

Hudson Valley Community Congress (HVCC) Initiative



Philipstown Community Congress public forum, St. Philip's Church, Garrison, NY

We began with a simple idea: regular people should have more control over the decisions that impact their lives. The Hudson Valley Community Congress (HVCC) is an experiment in building new, postpartisan Democratic institutions that give people the opportunity to say what they care most about, to identify shared priorities through a community vote, and to engage in becoming part of the solution.

Our vision for the future includes active community congresses across the Hudson Valley, not only revealing community majorities around local issues but communicating across participating communities to define shared priorities at the regional, state and federal levels. We have just concluded our successful demonstration in the Town of Philipstown. Here's a glance at how the process worked and the impact its already had:

Hearing People

We asked residents of Philipstown 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, participating community members had three minutes (strictly enforced!) to present their ideas. The public forums concluded with beer, wine, and good, local food giving participants a chance to connect and socialize. Residents proposed 40 ideas across a range of issues. To read a summary of all proposals, please visit ecologicalcitizens.org/pccproposals.

Community Voting

Unlike our regular voting experience that asks us to choose between candidates along partisan lines, we asked residents to vote for the top three community priorities they cared about the most regardless of political affiliation. Any Philipstown resident age 13 or older was eligible to vote via an on-line ballot, mail-ballot or at drop off locations. While not representative of *all* residents, the results revealed shared community priorities across all participants.

PHILIPSTOWN
Community Congress

Shared priorities for community action

**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

NELSONVILLE
NORTH HIGHLANDS
GARRISON
CONTINENTAL VILLAGE
COLD SPRING

VOTE for your top priorities by **October 31, 2017**
All Philipstown residents age 13 years and older are eligible to vote.

Our experiment in 21st Century democracy launches in Philipstown, NY with a ballot mailed to 4,300 homes.

Table 1: Top Proposals in the 2017 PCC Vote

Rank order ⁱ	Proposal	Rank score ⁱⁱ	Potential volunteers ⁱⁱⁱ
1	Biking/walking paths	415	144
2	Clean water	373	91
3	Teen center	316	97
4	School consolidation	284	87
5	Climate Smart community	266	82
6	Sales tax distribution	265	70

PCC Voting Results

A total of 755 valid ballots were cast in the pilot 2017 PCC vote, which represented one-quarter (26.5%) of the voter turnout in Philipstown for the most recent 2015 election. Even more hopefully, Philipstown residents showed a 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. We published the results publicly to share with other residents, local elected officials and other community leaders. To read the full results report, please visit ecologicalcitizens.org/philipstowncommunitycongress/

Community Impact

Revealing community priorities around particular issues has proven to be a powerful tool for change, galvanizing action by citizens, community organizations and local government. In a few short months, the PCC process has already had an impact:

- As part of their “What the Candidates Say” article, the Highlands Current newspaper asked candidates for local office: “The Philipstown Community Congress gathered 40 ideas “to preserve and promote a strong community”. Which two should be priorities?”
- As a result of a PCC forum, the Hudson Highlands Land Trust has launched a town-wide Clean Water initiative. As Executive Director Michelle Smith noted, “The Philipstown Community Congress (PCC) occurred at a time when we were embarking on a major initiative to connect more people to land conservation by focusing on the benefits to water supplies. The PCC proved valuable in energizing the Clean Water Initiative though the recruitment of volunteers and press coverage that we would not have achieved otherwise. Now we are in a great position to garner both municipal support and grant funding to move this initiative forward.
- Following a proposal at a PCC forum, the Town of Philipstown created a position to coordinate responses to the opioid crisis.
- Following a proposal at a PCC forum, the Town of Philipstown created the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee.



“I think it is critical for people to get engaged with their local government. The Community Congress model is a tool to bring people together to discuss issues of significance that are not only local but global. Citizen action is needed on so many important initiatives and the Community Congress can provide another conduit for local leaders to open the dialogue that ultimately leads to positive outcomes.”

- Richard Shea
Supervisor
Town of Philipstown