Reader-Funded News for Beacon and Philipstown

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Surprising Ceramics

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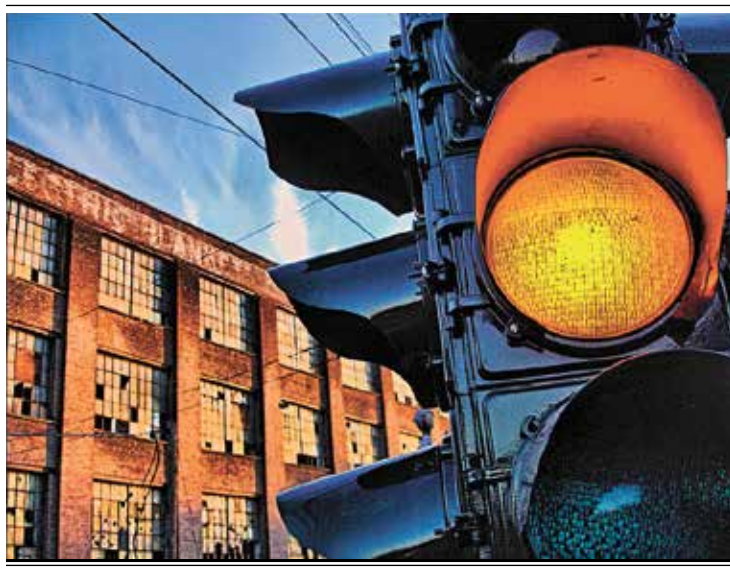

Part 1 of a series

Beacon: Then, Now and How

Twenty-five years ago, the city was falling apart. It has been revived. But at what price?

By Jeff Simms

In the past quarter-century, Beacon has transformed itself from a city of boarded-up windows and crime to a vanguard of culture and environmental sustainability. But many residents feel the resurgence has come at a steep price, criticizing the pace and scale of development and arguing that housing prices are robbing Beacon of its diversity and working-class character.

In January 2001, when then-Mayor Clara Lou Gould gave her annual state of the city address, the *Poughkeepsie Journal* noted that Beacon was

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Photo by Michael Bowman

Judge Bars Migrants from Dutchess Hotels

86 men allowed to stay at Red Roof Inn on Route 9

By Leonard Sparks

A state judge temporarily ordered New York City to stop sending asylum-seekers to Dutchess and provide the county with the names of dozens of men the city is sheltering at a Red Roof Inn in the Town of Poughkeepsie.

Judge Maria Rosa issued her ruling on Tuesday (May 23), four days after Dutchess County sued New York City and the hotel's owner.

Rosa's decision does not affect 66 migrants who arrived at the Red Roof Inn

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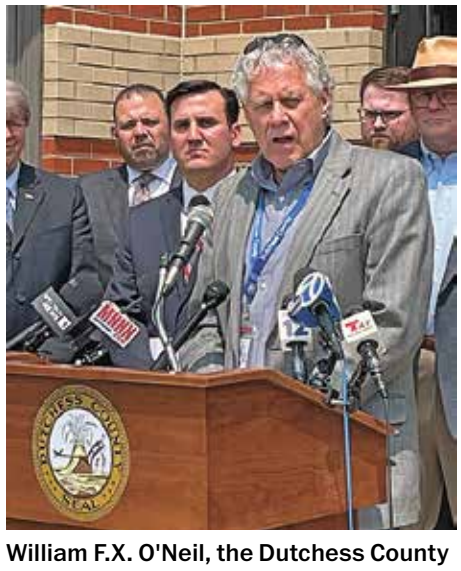

William F.X. O'Neil, the Dutchess County executive, speaks at a news conference on Tuesday (May 23). Putnam County Executive Kevin Byrne stands to his right.

Putnam County photo

RAIN DELAY — About 70 Philipstown Little League players attended a Hudson Valley Renegades minor-league baseball game on May 20 at Heritage Financial Park (Dutchess Stadium) but were disappointed when the skies opened and the game was canceled. The players were invited to return next month.

Photo by Ross Corsair

Can a Class Be Too Small?

Haldane discusses optimal number of students

By Joey Asher

Is reducing class size always the right thing to do?

That's been a topic of discussion for the Haldane school board this month, spurred by parents who lobbied for smaller classes for their rising first graders.

The district will have 38 first graders in 2023-24 and planned to divide them into two classes of 19, according to Superintendent Philip Benante. "Generally, 20 students [or

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Elementary Class Sizes

	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Haldane	13	15	18	18	20	20
Garrison	16	20	25	19	21	21
Beacon*	15	17	15	15	14	15

*Source: Haldane and Garrison budgets, 2022-23; *Beacon, 2020-21, data.nysed.gov*

Beacon: Then, Now and How

(from Page 1)

known in the 1990s for its "empty storefronts, dilapidated buildings, inconsistent code enforcement and poor infrastructure such as sidewalks and roads, especially on the east end."

Gould spearheaded a revitalization, expressing surprise at the pace of building rehabs and business investment. The arrival of the Dia Center for the Arts provided an "extra spurt"; the Dia Foundation in 2003 opened a 292,000-square-foot gallery in a former Nabisco box factory on the shores of the Hudson.

Situated between the river and Mount Beacon, the highest peak of the Highlands, Beacon has since the early 2000s attracted a steady stream of new homeowners and visitors eager to shop its bustling, mile-long Main Street. Many retreated more recently from New York City during the pandemic shutdown, purchasing homes and moving into condo developments on Main Street and the riverfront.

Who has benefited most from this transformation? Who has been left behind? In this series, we'll talk to people who live and work in the city and attempt to address these questions, as well as document changes over the past 25 years in housing and demographics, the arts, politics and activism.

Has Beacon Followed its Own Blueprint?

Before the pandemic, development was *the* issue in Beacon.

Who could forget the printout of a Facebook post and the hundreds of comments it generated attached to the temporary fencing around 344 Main St. when a support wall extended several feet into the sidewalk, out of alignment with the neighboring Beacon Natural Market? (Within weeks, the wall was removed and realigned.)

The subsequent formation of the People's Committee on Development, led in part by Dan Aymar-Blair, now a City Council member. Two building moratoriums passed by the council, both driven by concerns about water.

More than a dozen public hearings for the Edgewater apartment complex proposal, the largest ever in Beacon, residents packed so closely that some began to shout from the lobby of City Hall. At several hearings, dueling attorneys argued over formulas for estimating the project's impacts on the school district.

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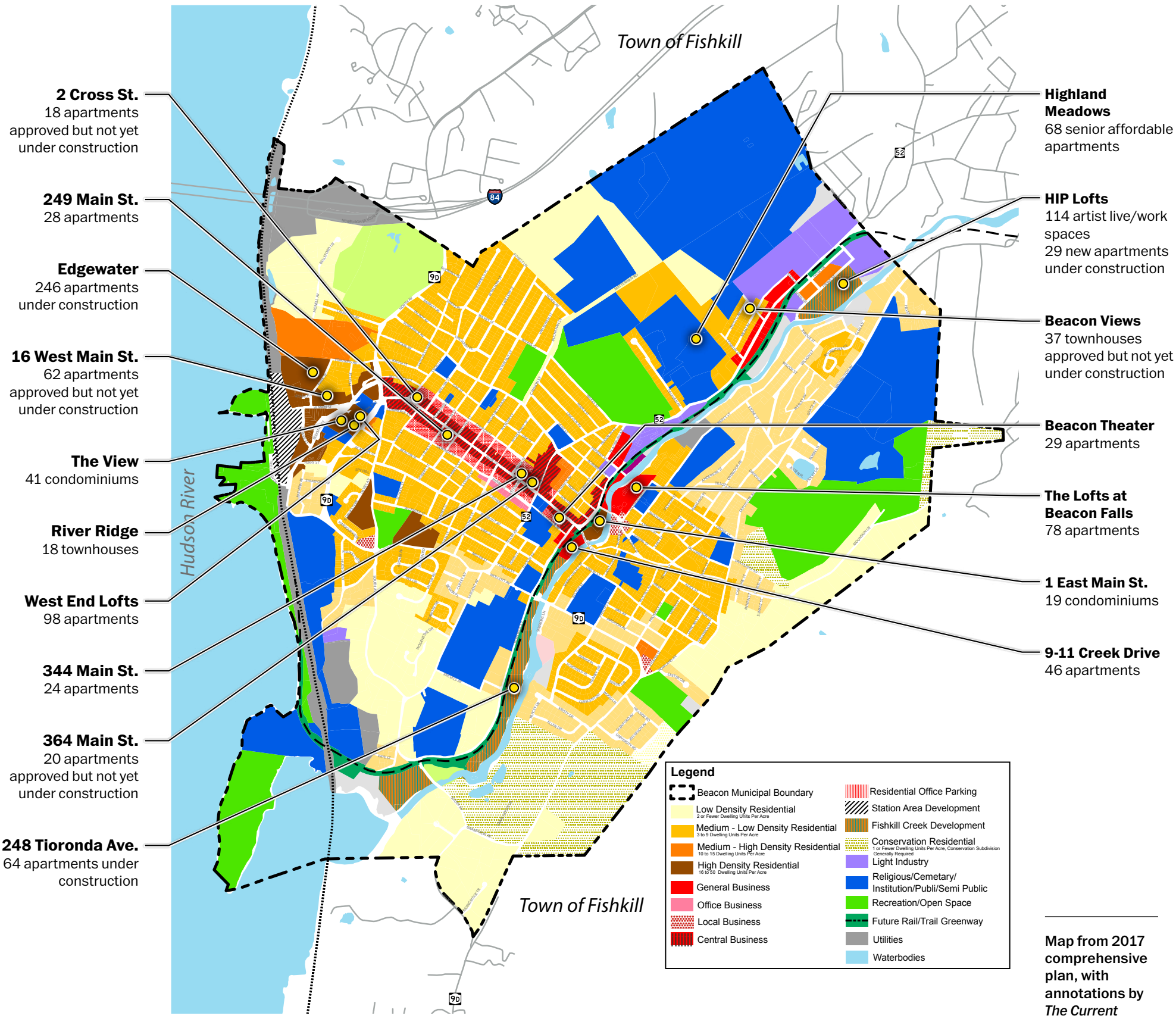
Beacon Housing Developments of More Than 10 Units, 2012-2023



Map from 2017 comprehensive plan, with annotations by *The Current*

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Since 2012, nearly 800 apartments and other housing units have been built in Beacon. At Edgewater and 248 Tioronda Ave., among a handful of others, there are more than 300 units still under construction because of pandemic delays.

