

INSIDE INSIGHTS

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE SULLIVAN COUNTY MANAGER



BANKING ON OURSELVES

BY JOSHUA POTOSEK, COUNTY MANAGER

In 2018, the Sullivan County Legislature created an innovative but proven method of restoring blighted properties called the Sullivan County Land Bank.

Overseen by an independent community board, this nonprofit public authority aims to strengthen neighborhoods, increase homeownership, and stimulate economic growth by building new homes, facilitating larger development projects, and acquiring vacant or abandoned properties and returning them to productive use.

This isn't about the County getting a return on its investment. This is about strategically acquiring properties to activate neighborhoods and turn around the dilapidated, neglected parts of our main population centers.

What I enjoy most is seeing young families - people who never dreamed of owning a home - moving in to a beautiful property restored (or rebuilt) via the Land Bank.

As of the writing of this newsletter, there are more than 40 properties available for first-time homebuyers, experienced developers and ambitious entrepreneurs. The board vets every applicant to ensure these assets will be properly developed and cared for, as the goal is to improve our communities. Details - including the entire list of properties - can be found at www.sullivancountylandbank.org.



WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS ISSUE:

ONCE RAILS,
NOW TRAILS - 2

WHAT IS THIS THING
YOU'RE CALLING
REDISTRICTING? - 3

A 5-YEAR PLAN TO DEAL
WITH DRUG USE - 4

Land Bank Executive Director
Jill Weyer at a Liberty home
now occupied by a family

GROWING OUR RAILS-TO-TRAILS PROGRAM

What once brought our communities together is doing it again: the path of the former New York, Ontario & Western (O&W) Railway.

I can only imagine what a steam train looked and sounded like as it puffed its way through my hometown of Livingston Manor, since the rails fell silent 65 years ago, well before I came along. But thanks to the Legislature and the Sullivan O&W Rail Trail group, I can still experience what the railroad's passengers would have seen. The streams and waterfalls, the trees and berry bushes, the rock cuts and tunnels - even a few original stations and foundations - are still there.

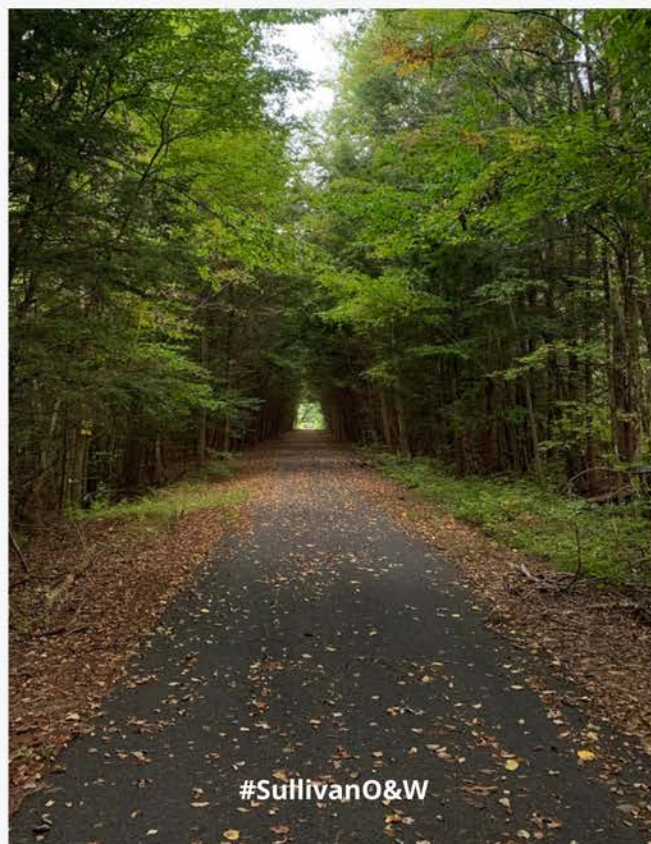
In all, 24.4 miles of the railroad's route are now a well-maintained, well-marked rail trail. The trail isn't contiguous, but we're working on making it one continuous path from Wurtsboro in the south to Livingston Manor in the north.

