



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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Legislature Appropriates \$2.1 Million American Rescue Plan Act Funds to Improve Ulster County's Trail Infrastructure

Ulster County partners with Open Space Institute to rebuild three sections of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and O&W Rail Trail.

KINGSTON, NY—The Ulster County Legislature allocated \$2.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds this evening to establish three rail trail improvement projects that will grow local economies and enhance the mental health and quality of life of area residents.

The county has partnered with the Open Space Institute to rebuild and improve sections of the Wallkill Valley and Ontario & Western (O&W) Rail Trails. The trail infrastructure improvements will provide access to scenic views along Rondout Creek, further the completion of the 29-mile rail trail between the City of Kingston and the Village of Ellenville, and a direct feeder trail connecting the Village of New Paltz to the 750-mile Empire State Trail.

Trail infrastructure improvements will include grading, vegetation removal, improved drainage and structural enhancements, upgrades to the safety of existing bridges and road crossings, tread replacements, fences, and trail resurfacing. Improvements will also provide universal accessibility access points, welcoming trailheads, and improved signage.

- **Project 1:** Restores a 5.45-mile corridor of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail between the Village of New Paltz and the Town of Gardiner. Project funding total: \$895,000. Expected completion date: June 2023.
- **Project 2:** Restores a 3.2-mile corridor of Ontario & Western (O&W) Rail Trail connecting the hamlets of Accord in the Town of Rochester and the hamlet of Kerhonkson within the Town of Wawarsing. Project funding total: \$565,000. Expected completion date: June 2023.
- **Project 3:** restores a two-mile corridor of the O&W Rail Trail between the hamlet of Napanoch and the Village of Ellenville. Project funding total: \$640,000. Expected completion date: November 2023.

The Open Space Institute will contribute \$95,000 worth of in-kind project management services to develop the projects.

“Decades of OSI’s strategic land protection throughout the Shawangunks and Ulster County improves the public’s access to nature and makes parks and trails more available and welcoming to everyone,” said OSI president and CEO, **Kim Elliman**. “Thank you to the Ulster County Legislature and County Executive Pat Ryan for sharing in this vision for conservation and safe, accessible, and equitable recreation and transportation options for the residents of Ulster County and the visiting public.”

Chair Tracey Bartels (Towns of Gardiner and Shawangunk, District 16), said, “Our county’s long partnership and collaboration with the Open Space Institute has made Ulster County a world-renown destination. Their projects



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include the Ashokan Rail Trail, Rosendale Trestle, Northern Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, River to Ridge Trail, Bluestone Wild Forest Trails, Carriage Roads at Minnewaska, and the Lake Minnewaska Visitor Center.”

Chair Bartels adds, “Countywide, our trails receive over 600,000 visits per year and contribute more than \$10 million to the local economy annually. They provide equitable access to nature, open space, and safe recreation.”

“Before the global pandemic, I don’t believe any of us fully appreciated how critical our parks and trails are to the health and wellbeing of not only our residents but to all who visit Ulster County. The pandemic revealed that our trails are not only valued transportation infrastructure but are also a vital part of Ulster County’s public health infrastructure,” said Bartels.

“Over the past two years, the County’s trail systems have provided extraordinary benefits as people turned to outdoor spaces to connect with nature and each other,” said **Peter Karis**, OSI’s vice president for Parks and Stewardship. “Building on our River-to-Ridge Trail, Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, Ashokan Rail Trail, and Minnewaska carriage road successes, OSI is proud and excited to partner with Ulster County to support its communities recovering from the pandemic. It’s partnerships like this that make all the difference.”

Legislator Peter Criswell (City of Kingston, District 7) said, “Trails merit American Rescue Plan funding. They are accessible and equitable spaces for all and provide huge public health benefits—outdoor activity is beneficial for stress reduction and physical and mental health. In addition to the health benefits, trails revitalize local communities and economies.”

“After the long and challenging years of the pandemic, the planned improvements to the Wallkill Valley and O&W Rail Trails will grow local businesses, promote good mental health, and allow residents and visitors alike to enjoy the natural beauty of Ulster County,” said **Legislator Thomas Corcoran** (Town of Marlborough, District 11), deputy chair of the ARPA Special Committee.

Physician and Ulster County Legislator Kathy Nolan (Towns of Denning, Hardenburgh, Olive and Shandaken, District 22) noted, "With these trail projects, Ulster County and the Open Space Institute are joining together to extend the well-documented health and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation to underserved residents and regions of our county." Nolan adds, "Our regional trail network played an oversized role in providing a safe refuge for residents during the early phases of the coronavirus pandemic, while also supporting a sustainable, low-carbon portion of our tourism economy."

“We applaud Chair Tracey Bartels, members of the Legislature, and County Executive Patrick Ryan for acting to significantly expand Ulster County’s signature shared-use trail system and municipal parks. Tonight’s approval acknowledges the vital benefits Ulster County’s premier trails and parks have provided throughout the pandemic—for active transportation, recreation, and as essential public health infrastructure,” said **Kevin D. Smith**, chair of the Ulster County Trails Advisory Committee. “These new projects will significantly extend those benefits to tens of thousands more residents in four municipalities, as well as to the many visitors to our County.”

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