Maps of projected land use in the 2017 update to Beacon's comprehensive plan — a blueprint revised by the city about every 10 years to guide growth — indicate that the most-dense development should occur in four locations: (1) on the east side of the Metro-North station; (2) in the waterfront-to-Main "linkage" district; (3) on Main Street, in the central business zone; and (4) in spots along the Fishkill Creek corridor.

Most of the remaining land — which makes up 80 percent to 90 percent of the city — is zoned for low- to medium-density housing, such as single-family homes.

An overlay of major construction projects in the last decade shows that each occurred within one of the zones designated for high density. In addition, the city's zoning code was amended several times after the 2017 moratorium to temper the impacts of incoming development.

In late 2017, the City Council adopted changes in the Fishkill Creek zone limiting new buildings to three stories totaling no more than 40 feet. New projects there must also include at least 25 percent commercial uses, and a parcel's density is based on buildable (rather than gross) acreage to account for topographic features such as steep slopes.

Five months later, the council extended the "steep-slopes" measure to the largest residential districts, reducing the Edgewater project from 307 units to 246. In the creekside zone, the change downsized the 248 Tioronda development from 100 to 64 apartments.

In 2020, the city tightened its Main Street zoning by requiring four-story proposals to include one or more "public benefits," such as increased parking, affordable housing units, green building features or public spaces.

City officials say that, dating to the 1990s, Beacon's zoning has been corrected to funnel foot traffic toward businesses on Main Street.

"For Main Street to recover and thrive requires more nearby residents to support its businesses," said Mayor Lee Kyriacou. "The appropriate places for additional residences are on and around Main, near the train station as a public-transit hub and on abandoned or former industrial sites along Fishkill Creek."

Beacon Mayor Lee Kyriacou and developer Rodney Weber broke ground in July 2022 at the Edgewater site. *File photo by J. Simms*

Not everyone agrees. One resident, Theresa Kraft, has attended and spoken at virtually every public meeting in Beacon during its building boom. Earlier this month, she argued before the City Council that housing and development in Beacon are "in crisis mode."

"Sadly, it's the upheaval of what this city has allowed to be destroyed directly on our historic Main Street and the side streets abutting it," she said. "So many of these projects are either poorly designed, out of character with the neighborhood or have seriously infringed on our protected viewsheds. This rampant building spree is spreading like wildfire, and it's got to be stopped."

Beacon's approach is similar to the one adopted in Somerville, Massachusetts, a city of 80,000 that undertook an urban revitalization initiative over the last decade. There, planners directed growth toward the city's downtown core, around two public transit stations, which are "naturally places where you want to focus your development," according to Michael Rodriguez, an urban planner with the Smart Growth America organization.

Rodriguez noted the benefits of other recommendations in Beacon's comp plan, such as creating what is known as "transit-oriented development" (TOD) near public transportation.

"You're sitting on this gift, a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure asset, that gives you a nice commute if you want it, or a recreational trip to the city," he said. "Yet very few people can use that infrastructure without getting into a car."

In 2007, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) announced plans to create a TOD at the Beacon Metro-North station. A citizen group, Beacon Deserves Better, opposed the plan over a number of issues, including potential environmental impacts and the effect it would have had on the city's Main Street, which had yet to fully rebound from the neglect and crime of the 1990s.

In addition, the MTA plan, which the agency put on hold in 2010, called for a major expansion of the Metro-North parking lot and, in a second phase, construction of a 1,000-car parking garage.

If approached differently, and with community input, Rodriguez suggested a TOD could create "hubs" of activity. "Now you become more of a job center," he said. (Beacon's comprehensive plan recommends development intended to guide people from the train to Main Street, but also reflects community feedback and proposes that land west of the train station remain open space that would be fed by improved connections between Riverfront Park, Long Dock Park and the proposed Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail.)

In economic terms, it's hard to argue that Beacon as a whole hasn't benefited from development. "When we add new assessed value through new construction, nobody else's taxes go up, but we receive added revenue," said Chris White, the city administrator.

Beacon in 2021 hired Ambulnz, a private company, for $150,000 to provide 24/7 advanced life support emergency services, while also sending $50,000 to the nonprofit Beacon Volunteer Ambulance Corps, which has served the city for 65 years and provides basic life support service.

"All that was added as a new service with no impact on current taxpayers," White said, adding that Beacon now has the ability to fund (and borrow for) projects such as its $14.7 million centralized fire station, and to make "generational" investments in its water and wastewater systems.

He pointed, also, to the addition of a mental health worker in the Police Department, a full-time human resources director and the city's Climate Smart coordinator.

"We have the latitude to do that without creating an undue tax burden because we've had a trend of growth over the last 10 years," White said. ▪

Was Enough Done to Keep It Affordable?

While Beacon's comprehensive plan shows — in zoning districts colored brown, red and orange — that residential development has followed guidelines approved by the City Council, it's harder to say whether the city has made the right moves regarding affordability.

In 2017, the council upped its "inclusionary zoning" policy by requiring that new developments of 10 units or more set aside 10 percent as part of the city's workforce affordable program. By last year, of the more than 2,200 apartments in Beacon, 851 were "affordable" [see box on Page 10] — most of them either subsidized through federal programs (commonly called Section 8), a state-funded program or part of the workforce program. The latter gives priority to applicants who are volunteer emergency responders, followed by municipal and school district employees.

The number accounts for more than 19 percent of the affordable housing stock in Dutchess County, although the city makes up only 5 percent of the county's population. (At 60 percent combined, only the City and Town of Poughkeepsie have a greater share of the county's affordable housing.)

At the same time, a Dutchess housing assessment released last year described a "series of long-simmering trends" that have created a significant shortage for the most vulnerable residents. Countywide, there are 2,155 more households that rent and earn less than $50,000 per year than there are affordable units available to them.

The Beacon council last year amended its zoning code to simplify the process for creating "accessory dwelling unit" (ADU) apartments, a strategy promoted by the federal government. Over the last two months, the council has discussed additional measures but has failed to reach consensus on how to move forward.

John Clarke, a city planning consultant, suggested revising a little-used overlay district that would remove zoning restrictions for developers who build housing for seniors. He also recommended that the city facilitate developments on public land that have higher percentages of affordable apartments — similar to when the council in 2016 sold land next to City Hall to a developer to create the West End Lofts apartment complex.

Clarke suggested a partnership with Dutchess County on an infill project at the DMV building at 223 Main St., a proposal that's recommended in Beacon's comprehensive plan. The Beacon Farmers Market, which uses the parking lot on Sundays, could be integrated into the design, along with a three-story, mixed-use building and a transit-linked public park on Main Street, with an expanded rear parking lot, he said.

The Metro-North northern parking lot was also identified in the 2017 comp plan as an excellent spot for housing, Clarke

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Affordable *(from Page 9)*

noted. The site is within easy walking distance of the station and a structure would have low "view impacts."

There's also the 39-acre former Beacon Correctional Facility site ("Camp Beacon"), which is owned by New York State, and is more isolated than the DMV or Metro-North lots. In 2019, state officials selected a New York City company to create a "bike farm" with a hotel and track-and-field venue at the site, but there's been no movement there since.

In a council workshop last month, Clarke said he does not recommend a further increase in the "set aside" of affordable units required of developers. With no offsetting benefits such as tax abatements or assessment reductions, "you're essentially asking a private developer to subsidize affordable housing on their own dime, without any advantages for them, other than they can get their project approved," he said.

Upriver, Kingston residents and officials are engaged in a citywide rezoning effort that is set to increase the availability of affordable housing, Mayor Steve Noble said. The city is holding a "Say Yes to ADUs!" design competition and is using $1 million of its federal American Rescue Plan Act funding to incentivize the construction of affordable housing.

It is also creating a "tiny homes community" to provide emergency housing and services to people who risk becoming homeless. Any rent would be in line with affordability guidelines established by Ulster County.

Kingston may extend its 10 percent set-aside to apply to new developments of seven units or more while requiring 15 percent or 20 percent for larger developments, Noble said. It also may offer bonuses, such as allowing construction of taller buildings, in exchange for affordable housing.

The hope with the rezoning project, which also includes environmental, mental health and downtown business initiatives, is that "you end up building a city that is reflective of the core values of your community," he said.

In Beacon, Paloma Wake, an at-large member of the City Council, said she would like to see Beacon work on "integrated" affordability. "There's value in having integrated housing, and I want to make sure whatever solutions we push forward have that vision," she said. "If we just build a building with 100 units, that isn't a win. That's segregated."