Along the way, the route intersects the downtowns of Parksville, Liberty, Hurleyville, South Fallsburg, Woodridge and Mountindale - each with shops, restaurants and parking. It's paved and handicapped-accessible around Hurleyville, and Mountindale even has a reconstructed train station to visit. Within a couple of years, a pedestrian/bike bridge will span the scenic Neversink River, connecting Woodridge's trail to South Fallsburg's.

Why are we investing so much time and money in this? Because - just like the original railway did - it connects our communities, promotes health & tourism, and enhances economic development. It also sends a message that we care about where we live - enough to clear away sticks and stones to keep that connection vibrantly alive.

I encourage and challenge you to visit every segment of our rail trail system: Parksville, Liberty, Hurleyville, South Fallsburg, Woodridge, Mountindale, Summitville and Wurtsboro (which parallels the even older Delaware & Hudson Canal, now a County park).

Each is uniquely memorable, and you can find maps and other details at www.sullivanoandw.com.



Above: The Hurleyville "Milk Train Trail" offers nearly two miles of paved rail trail. Below: The Woodridge segment connects to Mountindale's.



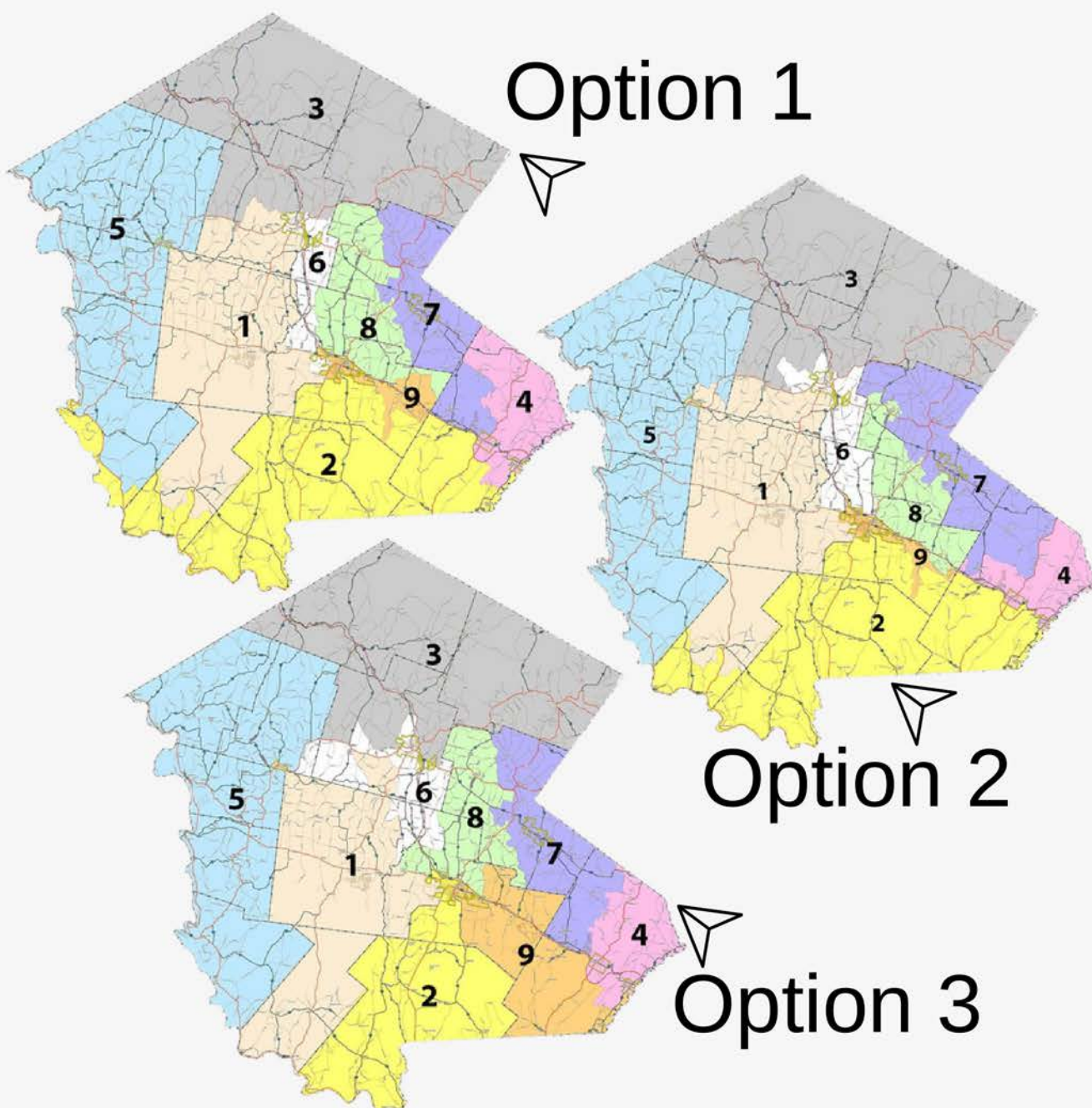
REDISTRICTING - WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Even though we go through it every 10 years on the local, State and Federal levels, it's easy to be confused by the various redistricting plans put in front of us for review.

