Dear Friends,

It is tough to resist the draw of the Hudson North Bay, a place that is so closely connected to the city, yet still feels undiscovered. Even in its present state, without formal paths or management, it evokes the feelings that the best-planned parks inspire – anticipation, discovery, and wonder. The Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC) is pleased to share a vision for the North Bay that connects people with nature and conserves the natural features of the site. This is a less is more vision, of working with what is there. It also has some big ideas, inspired by the lands and waters of the North Bay and the potential connections between the city and vast areas of adjacent open space.

In 2009-2011, CLC, with the support of the City of Hudson and Columbia County, completed a Concept Master Plan for the North Bay Recreation and Natural Area. This plan provides a basis for discussion and decision-making by the City, the County, and other key stakeholders about the future of the North Bay. The Concept Master Plan documented and described the area much more thoroughly than had been done before. It addressed the challenges associated with the site, and also the many exciting possibilities. A key question was whether the goals of public recreation and conservation would be compatible with the closed landfill at the center of the site. In developing this plan, CLC commissioned a report on the condition of the landfill and a Natural Resources Inventory. (These reports and the full Concept Master Plan remain available electronically at www.clctrust.org.)

The Concept Master Plan was more vision than specific plan. In 2014, the City and the County finalized a Memorandum of Understanding in which each pledged to collaborate in moving forward, in partnership with CLC. A new phase of planning is about to begin, thanks to a grant to Columbia County from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The grant will help fund the planning of trails and public access, an important first step. The City and County, their residents and others will shape what happens next as together we move toward transforming this precious and special place. We offer this summary of the Concept Master Plan as an aid in your own explorations and visions for its future.

Sincerely,

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Galvan Foundation, which made this publication possible, and the generous assistance of Jonathan Lerner in reviewing and editing the text. We also recognize the Hudson River Foundation and the Catskill-Olana Mitigation Fund for providing funding for the Concept Master Plan and the research that led up to it.

The proposal for the North Bay Recreation and Natural Area in Hudson, New York is to create a public park and conservation area offering exceptional beauty, the natural resources of the Hudson River estuary, education about human settlement and industry along the river, and access to a trail network through 1,000 acres of conserved land. The most exciting part of this vision is how seamlessly it connects the city with nature.
Embrace the Waterfront

There are still too few places in Columbia County along the Hudson River where there is physical or even clear visual access to the riverfront. Hudson is fortunate to have the Henry Hudson Waterfront Park, which also provides a venue for entertainment. But natural areas such as the North Bay site – offering water access, proximity to high value ecosystems, and exceptional opportunities for wildlife observation – are exceedingly rare, especially in such close proximity to an urban center.

Expand Connectivity

One of the strongest arguments for developing the North Bay as a recreation and natural area is that it is already centrally located in the middle of existing pedestrian, trail, and open space resources and could serve as a hub for connecting these resources. Thus it offers the potential to create a major regional recreation destination in the City of Hudson.

Conserve and Enhance Habitat

Both site development and the programming and management of a North Bay Recreation and Natural Area must be done in a manner that conserves and enhances the rich ecosystem there. The chief strategy is to avoid fragmentation of habitat by selectively making use of existing infrastructure and already disturbed areas – roads, paved areas, buildings, and paths. A related strategy is to maintain continuity with adjacent habitat, including the Greenport Conservation Area.

Encourage a Natural Laboratory

A North Bay Recreation and Natural Area can be a permanent classroom and field research laboratory for the study of its ecosystem and natural processes. Schools, afterschool programs and youth organizations all can take advantage of this unique area. The area also offers opportunities for research to students at scientific and educational institutions in the region.

Plan for the Future

The North Bay is ever changing. Planning for the park should consider the long-term changes that can be anticipated. By the year 2026, it is expected that the landfill will have reached the end of its required monitoring life. While the options for the site can be expected to remain restricted, there may be new opportunities at that time, such as the potential to thoroughly remove the gas vent system.

Build Upon the Synergies of Nature and Culture

The North Bay site is both a significant ecosystem and a complex of land uses – each of them with their own value. The most sustainable way to protect the natural features is to acknowledge and integrate the site’s cultural values.

Guiding Principles

Visit the North Bay, and you begin to understand that while its name and its formal designation as a “significant habitat” derive primarily from the tidal marsh, the site is an integral part of a much larger complex of natural, cultural, and historic resources.

As part of the Hudson River estuary, North Bay is one piece of a huge hydrologic network that connects the river’s headwaters and all of its tributaries to the Atlantic Ocean. Locally, the North Bay is at the southern extent of the approximately 1,600-acre Stockport Creek and Flats, a New York State-designated Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat that extends for seven miles from Hudson north to the Town of Stuyvesant. Conserving North Bay would enhance the protection of this important wildlife habitat.

As part of the Concept Master Plan, CLC commissioned a Natural Resource Inventory, which identifies the different types of habitats, important species of wildlife, and the conditions of the site’s natural features. The identified habitats include tidal and forested wetlands, floodplain forest, mixed deciduous upland forest, and successional fields. There are two stream-fed wetland/stream complexes east of the landfill, as well as pocket wetlands within the forests, all ecologically valuable. The floodplain forests within the bay area are particularly sensitive because they exist only as small patches. Nonetheless, these forests offer a measure of protection to the marsh from runoff generated in the adjacent upland areas. They also add to the species diversity by providing another habitat for wildlife.

The marsh itself has historically been exposed to a wide range of contaminants from the landfill, the sewage treatment plant, dumping, and industrial uses. Invasive plant monocultures have established in both the marsh and upland areas. The landfill surface consists of mostly non-native grasses, and frequent mowing has prevented other species from establishing there. The Natural Resource Inventory, which you can download at www.clctrust.org, recommends ways to restore and manage wildlife habitat.
A one-mile long Access-for-All trail, which can be used by people with mobility and sight problems.