Although Beacon's affordable numbers are relatively high, Wake and Wren Longno, who represents Ward 3 on the council, have argued that the city must address the shortage of housing for households earning $50,000 annually or less.

"We want to do better than the minimum," Longno said. If a project is providing housing for lower-income residents, "many of us would be quite happy to see more density. If it's not that, we'd rather just see the meadow stay the meadow." ▪

What is 'Affordable'?

When elected officials, planners and developers talk about "affordable" housing, it is usually a reference to how much household income a renter or homeowner must commit. The assumption is that housing costs, including property taxes, should not consume more than 30 percent of household income.

"Affordable" is sometimes based on the median household income of an area. For example, the fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in 2022 was $1,412 in Dutchess County and $2,340 in Putnam, according to figures compiled by the National Low Income Housing Coalition. The affordable rent for a household earning 50 percent of the area median income in Dutchess ($115,700) would be $1,446 per month, according to the coalition. In Putnam, where the AMI is $94,500, the affordable rent for a household earning 50 percent of the AMI would be $1,181 per month.

Is There Room for Lower Incomes?

Lastar Gorton says she feels invisible. Born and raised in Beacon, the 38-year-old Tompkins Terrace resident says that as the city has grown, the people she grew up with have been left behind — either priced out and forced to move elsewhere or left to live in unsafe conditions because it's all they can afford.

Indeed, much has changed in the city. No longer are there boarded-up storefronts dotting the mile-long Main Street. Nearly 800 condominiums, townhouses and apartments have been built in the last decade, with more than 300 more under construction now.

The city's population has changed over the past two decades, according to U.S. Census data. The overall population has fallen by 14 percent, to 13,769, including a 36 percent drop in Black residents. Beacon today is 62 percent white, 19 percent Hispanic and 13 percent Black; in 2000, it was 68 percent white, 20 percent Black and 17 percent Hispanic.

There also have been huge economic changes. The city's median household

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Lastar Gorton *Photo by Valerie Shively*

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income has risen to $93,000 annually, with about 30 percent of households earning less than $50,000. Twenty years ago, in 2000, the median income, adjusted for inflation, was $80,000 but about 75 percent of households earned less than $50,000.

"Beacon used to be a very, very diverse place to live," Gorton says. While growing up, she had "every type of friend" at Sargent Elementary School. "Everyone was family. Everyone looked out for everyone," she says. "But I no longer feel that. Walking down Main Street, I feel like a stranger."

> Everyone was family. Everyone looked out for everyone. But I no longer feel that. Walking down Main Street, I feel like a stranger.
>
> **~ Lastar Gorton**

Gorton lived in Tompkins Terrace, a low-income apartment complex on the city's west side, until she was 5. Her family then moved to Forrestal Heights, another low-income development managed by the Beacon Housing Authority.

She and her two sons moved back to Tompkins in 2020 but, by then, Gorton says the development — which is slated for a $14.5 million renovation beginning this year — had changed.

"I call the police at least every other week," she says. "I don't let my younger son go outside without me."

The City of Beacon in recent years has made efforts to increase its affordable housing stock. New developments of 10 units or more must set aside 10 percent of those units for Beacon's "workforce" affordability program, which, for renters, is available for households making between 70 percent and 80 percent of Dutchess County's area median income (AMI), or $80,990 to $92,560 for a household of four. It gives priority to applicants who are volunteer emergency responders, municipal employees or school district employees.

In 2016, the City Council sold a 3.14-acre parcel to a developer at less than market value on the condition that he build affordable units there. The complex, the West End Lofts, includes 72 affordable apartments, 50 of them live/work spaces for artists.

But Gorton, and many others who have spoken up in public meetings in recent years, feel that isn't enough. The city's workforce program and the West End Lofts both have conditions that Gorton, who works for a nonprofit agency, doesn't meet.

The workforce program, she says, isn't affordable for truly low-income people. Tompkins Terrace, meanwhile, restricts 38 of its 193 apartments to households earning 50 percent or less of the AMI, which, in Beacon, is equal to a four-person household earning up to $56,200. The remaining 155 apartments may be rented to households earning 60 percent or less of the AMI, or $67,440 for a household of four.

"It's affordable to live here, but it's not safe," Gorton says. Referring to the West End Lofts, she says, "not everybody is an artist."

She wants to see the city hold developers accountable to create more affordable housing for a wider range of residents — so much so that she's considering a run later this year for City Council.

Gorton recalls diverse community gatherings such as the Fourth of July fireworks celebration at Memorial Park, or the free afternoon and summer programs at the Martin Luther King Cultural Center or the Beacon Community Center.

"People with morals, respect and dignity is who I want in this community," she says. "I love that Beacon is thriving, but I wish the city would give back to the community. That's the way it has always been in Beacon." ▪

NEXT WEEK:
The arts helped fuel Beacon's resurgence. What happens when high rents push artists and galleries elsewhere?

Recent History

ONAL EDITOR (845) 437-4877 ttripicc@poughkee.gannett.com FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2001 3B

Mayor touts Beacon's turnaround

By Patrick R. Anderson
Poughkeepsie Journal

BEACON — The City of Beacon is on target in its continued renaissance.

That was the word from Mayor Clara Lou Gould, who delivered her state of the city report at Tuesday's council meeting.

Gould cited the ongoing renovations at Dia Center for the Arts, various waterfront

"We didn't expect (revitalization) to roll so quickly," Gould said. "It got the extra spurt due to Dia coming in. And we are well positioned to facilitate things keeping up at the pace it is."

Gould

Before the turnaround began in Beacon in the early

as sidewalks and roads — especially in the east end — plagued the city.

But building rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements and mounting business investments spurred the city's growth, particularly Main Street.

Another inspector hired

The mayor said another hiring in the building department will be made soon to

"As far as the construction pace goes, it's very steady," Dexter said. "We haven't seen any dropoff. And what we've seen indicates a lot more activity."

Dexter also welcomed the proposed hiring of another deputy building inspector to help ensure existing structures comply with the zoning codes.

"And that's a very impor-

ty agreed with Gould's assessment.

"The thing that caught my eye was the city's Web site being up," said 20-year Beacon resident Olu Akiwumi-Assani. "They're trying to do the right things to improve the quality of life for everyone and I'm supportive of that."

Beacon businessman Ori Brachfeld said the city has made a strong comeback

heading in the right direction," Brachfeld said. "And (the future) looks good."

Steve Fleming, a 14-year Beacon resident and member of the city's Conservation Advisory Committee, also credited the mayor with the significant transformation of the city.

"(Gould's) stewardship has been key in this process," he said. "She's done a good job in balancing the realities

2001 In her annual state of the city address, Mayor Clara Lou Gould said that, after a decade of stagnation, the city was returning to life. She cited renovations at the Dia Center for the Arts, waterfront development and the hiring of a third building inspector.

2003 Dia:Beacon opens a contemporary art museum in what had been a Nabisco factory on the banks of the Hudson River.

2007 The City Council adopts a comprehensive land-use plan, Beacon's first since 1973... The Metropolitan Transportation Authority announces plans to develop 18 acres at the Metro-North station, but a grassroots group, Beacon Deserves Better, forms to oppose the plan.

2009 After scrapping plans for a hotel and conference center, Scenic Hudson opens Long Dock Park, a 19-acre site designed for passive recreation and climate resilience.

2010 The MTA puts its plans to develop at the train station on hold.

2012 The Roundhouse opens in restored factory buildings adjacent to the waterfall at the east end of Main Street.

2013 After requesting proposals, the city sells its parcels at 344 Main St. to a developer for $5,000. Three years later, the construction of a four-story, mixed-use building (at right) on the site sparks calls to rein in development.

2017 The City Council updates the 2007 comprehensive plan and enacts a six-month building moratorium because of concerns about the water supply. (The council approved a second moratorium in 2019.)

The four-story building at 344 Main St., shown here in 2021, prompted changes in Beacon's zoning code. *File photo by J. Simms*

2018 After more than a dozen public hearings over 18 months, the 246-unit Edgewater, the largest residential development in the city's history, is approved. The project was downsized by the developer after the City Council adopted a law reducing the number of units that can be built on sites with steep slopes.

2019 The Beacon Theater opens, bringing first-run movies to Main Street for the first time since the 1980s.

2020 The City Council adopts a law requiring developers to provide a "public benefit" to build four-story buildings on Main Street.

A rendering of the Craig House rehab

2022 The Planning Board approves the first phase of redevelopment plans for the 64-acre Tioronda Estate site on Route 9D. Mirbeau, which bought the property for $10 million, plans to convert the former Craig House into a luxury hotel and spa.

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Bear Mountain Bridge at 100

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Part 2 of a series

Beacon: Then, Now and How

The arts fueled Beacon's transformation. What happens when high rents push artists and galleries elsewhere?

By Brian PJ Cronin

It was a picture-perfect Saturday in early May when Dia:Beacon celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Common Ground Farm set up a booth and prepared an educational demonstration. Other scheduled events included a zine-making workshop and a tour led by an artist who snuck into this former Nabisco factory over 20 years ago, before Dia moved in, to shoot an indie movie. There were also tours for Spanish-language speakers and

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A sign near the former Nabisco plant announced the pending arrival of Dia:Beacon. *Beacon Historical Society*

A DAY TO REMEMBER — Military veterans, accompanied by first responders and Philipstown residents, traveled up Main Street on Monday (May 29) for a memorial service at the Cold Spring Cemetery to remember those who lost their lives during wartime. The grand marshal was Michael Mastrolia, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. *Photo by Ross Corsair*

GE to Sample PCB Levels in Lower Hudson

Environmental groups say testing is overdue, inadequate

By Brian PJ Cronin

Nearly 40 years after the federal Environmental Protection Agency designated a 200-mile stretch of the Hudson River as one of the most heavily polluted sites in the country because of chemical dumping by General Electric, the company will begin testing the water in the Lower Hudson, including in the Highlands, to determine the extent of the damage.