State and Congressional lines have already been redrawn - and redrawn again - in a contentious process that didn't rely very much on population. However, the number of people living in Sullivan County - specifically, where they live - is the primary factor in the redistricting of the County Legislature.

Legislators hired an independent consultant to redraw the boundaries of the nine legislative districts so as to ensure each encompasses approximately the same amount of people.

Three maps have been developed by the consultant to illustrate what those new districts may look like, and legislators will pick one before the end of 2022. To see these maps up close and for an informative fact sheet, visit www.sullivanyny.us/Departments/Legislature/Redistricting.



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE?

There's no glossing over the grim fact that we have one of the worst rates of substance use - particularly with opioids - in New York State. Hardly any of us has not been impacted by this deadly addiction, and I'm keenly aware of the County's responsibility to be part of an effective, long-lasting solution. Thankfully, we have more money than ever to devote to this lifesaving effort. As you've probably heard, the major pharmaceutical manufacturers have agreed to millions of dollars in settlements in reparation for their role in spreading this affliction. Our Drug Task Force, led by Health & Human Services Deputy Commissioner Wendy Brown and District Attorney Meagan Galligan, has requested \$375,515 from those settlements, and Health & Human Services Commissioner John Little, in concert with the Task Force, has developed a five-year action plan to utilize the funds.

As the chart at right illustrates, we have ambitious goals for this year, including:

- Providing additional tools to law enforcement to disrupt the supply of narcotics coming into the County
- Properly educating and equipping our staff
- Partially funding two years of operations of a crisis call center and peer support
- Funding transportation to substance use treatment programs
- Incentivizing education and licensure of future social workers
- Expanding access to Narcan & drug dropoff sites
- Fully supporting the already-successful "Hope, Not Handcuffs" program
- Bringing mental health and prevention programming to local school districts

There's more, all a combination of prevention and prosecution. While we want those who are suffering from substance use to feel completely free and safe to reach out for help whenever and wherever they need it, we also want to stem the flow of illegal drugs and dealers into our community. The harder it is to get hooked, the better chances we have of erasing this threat to our health.

And that's what this is really all about: promoting the best life, the best outcome, for each of our residents.

EASE Access to Care and END the Drug Crisis

RWJF Areas of Concern: Shortage of primary care providers, High rate of injury deaths

2021 Accomplishments:

- Raising awareness of services
- Identified 3 new MH/SUD providers
- Increased access to NARCAN
- Hope Not Handcuffs established; 15 referrals made
- Catholic Charities Inpatient Services

2022 Goals:

- **Establish crisis call center** (CIT/OS)
- Fully develop United Sullivan to increase access to treatment and prevention providers
- Implement NY MATTERS program
- Improve staffing at Community Svcs and open public/private pediatric and substance use clinics in Liberty

Key to acronyms: RWJF = Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (which gives us our health rankings), MH = Mental Health, SUD = Substance Use Disorder, CIT = Crisis Intervention Training, OS = Opioid Settlement
From "Opioid Settlement Fund 5-Year Spending Plan" report presented to the Sullivan County Legislature on June 16, 2022

Substance use does not live in a vacuum - it can and does lead to suffering of those who are and are not addicted, increased crime, more motor vehicle accidents, dangerous and unattractive downtowns, and so forth.

Dedicating these opioid settlement funds to addressing that issue head-on is a necessary and wise investment in our own future.