A spur trail leading to a second trailhead at the Greenport Town Park.

A 1.8-mile connector trail linking the Greenport Conservation Area trail system to two other locations along the river:
- The Stockport Wildlife Management Area managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and
- Scenic Hudson’s Harrier Hill Park, both in the Town of Stockport.

Another trail connects to Hudson High School. With the creation of the park, all of these natural areas and trails would become seamlessly accessible from the city.

In time, connections could be made to Promenade Hill and Henry Hudson Waterfront Parks.

The City also owns a parcel at the extreme southwest limit of the study area, near a trestle over the inlet from the Hudson River to the North Bay, which offers access to and from the bay for canoes and kayaks. Seasonal cabins and houseboats in this area were part of what was known as the Fugary Boat Club, which was closed in 2012.

North Bay offers multiple opportunities for connections to a trail network accessible to diverse users. The most significant of these, from the standpoint of access to open space and the conservation of significant habitat, are in the 714-acre Greenport Conservation Area to the north, in the Town of Greenport.
A park that merges city with countryside

The ease with which Hudson residents and visitors could access the North Bay is one of its most attractive features. It is not far-fetched to picture bikers from the Greenport Conservation Area passing through and visiting the city for lunch, students walking from Hudson High School to field classes at the edge of the water, or visitors to the FASNY Museum of Firefighting using an accessible trail to access the upland areas of the site with its fabulous river and mountain views.

A park so intimately connected with the urbanized areas of Hudson will offer numerous benefits to the city. Parks function as communal space. They contribute to public health and wellness, and open up opportunities for new programmatic partnerships with municipal agencies, neighborhood groups, businesses, and cultural organizations. Parks can spur economic development as well.

Ecological Significance

Conserved tracts of this size are exceedingly rare within the Hudson River estuary and its migratory flyway. The site offers a variety of different habitat types in itself. Apart from the tidal wetland in the bay, hardwood forests, successional fields, and forested stream-fed wetlands are found on site, providing habitat for birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. The tidal wetland is situated within the southern end of a significant habitat complex known as the Stockport Creek and Flats. The northern portion of the Stockport Creek and Flats is one of four key locations that form the timeline of Hudson’s last century or so. While the succession of commercial and industrial uses that the North Bay’s early history has been built over, the site’s recreational and ecological values.

Education and Interpretation

The North Bay site is imprinted with many layers of history, from its pre-history to the establishment of Cloveport Landing, to the city’s heyday as a whaling port, and the succession of commercial and industrial uses that form the timeline of Hudson’s last century or so. While the North Bay’s early history has been built over, the clay bluffs or “clavers” that supplied the brick-making industry still remain. Remnants of the former Atlas Brickyard are found within the Greenport Conservation Area to the north, which could be connected by a trail and would provide an interpretation opportunity.

The environmental history of the site provides another opportunity for interpretation - the landfill, the sewage treatment plant, and the brownfield site (Foster Refrigeration Site) offer excellent topics for education about human interaction with the land. Making the site’s history visible to the public through park improvements, interpretive signage, artwork, educational programming, and partnerships will be the basis for experience as rich as that offered by the site’s recreational and ecological values.

Landfill Reclamation

The most significant controlling factor for redevelopment of the North Bay site is the landfill, with its constraints and requirements. While it covers somewhat less than 30 acres, or about one quarter of the study area, the landfill is at the heart of the North Bay. The North Bay landfill is now halfway through its 30-year monitoring life span, which is scheduled to extend to at least 2026, subject to further testing. All new uses must be protective of the landfill cap system, avoiding changes to the hydrology and anything that might penetrate the protective soil barrier. Both ground settling and gas production have moderated over time, but still continue.

In New York State, landfills are under the jurisdiction of the DEC. The Columbia County Department of Public Works currently has oversight and management responsibility for required inspections of the North Bay landfill. Any proposed improvement or plans for new uses there must be submitted to DEC for approval.

Ownership, Roles & Responsibilities

Presently, there is no one entity with the responsibility or resources to manage the North Bay. The area is divided among multiple land uses and both public and private ownership. Based upon the title work conducted in 2009 and subsequent developments, the current ownership within the study area consists of:

- A. ±27 acres of landfill area on the northeast portion of the site, owned by Columbia County;
- B. Adjacent industrial building and ±9 acres, including portions of the landfill, in private ownership;
- C. ±14 acres of undeveloped upland and ±39 acres of tidal wetland, owned by the City of Hudson Industrial Development Agency;
- D. ±12 acres on the southeast limit, Charles A. Williams Park and the “old ball field,” owned by the City of Hudson;
- E. Parcels totaling ±18 acres at the southwest limit, including portions of the tidal wetland and the former Foster Refrigeration brownfield site, owned by the City of Hudson.

Environmental Impacts

As the Natural Resource Inventory observes, “Rarely does one location contain the array of attractive ecological features that this property does.” The quality of the park experience will be enhanced to the extent that the design and function of the area respects breeding grounds, hydrology, and sensitive features of the site. The key is to strike a balance between the natural and human uses of the site so that they enhance each other.
Hudson North Bay Recreation and Natural Area

The Hudson North Bay Recreation and Natural Area is a proposal to transform a former landfill and surrounding open space into a public park and conservation area that will offer exceptional beauty, the natural resources of the Hudson River estuary, education about human settlement and industry along the river, and access to a trail network covering potentially 1,000 acres, all within walking distance of downtown Hudson.