From 1947 to 1977, GE discharged polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from two of its manufacturing plants on the Upper Hudson. In addition to essentially ending commercial fishing in the Hudson, the discharges kicked off decades of legal battles. The EPA repeatedly dragged GE into court to force the company to clean up the river.

GE dredged the Upper Hudson for six years, from 2009 to 2015, to remove contaminated sediment, although environmental groups asserted that the cleanups

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Hotels Sue Counties Over Migrant Orders

Say that official actions 'reek of discrimination'

By Leonard Sparks

After being targeted by county executives in the Hudson Valley for renting rooms to asylum-seekers from New York City, owners have responded with a federal lawsuit.

Hotel owners in Dutchess, Orange and Rockland counties filed a federal lawsuit on May 22 in White Plains, arguing that executive orders banning migrants from hotels in more than two dozen counties and towns violate their constitutional rights to enter into contracts and are preempted by federal law.

The hotels also say the orders disregard their property and due-process rights under the U.S. Constitution's 5th and 14th amendments.

The plaintiffs include the owner of a Red Roof Inn and Holiday Inn on Route 9 in the Town of Poughkeepsie and the Crossroads Hotel and Ramada by Wyndham in the Town of Newburgh. New York City last month transported 86 asylum-seekers to the Red Roof Inn and 186 to Crossroads and Ramada.

A third plaintiff is the owner of Armoni Inn & Suites in Rockland County. The county refused to renew its residence permit, which had expired, as the hotel prepared to receive asylum-seekers. Police monitor the hotel around the clock, according to the lawsuit.

The hotels say that the executive orders "unlawfully, impermissibly and unconstitu-

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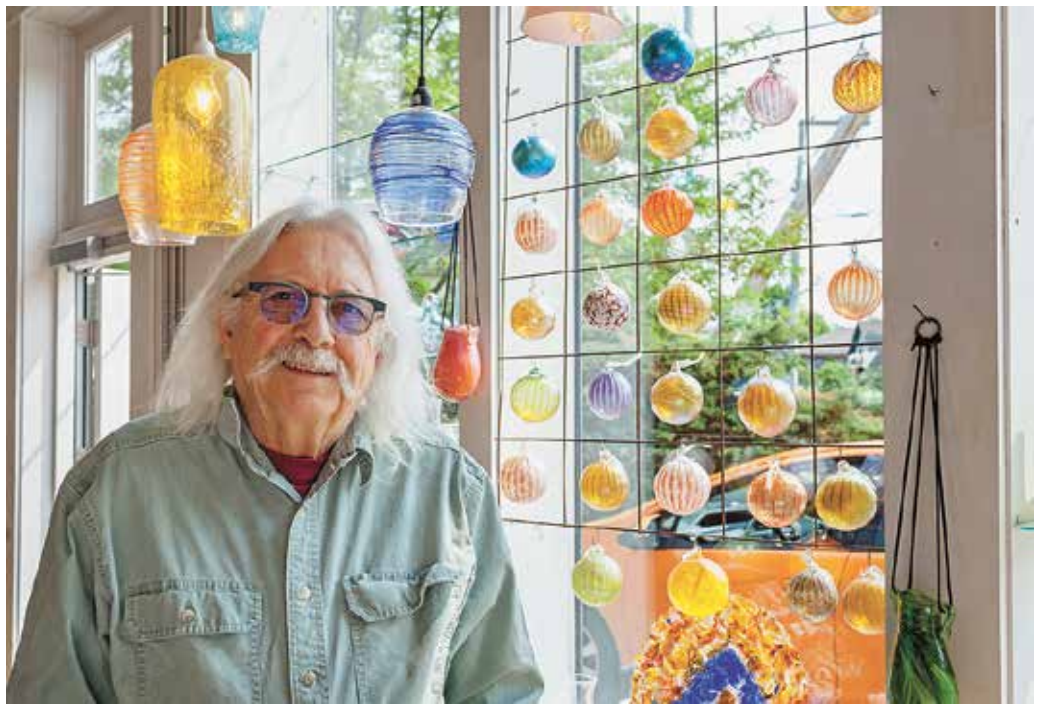
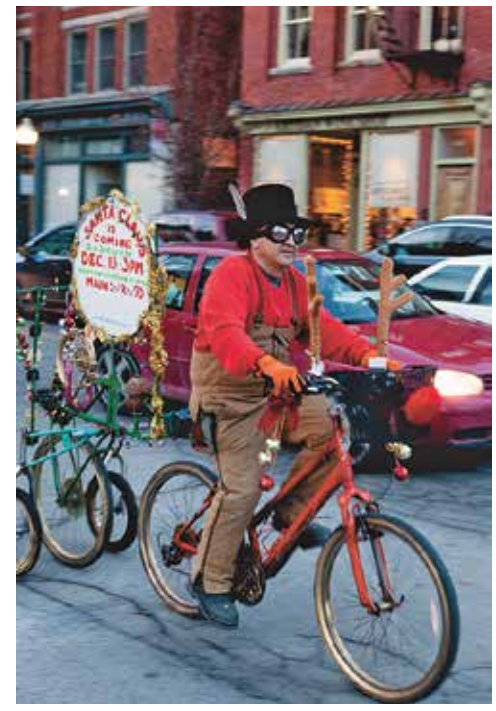


John Gilvey at Hudson Beach Glass *Photo by Valerie Shively*

Jessica Morgan, executive director of Dia:Beacon *Photo by B. Cronin*



Ed Benavente annouces the arrival of Santa Claus in 2014. *Photo by Ethan Harrison*

Beacon: Then, Now and How

(from Page 1)

parents with strollers.

"Kids get it immediately," says Jessica Morgan, executive director of the Dia Art Foundation, about the museum's sculptures. "They intuitively respond; you don't have to read a book to understand it."

Beacon residents have been admitted at no charge to Dia:Beacon for years. To mark its 20th, the museum extended the offer to residents of Newburgh, in part because many Dia:Beacon staff and many local artists now live there.

Dia didn't bring the arts to Beacon when it opened in 2003. The Polich Tallix fine art foundry was here, casting works by Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, Richard Serra and others. Hudson Beach Glass had been blowing glass on Maple Street since the 1980s before buying the old firehouse on the western end of Main Street in 2001 and opening to the public a few months after Dia.

The boarded-up storefronts and empty factories left in the wake of the city's industrial decline were like catnip to artists priced out of New York City and looking for affordable housing and ample studio space. "What some people see as terrifying, artists see as opportunity," said John Gilvey of Hudson Beach Glass.

But Dia:Beacon did seem to accelerate the transformation the city has undergone. A wave of galleries followed, public art projects bloomed and scores of artists found community.

Twenty years later, Dia:Beacon and Hudson Beach Glass are still here. But few of the galleries and other cultural projects that opened in their wake remain. In their place is the fear that the same economic forces that drove so many artists and galleries out of New York City have followed them north, pushing them from their homes and studios once again.

"Artists can't afford to live in Beacon now," said Gilvey.

Taking a risk

The Dia Art Foundation came to Beacon for the same reasons that many artists did: It needed room.

Specializing in site-specific works, the Manhattan-based foundation didn't have the space to display its rapidly growing collection. Morgan wasn't part of Dia then, but she's well-versed in the story: The director of Dia at the time, who was also a recreational pilot, loaded the president of the Dia board into a two-seater and flew up the Hudson River to check out a vacant industrial site in the Berkshires. But before they hung a right, they noticed an empty warehouse on the Beacon waterfront. (The Berkshire site became the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.)

Not every Beacon resident was thrilled about the prospect of a museum. Many hoped the site would continue to be used as a factory and provide jobs. Proposals were in the works for a fish-processing facility or a tire warehouse.

"The city, thankfully, got behind it and saw what the future could be, which was taking a risk," says Morgan. "No one knew how it would turn out."

Maybe one person did: Gilvey was a student at art school in the 1970s when the Dia Art Foundation set up shop in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. Many of his teachers were involved with Dia, and he saw how quickly New York's art scene subsequently ditched SoHo for Chelsea.

Now, Dia was moving the bulk of its collection to Beacon. "It was obvious that something was going to happen," he recalled. "It didn't dawn on us how it would happen, but we all watched it and it was pretty amazing."

Gilvey was part of a group of artists who created the Beacon Arts Community Association (now BeaconArts) in 2002 in anticipation of Dia and to serve as a de facto chamber of commerce. "There was no business organization at the time because there was no business," he said.

In the winter of 2003, the organization held its first Second Saturday event. It was cold and raining, and the new Hudson Beach Glass building didn't have heat. But Gilvey said they put out some glass, opened the doors and people filled the space.

Ed Benavente, Kelly Ellenwood and Matthew Agoglia *Photo by B. Cronin*

Randy Casale, the former Beacon mayor, used to joke that you could have rolled a bowling ball down the length of the mile-long Main Street in the 1990s and not hit anything. That cold winter night in 2003, with the Dia opening just a few months away, it became clear that those days were over.

'A pile of junk'

It was a rite of passage for New York City artists: Rent a car for the weekend, pack it with a bunch of your friends and drive in ever-widening circles from the city until you found a place you could afford. For many artists, that circle ended in southern Dutchess County.

