage individuals to pick-up trash on roadways, sidewalks and in the woods of our community.	<30
32	Safe Metro-North transport	Request that state and county officials work with residents to ensure a safe Metro-North.	<30
33	Safety and sharing	Investigate ways to promote safety and sharing of roadways between motorists and bicyclists.	<30
34	Sowing seeds of love	Residents can grow gardens for the Philipstown food pantry or share a portion of an established garden bounty.	<30

35	Wildlife-proof trash receptacle	Put wildlife-proof trash cans at Stony Point to reduce litter.	<30
36	Community fair	Organize a fair to disseminate information on implementation of Climate Smart goals.	<30
37	Build another school	Consider building a Philipstown school in Continental Village.	<30
38	Sister City	Join the Sister City program to act locally and think globally.	<30
39	School-library path	Create a right-of-way path for Garrison School students to walk to the Desmond Fish Library.	<30
40	Rape crisis center	Ensure rape crisis services are easily accessible to Philipstown residents.	<30

ⁱ A "top priority" vote earned 3 points; a "second priority" vote earned 2 points; a "third priority" vote earned 1 point; then points were totaled across all ballots received.

ⁱⁱ Proposals ranked 31 through 40 received rank scores of <30; actual rank scores are available upon request.

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WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR PHILIPSTOWN?

To read the full proposals put forward
by Philipstown residents, please visit a
ballot location or go online to:
ecologicalcitizens.org/pccproposals



Special thanks to Jenn Giachinta for her design work on the ballot.