"For the same cost as what we were spending on dog walkers, we could buy a house in Beacon," says Ed Benavente, who arrived in 2006, as he sat around a table at Kitchen + Coffee recently with Kelly Ellenwood (2002) and Matthew Agoglia (2011). All three are board members of BeaconArts.

Benavente grew up in Los Angeles before moving to New York City; he knows a bit about how difficult and intimidating it can be to break into the art scene in a new city. With Beacon, he didn't have that problem because it seemed like all the artists were in the same boat. "It was like the first day of college," he recalled. " 'Hi, what's your name? What's your major?' "

That easygoing spirit extended to the artists' relationship with the city. "You'd see the mayor or anyone from the city government on the street and you'd say: 'Hey, why don't we do this?'" said Benavente. "And they'd say: 'Great, why don't you do that?' There weren't a lot of rules and there wasn't a lot of oversight."

What followed was an explosion of annual citywide public art projects. There were Windows on Main, in which artists created displays for businesses; Beacon Open Studios, in which the public was invited to see where artists worked; Beacon 3-D, in which outdoor sculptures sprung up all over town; and Keys to the City, in which artists decorated donated pianos to

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be installed up and down Main Street, leading to countless impromptu concerts.

In 2008 and 2010, Main Street was shut down at the dummy light for Electric Windows, a block party in which artists created murals that were hung in the windows of the then-vacant electric blanket factory at 1 E. Main. It culminated in 2011's Electric Projected, in which animators armed with an enormous movie screen and thunderous breakbeats made it seem as if the colorful murals were coming to life, writhing and crawling over the abandoned and faded husk of the city's industrial past.

And then there was the bicycle tree.

BeaconArts had wanted to hold a Christmas tree lighting for years, but trees cost money, which none of the artists had. During a 2010 meeting, Benavente announced that he had figured out how to get a tree that would cost nothing but elbow grease: He would build one from discarded bicycle parts.

"Reduce, reuse, recycle," said Ellenwood. "Also, it was during a recession."

The group realized that a tree made of sustainable transportation parts could serve as a symbol of Beacon as an environmental vanguard. "It immediately set us apart from everywhere else," Ellenwood recalled.

The first tree lighting was a low-key event at the vacant lot on Cross Street and Main, but it soon became a city-sponsored event complete with Santa Claus arriving on a pedicab with Benavente playing the reindeer. A bicycle menorah soon joined the festivities. One year Benavente made a miniature version for Rabbi Brent Spodek of the Beacon Hebrew Alliance, who passed it on to then-First Lady Michelle Obama during a visit to the White House, along with an invitation to see the full version.

The bicycle tree was not universally loved. Some people would disparagingly tell Benavente that the tree was a pile of junk.

"And I'd say, 'Well, yeah, it was a pile of junk. But it was the energy that people put into it that made it art.'"

The last bicycle tree was in 2018, in part because Benavente had become too busy and too exhausted to build a tree every year, but also partly because another group of Beacon residents started holding a tree lighting with an actual tree. BeaconArts felt competing trees would feed into the damaging Old Beacon versus New Beacon narrative, pulling people apart instead of bringing them together.

Other events fell by the wayside, victims of burnout and development. The Electric Windows were turned into the city's first million-dollar condos. The artist-made "Welcome to Beacon" sign near the train station was removed to make way for other condos. Rents started rising, and suddenly it was much more difficult to maintain a gallery on Main Street by selling a few paintings per month. Artists began moving west or north, and the pandemic put an end to openings and Second Saturday. To the casual viewer, it may have seemed as if Beacon's art scene was retreating.

Passing the torch

"That's the ironic, sad thing," said Scott Lerman. "The arts are such a force for economic development and success, because it attracts people. But often, those same people in those places are pushed out when they can't afford to stay in the main thrust of a community."

Lerman and his partner, Susan Keiser, showed their art in Beacon galleries before they moved here. But once they had relocated, the galleries they had shown in were gone.

That led them to wonder how art can thrive in a post-gentrification environment. Part of the answer was the 24-by-30-foot garage that came with their house, half a block from Main Street. Sure, they could park cars in it. But artists think differently, and sometimes that means showing up at City Council meetings.

At one meeting, the council voted to change the zoning in the blocks adjacent to Main Street to a Transition Zone. "Part of that was to encourage people not to tear down older structures by giving them additional uses that would help them economically to survive, as opposed to 'Let's put up a big building here,'" says Lerman. "And one of the changes in use is that you can have a gallery in that zone and it does not require a permit."

Garage Gallery opened in 2021. The couple then created Beacon Art Walk, a website with a map that visitors can use to make sure they don't overlook galleries or cultural destinations. The map may only become more important in the years to come, as Lerman thinks that many galleries will be, like Garage Gallery, off the beaten path, or even behind the scenes.

Walk to the back of 484 Main St. and, behind a door, you'll find Super Secret Projects, which is run by an artists' collection that sublets the space from Hyperbole.

"It's not so much based on profits; that's not the point," says Allegra Jordan, a member of the collective who has a show opening this month (see Page 15). "This is a space for us to collaborate and be creative."

For Jordan, Super Secret Projects gives her a chance to contribute to an art scene that she might not have had access to. "I have the opportunity to share with my community and the community has the opportunity to come and see what kind of fresh ideas are being introduced by otherwise underrepresented people in their own spaces," she says.

The current show at Super Secret Projects features works by Darya Golubina, who now runs Beacon Open Studios. The torch is being passed in other ways as well: This November, the second annual Beacon Bonfire arts festival will take place, after the first brought a blast of post-pandemic energy. The affordable housing built next to City Hall in 2019 has allowed some artists to stay in Beacon; Ellenwood says that one former BeaconArts member who moved to Newburgh plans to return.

Instead of Beacon's art scene being in decline, maybe it's just entering a new phase. "I have a passion for Beacon's art scene and I want to contribute to it, but it's not based on nostalgia," says Jordan, who moved to Beacon in 2019. "And I think as the scene grows again and brings in new people, they'll have that same experience. Because I've never seen anything like this."

Agoglia, the president of BeaconArts, believes the city's art scene has a solid foundation. "I hear a lot of sob stories: 'Oh, it's all going downhill. I can't do XYZ,' " he said. "Are you kidding me? Look around. It's different people doing different things with different resources. You can get on board or you can stay home and mope."

Maybe, as Benavente suggests, it wasn't the art that changed Beacon.

"The arts don't cause change," he says. "They're a reflection of the change, of the culture and the people who are part of it. Art just represents what's already there, good, bad or otherwise. It's up to individuals to make something out of it."

Why This Series

In the past quarter-century, Beacon has transformed itself from a city of boarded-up windows and crime to a vanguard of culture and environmental sustainability. But many residents feel the resurgence has come at a steep price, criticizing the pace and scale of development and arguing that housing prices are robbing Beacon of its diversity and working-class character.

Who has benefited most from this transformation? Who has been left behind? For this series, we're talking to people who live and work in the city as we attempt to address these questions, as well as document changes in housing and demographics, the arts, politics and activism. Earlier installments are online at highlandscurrent.org.

After Beacon, A New Home

Former council member finds Kingston has similar challenges

By Jeff Simms

Sara Pasti was intimately involved in Beacon's revitalization for most of the 18 years she lived in the city.

After moving to Beacon in 2002, Pasti was elected to the City Council in 2007 as a Democrat and served three, 2-year terms representing Ward 4. She also was co-chair of the committee that drafted the comprehensive plan in 2007, updated it in 2017 and was named co-chair of the Main Street Access Committee in 2020.

But after retiring in 2019 as director of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz, Pasti found herself ready to downsize.

A year later, she began looking for apartments in Beacon as well as Newburgh and Kingston. "It was hard to find a place because so many Airbnbs were springing up during the pandemic and taking over the rental units in each of those cities," Pasti said. In addition, because she was now on a fixed income, she found that two-bedroom apartments in Beacon (she wanted a home office) were too expensive.

Fortunately, Pasti stumbled onto a small house in Kingston that she could afford to buy. "Kingston still has some of the grittiness that Beacon had when I first moved there," she said. "I was looking at the next phase of my life, and I was open to having it anywhere in the Hudson Valley."

In Kingston, like Beacon, Pasti said she's found a thriving arts community. She joined the board of the Midtown Arts District, which trains students in the arts and other life skills and is in the process of creating a community print shop.

She found diverse neighborhoods and housing, she said, but also a fear among residents that the city could lose its pockets of diversity, "the same way they disappeared in Beacon."

Sara Pasti in Kingston *Photo provided*

Kingston has launched a rezoning effort that includes affordable housing initiatives, plus related projects, such as community grant programs, tenant protections and parks improvements, among many other projects. The rezoning is expected to be completed this year, and Pasti is running for a seat on the Common Council to oversee its implementation.

"Beacon is certainly not the only place experiencing an affordability crisis," she said, noting that Kingston also saw an influx of new residents who fled New York City during the pandemic.

Once the rezoning project is finished, Pasti hopes, if elected, to join a task force that will guide housing policy. She also hopes to see Kingston address pedestrian and bike safety, one of the issues the Main Street committee wrestled with in Beacon.

Then there's "the unseen work, which is what I came to love in Beacon," of connecting residents with the services they need.

Pasti returns to Beacon often to visit. "As much as I loved Beacon, I realized it was the Hudson Valley region I had really fallen in love with," she said. Once she arrived in Kingston, it was time to get invested in a new community, "and I was off on a new adventure."

NEXT WEEK:
Police and crime, political shifts and community activism

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Part 3 of a series

Steve Schwartz with the sloop Woody Guthrie *Photo by B. Cronin*

Beacon: Then, Now and How

The city has long been fertile ground for community activism. Why here?

By Brian PJ Cronin

In 1978, Steve Schwartz ran the New York City Marathon without training. It wasn't the most questionable thing he did that weekend.

The following day Schwartz got a call from a friend inviting him on a sailboat ride from Beacon to Cold Spring. Schwartz had recently moved to Cold Spring from New York City in order to start a family — "I came upriver to spawn," he said — and was living near the train station. Although he could barely move, he figured he could hobble to the train, ride to the Beacon waterfront, hobble to the boat, sail to Cold Spring and hobble home.

"I'm thinking deck chairs and a piña colada with a little umbrella in it," he said. "I didn't know much about sailboats, but I figured you didn't walk much on it."

The boat was the brand-new sloop Woody Guthrie, a smaller-scale replica of the sloop Clearwater that folk singer Pete Seeger and friends had built 10 years before. Seeger was there and, as Schwartz found out when they pushed off from the dock and discovered that there wasn't enough wind to catch the sail, he liked to do things the old-fashioned way.

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Philipstown to End E-Vehicle Honor System

Also weighs more solar, approves fees for e-waste

By Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong

Philipstown plans to replace the "honor boxes" at its e-vehicle chargers at Town Hall with equipment that requires payment.

Town Clerk Tara Percacciolo reported that drivers deposited $80 in the first month, but the monthly yield then fell to, at most, $30. At the Philipstown Town Board meeting on June 1, she and Supervisor John Van Tassel also noted that some drivers monopolize the chargers for hours, or even overnight.

Once the new chargers are in place, "nobody's going to be getting a free ride any longer," Van Tassel promised.

At the same time, the town plans to install two new pay-per-use chargers in the parking strip at Mayor's Park in Cold Spring.

Martha Upton, the town's Climate Smart program coordinator, noted that, since last fall, "something very surprising happened" and the cost of the equipment has dropped. That has been a boon for efforts to install the chargers, which are largely funded by grants from New York State and Central Hudson.

Solar panels

Van Tassel said Philipstown wants to

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AIR ALERT — The air in the Highlands and throughout the eastern U.S. turned orange and hazy with smoke this past week from hundreds of forest fires burning in Canada. This shot of the Hudson River was taken at 1:15 p.m. on Wednesday (June 7) from Anthony's Nose in southern Philipstown. New York State issued a health advisory, cautioning people who need to be outdoors to wear N95 or equivalent masks. The fires may continue to loft smoke for weeks or months, meteorologists said. *Photo by Lucy Freilich*

Putnam Valley Fire Sues Over Dumping

Seeks at least $1.75 million in cleanup costs

By Leonard Sparks

The Putnam Valley Volunteer Fire Department is suing a contractor and a materials recycler to recover the more than $1.75 million in taxpayer funds it has spent cleaning up contaminated construction fill and debris illegally dumped in 2016 at the site of its new firehouse.

The federal lawsuit, filed May 19 in White Plains, accuses John Adorno, the owner of Universal Construction in Yorktown Heights, of dumping 10,000 cubic tons of material at the fire department property at 218 Oscawana Lake Road. It also names Metro Green, which recycles construction and excavation material at a facility in Mount Vernon.

The fire department said "an injustice would result" if Adorno and Metro Green are not ordered to pay for the cleanup.

According to a state report, Adorno told state Department of Environmental Conservation investigators who visited the site in 2016 that most of the waste came from Metro Green and the rest from a demolition project in the Bronx.

The material included asphalt, bricks, concrete and lumber. Testing by HDR Engineering, which was hired to clean

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Beacon: Then, Now and How

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"His favorite thing about that boat was rowing it," Schwartz said. The immobile Schwartz and the spry Seeger spent the next three hours rowing the 9-ton sloop down to what some sailors call The Wind Gate, where the Hudson River narrows and deepens between Storm King and Breakneck Ridge. The Dutch, however, referred to that area as "the weather hole," as Schwartz discovered when the wind and current suddenly picked up with hellish intensity, determined to sink the Woody, as they had hundreds of other boats in that spot.

Three hours of rowing at a snail's pace were followed by 10 minutes of breakneck panic, as the sloop zig-zagged back and forth, narrowly missing the shore again and again. Finally, with Cold Spring in sight, Seeger dropped the sail and the sloop gently coasted into the dock as if being carried on a pillow.

"I turned to Pete and said: 'What do I have to do to get back on this boat?'" Schwartz recalled. "And Pete said: 'Show up tomorrow; we're doing some maintenance.' "

Forty-five years later, tomorrow hasn't ended. Schwartz is now a captain of the Woody Guthrie and spends more days on the water than off. It's a volunteer position; as Schwartz proudly points out, no one has ever paid, or been paid, to be on the Woody. The Beacon Sloop Club still hosts free sailing trips on weeknights at 6 p.m. throughout the summer, and will hold its popular annual Strawberry Festival this Sunday at Pete & Toshi Seeger Riverfront Park in Beacon.

When the Seegers and friends founded

> "Pete Seeger landed here for some reason, right?"
>
> **~ Jen Clapp**

Clearwater in Beacon in 1969, the Hudson Valley was a focal point in a resurgent environmental movement, as community groups fought Consolidated Edison's plans to build a power plant on the side of Storm King. The Seegers thought that if the 18th-century sloops, specially designed to take advantage of the river's unique topography and fickle weather, made a return and were accessible to the public, people would fall in love with the river again and try to protect it.

Sloop clubs affiliated with the Clearwater sprouted up, although only about a half-dozen remain, and Beacon's is the only one on the Hudson River that still has a sloop. Perhaps that's because it's the oldest club, formed the same year and in the same city as the Clearwater.

But there may be another reason that Clearwater has endured, and that many later activist groups and community organizations have thrived in Beacon. Schwartz, and others said it may have to do with the city itself.

"Pete Seeger landed here for some reason, right?" said Jen Clapp, who arrived in September 2001 from the West Coast and

Members of Beacon Mutual Aid prepare for distribution on Wednesday (June 7).

became the first education director at Common Ground Farm.

Schwartz said he observed the same energy in the ongoing protests led by Beacon 4 Black Lives in the summer and fall of 2020 as he did in the early years of the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day marches in Beacon that the Seegers helped to found with the Southern Dutchess NAACP. "We're Pete and Toshi's children," he said. And Seeger used to say, in reference to his work in Beacon, "I wanted to turn back the clock to when people lived in small villages and took care of each other."

Feeding each other

Clapp and her family moved to Beacon 10 days before the towers fell. She didn't know too many people, but the people she did know were looking to build community in the wake of the attacks. From that came Common Ground Farm, based at the Stony Kill Environmental Center just outside Beacon. It launched one of the Hudson Valley's first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in which members pay upfront for a share of a farm's produce throughout the growing season.

After Clapp became education director, the farm started working on food-justice projects, such as offering free or discounted memberships, working with the Beacon school system and helping to found the Green Teens, in which teenagers are paid to plant community gardens while learning about the food system and how to cook the food they grow. Thanks to an ongoing grant, Common Ground gives away about half of the food it grows every year.

Clapp left in 2013 to become a nurse, which meant that she was overworked and overwhelmed after the pandemic hit. "Suddenly Beacon Mutual Aid sprang into existence, and I thought, 'Oh, my God, I can't believe this thing that I've always wanted to have happen in my community is happening and I can't participate,' " she said. "It was painful." She changed her work schedule so that she could help with distributions, "and I just loved it," she said.

Every other Wednesday, a crew of volunteers shows up at 6:45 a.m. behind Rombout Middle School to pack bags, sort donations and unload a truck from the Hudson Valley Food Bank. By 8 a.m. on a recent Wednesday there were more than 30 cars lined up, even though distribution would not begin for another hour. Clapp said that the group usually serves more than 60 cars, and most are transporting members of more than one family. Bags are also packed for home deliveries, and another batch is dropped at the Beacon Recreation Center.

Kara Dean-Assael and Jamie Levato of Fareground *Photos by B. Cronin*

It's a diverse group that shows up to help, Clapp says: racially, economically and politically. "Everyone's politics are all over the map, but it doesn't get talked about," she says. "This is nobody's overt mission to change the world. It's just people working together to do something good."

The concept of mutual aid appeals to people who might not otherwise get involved in charity groups, Clapp says, because there's no hierarchy. "I know several people who used to be in that line of cars every week who are now in positions of leadership in the group," she said.

A similar philosophy governs Fareground, a food insecurity group that was founded in Beacon in 2014 and works with Common Ground Farm and Beacon Mutual Aid. "A lot of our volunteers are people who have in the past, or are currently, getting free food from us," said Jamie Levato, its executive director, who in 2021 became the organization's first paid employee. "That's important to us, because they know what it's like to have experienced food insecurity, so it helps how people engage with one another. But it's also neighbors helping neighbors."

"Being involved and taking action is simply the character of the Beacon community, and it has been for decades," said Brooke Simmons, who helped to create I Am Beacon in 2012. In 11 years, the group has raised $33,000 in scholarships for Beacon High School graduates, produced 100 episodes of a podcast that features community members and organized dozens of events, including a festival devoted to expanding mental health resources and an annual 5K run.

Simmons said the group was inspired by the legacy of the city's shuttered community centers, including the Beacon Community Center and the MLK Jr. Center, and by role models such as Carmen Johnson and Lehman Anderson.

Julie Winterbottom, who moved to Beacon in 2016, said "there's no better antidote to despair and a sense of powerlessness than working with others to actually get things done." Last year, someone she knew invited her to the first meeting of a Beacon group devoted to addressing the climate crisis. Winterbottom insisted she was too busy but would come to one meeting. However, Beacon Climate Action Now struck a chord and she's rarely missed a meeting since.

"It's a collaborative, democratically run group," she said. "We figure out a concrete campaign to work on and everyone pitches in. The climate crisis breeds fear and a feeling of helplessness, and this group has beautifully countered that."

The group has been working with organizations such as Grannies Respond and the Beacon Hebrew Alliance to collect supplies and offer outreach to the waves of asylum-seekers who have arrived in the Hudson Valley in recent weeks. It is also pushing for more affordable housing.

Those issues may not seem to have a lot to do with global warming, but Winterbottom said community care is an integral part of addressing climate change. "As the climate crisis accelerates, we're only going to survive and thrive if we have community connection," she said.

The mountain and the river

When Pete Seeger moved to Beacon in 1949, he had been branded a communist sympathizer. Only three businesses in town

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would serve him. He said he built the chimney in his Highlands cabin out of rocks that people threw at him. Yet, when he died 55 years later, in 2014, the city mourned. He had helped change the place.

"This was a smoldering landfill when I got here in 1978," said Schwartz, standing in Long Dock Park. "Now it's one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen."

It's tempting to attribute all of this to the Seegers, but Clapp said she knows from working as a home health aide for older residents whose families have lived in the city for generations that it has long been a tight-knit, supportive place. In conversations with local organizers, the size and landscape of the city kept coming up as the reasons why activism has thrived here.

> "This was a smoldering landfill when I got here in 1978. Now it's one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen.
>
> **~ Steve Schwartz**

"It was hard to find community in New York City because the place is so enormous and everyone is focused on their career," Winterbottom offered. "Here you can make real connections with people because you see them again and again."

The mountains and the river surround and contain the city, preventing sprawl. "It's small and compact, so you see your neighbors all the time," said Levato. "You see what's going on, you see where the needs are."

The city is also walkable, with a relatively narrow Main Street. Winterbottom noted that, after her urban downsizing, she could meet someone one day and run into the same person at Key Food or the library the next. Those connections "build a better town and better community organizations," she said.

"There's this constant flow of people coming from other places, and they want to meet each other," said Clapp. "That's part of what's kept me here. My kids are grown and gone, but I have this constant flow of new people coming into my life."

Finally, the mountains and river are lodestars. "It gives you this feeling of attachment and love for the place where you live," said Winterbottom. "That extends to wanting to take care of it, and wanting to work with other people to take care of it."

"People here know that they live in a special place, and we don't want to mess it up," said Clapp.

"You've got the mountains, you've got the river," said Schwartz, one hand gesturing to each. "How could it *not* be Beacon?" ▪

Democrats swept the Beacon council elections in 2019, winning all seven seats, including the mayoral race. *File photo by J. Simms*

Where Have the Republicans Gone?

Once a GOP stronghold, the city has shifted Democratic

By Jeff Simms

Clara Lou Gould's five terms as Beacon mayor were noteworthy for a number of reasons.

She was the first (and remains the only) female mayor in Beacon and the longest-serving female mayor in state history. In office from 1990 to 2007, she presided over the early stages of Beacon's revitalization, guiding the city out of debt and helping to combat crime while ushering in an appreciation for open spaces and the arts, both of which would fuel a resurgence that continues today.

She was also a Republican — a rare breed in Beacon these days, at least in elected office.

In 2003, the same year that Gould won her fifth term, Beacon voters elected four Republicans and two Democrats to the City Council. Four years later, when Steve Gold, a Democrat, became mayor, voters installed five Democrats and Randy Casale, who was registered with the Independence Party.

The next mayoral election, in 2011, would see Casale elected to the first of two terms as mayor, running as the Independence and Republican candidate. The City Council members elected that year were split evenly between Democrats and Republicans, but beginning in 2013, Democrats have taken nearly every seat, with Casale the notable exception.

By 2019, Beacon Republicans put forth only one candidate and, in 2021, six Democrats ran unopposed for six council seats. (The mayor is elected every four years and the other council members run every two. The next municipal election will be this fall.)

The trend is not surprising in the context of state voter registrations. There are nearly 23,000 more Democrats in Dutchess County than there are Republicans. Statewide, Democrats outnumber Republicans more than 2 to 1.

Beacon Voters

	1950	2003	2020
Democrat	32%	41%	55%
Republican	50%	23%	14%
Other	1%	8%	7%
Unaffiliated	17%	28%	24%

Sources: News coverage, Dutchess Board of Elections

According to the most recent data available from the county Board of Elections, Beacon in 2020 was 56 percent Democrat and other left-leaning parties, such as Green and Working Families. Twenty-four percent of voters were unaffiliated and 15 percent were registered as Republican or Conservative.

"It's very hard to convince someone to run for office with those kinds of numbers," said Peter Forman, a Republican who was Beacon's city attorney from 1990 to 1999. Forman, who later served more than 20 years as a Dutchess County judge, recalled that in 1989, when he managed Gould's first campaign, Beacon was closer to 40 percent Democrat, 30 percent Republican and 30 percent unaffiliated.

That split allowed Gould to build a coalition between Republican and independent voters that put her into office.

Forman cited his own loss in 2020 as a Dutchess County judge and a loss in 2021 by longtime City Court Judge Tim Pagones as the latest evidence of Beacon's shifting political allegiance. He suggested that older city residents who may have voted Republican have died or moved away and "their houses were bought by Brooklyn, by and large."

Gold served five terms on the City Council before being elected mayor in 2007. He remembers knocking on residents' doors during his first campaign, in the mid-1990s, and meeting only one family that had relocated from Brooklyn. "Now, that's impossible," he said.

Decades ago, "when Beacon was populated by people who worked in its factories and many of the same families lived here for generations, voters backed candidates whom they knew from work, church, school and their neighborhood, rather than based on political affiliation," he said.

It's unclear how active the Beacon Republican Committee is these days. The most recent activity on its Facebook page was a post more than a year ago expressing support for former President Donald Trump. An image at the top of the page lists the party's candidates for the 2017 municipal elections, and its site at beacongop.com is not operating. Susan Pagones, the wife of the former judge who managed his campaign, said she would forward a message to the committee chair but did not provide a name, and no one responded.

Justin Riccobono, who led the committee a decade ago but no longer lives in the city, said he does not know who the party's leaders are in Beacon, and Michael McCormack, the chair of the Dutchess Republican Committee, did not respond to an email seeking information.

It could be challenging, Gold said, for a candidate to navigate New York State's rules for collecting voter signatures and filing nominating petitions without guidance from party leadership. "It's not something you could approach as a layperson and overcome those hurdles," he said. "Without a strong party behind you, it could easily collapse."

Clara Lou Gould said she viewed her time as mayor as working for everyone in the community. "I always considered it community service, not politics," she said recently.

Gold also noted the adage that, on the

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Politics *(from Page 7)*

local level, there aren't Democratic or Republican ways to pave roads.

But as national politics become more divisive, are local voters inclined to solely support the candidates aligned with their favored party?

Lisa Jessup, the chair of the Beacon Democratic Committee, and Yvette Valdés Smith, a Democrat who represents part of Beacon in the Dutchess County Legislature, each suggested that Beacon Republicans had engaged in what Jessup called "very sly voter suppression" by not fielding candidates in the most recent municipal elections.

"It's derelict of them not to give people in their party candidates to vote for," said Jessup. She acknowledged that in the upcoming election, Democrat Eric Eckley will face a tough challenge in East Fishkill, where he is running for a legislative seat representing District 21. Voters there have historically supported Republicans, "but we put forth a candidate," Jessup said.

In addition, if fewer Beacon voters turn out because Democrats are running unopposed for the City Council, "that can have an effect on the countywide races," where Republicans and Conservatives hold 17 of the 25 seats in the Dutchess Legislature, Valdés Smith said.

In 2019, with only one Republican on the municipal ballot, voter turnout in Beacon was 44 percent. Two years later, with Democrat Greg Johnston challenging Pagones for City Court judge and the six Democrats running unopposed for council seats, turnout was 32 percent.

"It's always good to have meaningful debate," said Forman. "It helps to keep elected officials accountable. If you don't feel any pressure from the other side, you're in a different position than if you're in a more balanced community." ▪

Why This Series

In the past quarter-century, Beacon has transformed itself from a city of boarded-up windows and crime to a vanguard of culture and environmental sustainability. But many residents feel the resurgence has come at a steep price, criticizing the pace and scale of development and arguing that housing prices are robbing Beacon of its diversity and working-class character.

Who has benefited most from this transformation? Who has been left behind? For this series, we're talking to people who live and work in the city as we attempt to address these questions, as well as document changes in housing and demographics, the arts, politics and activism. Earlier installments are online at highlandscurrent.org.

A Plague Fueled by Crack

Beacon reeled from crime in the '90s

By Leonard Sparks

Before Daniel Aubry began marketing real estate from the storefront at 192 Main St. in Beacon, the building became a shrine to Michael Adrian Brown.

Police found the 19-year-old sprawled on the stoop of the then-boarded-up structure on Sept. 5, 1995 — one bullet struck Brown's left arm, the other his face. People began filling the stoop with candles, cards and flowers in honor of the former Beacon High School student.

An article in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* described the building as "a one-time barbershop, now marred by graffiti and peeling paint." For police, the corner of Main and Willow streets, where 192 Main sat, was at the epicenter of the illegal drug trade and an era.

"Weapons, armed robberies, you name it," said Harold Delamater, a retired Beacon detective. "It was the Wild West."

Before city officials declared a full-fledged renaissance, Beacon residents had to survive the 1990s, when the emergence of crack cocaine fueled an outbreak of drug sales, robberies and burglaries. Homicides and reported rapes remained low, according to crime data, but other violent crimes — aggravated assaults and robberies — reached highs in the 1990s, when the crack epidemic spread upriver from New York City.

Beacon averaged 110 violent crimes during the period, peaking at 173 in 1995. Brown's death was the sole homicide that year, but the city recorded its highest number of robberies and aggravated assaults since at least 1990.

Property crimes — burglaries, larcenies and car thefts — also spiked, which authorities attributed to people addicted to narcotics searching for items such as VCRs and televisions that could be sold. The 168 burglaries recorded in 1991 was 10 times the number recorded in 2022; the city averaged 209 larcenies annually during the 1990s, nearly twice as many as the 115 from 2022.

When Clara Lou Gould defeated Jim Fredericks in 1989 to become Beacon's mayor, she named the illegal drug problem as a priority. She still held the mayor's seat in 2000, when the crime wave began a steady decline as Beacon drew new residents, housing and businesses.

"People did get involved," said Gould, when asked what led to a safer city. "This is your city; you can't leave it all to everybody else."

Police in Beacon and Poughkeepsie first began to notice in the late 1980s the emergence of the smokeable cocaine derivative that became known as crack. According to a *Poughkeepsie Journal* article in November 1986, "until six months ago, many local police officers didn't know what the new crystalline form of cocaine looked like."

By March 1988, Fredericks and leaders of Beacon's Muslim community gathered for a march along Main Street, where they vowed to drive out drug dealers. Before crack, Beacon officers mostly dealt with a handful of heroin addicts who largely kept to themselves; the odd person smoking a joint; public drinking; and dice games on Main Street, said Delamater.

Crack "slowly worked its way into Beacon," he said. "When it came in, it came in with a vengeance. We were not prepared."

Dealers selling crack dominated on the West End, along Main Street between Bank Square and Elm, and powder cocaine at the East End. Main and Cliff streets, and Main and Willow, where Brown died, were two of the hot corners, said Delmater.

The arrests during the 1990s included a man charged with chasing a woman with a knife and demanding her bank cards, car and money; three Beacon men charged with possessing 66 vials of crack after police stopped a taxi near the Edgewater apartments; and two men arrested 2½ hours apart for selling drugs at Main and Cliff.

Police raided a third-floor apartment on Cliff Street being used as a stash house and a pool hall on the East End where dealers sold cocaine, said Delamater. In July 1990, police charged six people with felony cocaine possession and sales after raiding 163 and 174 Main St. and finding 6 ounces of cocaine and $5,000 cash.

Beacon's East End hosted most of the city's heroin trade, he said. Police raided one house and the dealer threw 100 bags of heroin out of a window — where it landed at the feet of a police officer, said Delamater.

Beacon averaged 105 burglaries annually in the 1990s, compared to an average of 20 since 2018. In addition to VCRs and televisions, thieves looked for cash and small items of value that could be fenced, such as jewelry. In 1990, a man living at the Mount Beacon Hotel was charged with committing burglaries at 15 businesses over a three-year period. Police said he stole things he could fit in his pocket.

That same year, police said they were investigating a string of five burglaries that occurred overnight on Aug. 29, including a 1987 Iroc Z Camaro valued at $12,000 and $200 in jewelry and cash.

One serial thief had a special tactic, said Delamater: "People would leave their windows open and the guy would lift the screen or poke a hole in it and then take a stick and reach in and grab the pocketbook that was close to the window."

Beacon, which had two armed robberies in 2022, averaged 20 annually throughout the 1990s, including 28 in 1995. The victims included pedestrians on Main Street.

A man with a pistol stuck in his belt stole $300 from Little Jo's Corner Store at 73 Teller Ave., in March 1990. In December 1992, a

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Violent Crimes in Beacon

YEAR	TOTAL	MURDER	RAPE	ROBBERY
1990	128	1	3	22
1991	131	1	0	17
1994	105	1	4	20
1995	173	1	4	28
1996	142	0	1	14
1997	134	0	1	19
2022	17	1	1	2

Property Crimes in Beacon

YEAR	TOTAL	BURGLARY	LARCENY	CAR THEFT
1990	385	164	191	30
1991	385	168	183	34
1998	448	110	319	19
1999	358	78	251	29
2002	377	119	229	29
2008	352	107	225	20
2022	135	16	115	4

Source: New York Division of Criminal Justice Services

(Continued from Page 8)

robber demanded money and shot a 17-year-old in the ankle at Main and South streets.

"People would be walking along, minding their own business, and the next thing you know, they were being mugged," said Delamater.

After Gould took office in 1990, she requested $20,000 from Dutchess County to fight the drug trade and $50,000 from New York State to hire two officers for the city's understaffed department. The City Council passed a budget for 1991 that added funding for one new officer, bringing the total to 35, but that still left the department below the 40 recommended by the state.

Gould and the Beacon school district employed another strategy, announcing in 1990 the posting of 24 signs designating drug-free zones around city schools. Under a state law enacted in 1986, the penalty for selling drugs to a person under 19 years old within 1,000 feet of a school increased, becoming a Class B felony, instead of a Class C. The maximum prison sentence rose from 15 to 25 years.

"We had a neighborhood watch set up, and that worked," said Gould. "People, if they saw something, could call the police to check it out."

Troopers assigned to the state police's Community Narcotics Enforcement Team (CNET) and officers from the multi-agency Dutchess County Drug Task Force, formed in 1989, aided Beacon's undermanned department. The council approved the creation of a narcotics unit within the Beacon Police Department and officers cracked down on quality-of-life crimes, such as drinking alcohol in public.

"Quality-of-life was big for the Police Department and then, when it comes to the purchases of the drugs and any search warrants, that was done by the drug task force," said Delamater. "CNET focused on street sales."

Entrepreneurs who began buying up and un-boarding properties in Beacon also helped, said Delamater, by allowing police to use their buildings for surveillance.

Felony drug arrests in Dutchess County spiked during the era, averaging 320 a year between 1989 and 1996, higher than any period since 1970, according to state data. Police also arrested more people for violent and property crimes between the end of the 1980s and the mid-1990s.

By January 2001, Gould was lauding Beacon's recovery in a State of the City address that highlighted the coming Dia Center for Arts, several waterfront projects and the strengthening of the city's code-enforcement office.

A year earlier, larcenies were still high, at 243, but violent crimes had fallen to 69 and burglaries to 35.

In an article about Gould's speech, Ori Brachfeld, then the owner of Dash Lock & Key in Beacon, told the *Poughkeepsie Journal* that "it's been a long struggle, but I believe we're heading in the right direction."

"The future looks good," he said. ▪

NEXT WEEK:

A look at Beacon's small businesses and a roundtable discussion with Beacon's four living mayors.

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Fjord Trail Drops Some Elements, for Now

Says it will initially take 'trail-first' approach

By Leonard Sparks

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail Inc. announced on Monday (June 12) that it plans to remove some elements from its plans for the proposed 7.5-mile trail between Cold Spring and Beacon.

Citing a desire to ensure the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail (HHFT) does not "inadvertently add to visitation and congestion," the organization said that an environmental impact study it is preparing will not include a play area and outdoor classroom at Little Stony Point, or a swimming area with a floating dock.

The organization is also dropping plans for "forest nets," a system of elevated wooden walkways that were to carry visitors through forests and have hammocks where people could relax.

Amy Kacala, HHFT's executive director, said in a statement that the nonprofit, a subsidiary of Scenic Hudson, is taking a "trail-first" approach that prioritizes managing the crowds that visit the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve and the impact on Cold Spring. That will mean a focus on the main trail, parking areas, trailheads and a visitor's center at Dutchess Manor on Route 9D.

In response to concerns expressed on Facebook that HHFT was removing features that would appeal to children, Lori Moss, a representative for the group, said "it is important to note that these features are not completely off the table, but rather they will only be considered after the main trail

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Part 4 of a series

Three former Beacon mayors — from left, Randy Casale, Clara Lou Gould and Steve Gold — and the current mayor, Lee Kyriacou (right), gathered on June 9 at the request of *The Current* to discuss the city's past and future. *Photo by Valerie Shively*

Beacon: Then, Now and How

We gathered the city's four living mayors for a discussion about change

By Jeff Simms

On June 9, *The Current* invited Beacon's four living mayors — Clara Lou Gould (1990-2007), Steve Gold (2008-2011), Randy Casale (2012-2019) and Lee Kyriacou (2020 to present) — to gather at City Hall for a discussion of the city's recent past and future. Their comments have been edited for clarity and brevity.

Let's talk about how Beacon has changed over the past quarter-century.

Clara Lou Gould: When I was mayor, I always wanted to get the community involved. As I would say to students who were learning about government, "This is your city." I would ask: "Have you heard that government is of the people, by the people and for the people?" They would say, "Yes." And I'd ask, "So, who is the government?" Invariably, they would respond, "You are." And I'd say, "No, you weren't listening. We all are."

If you see something that needs correcting or changing, you don't just

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Out There

Welcome to the Age of Fire

By Brian PJ Cronin

I woke up a week ago Wednesday and was confused as to why there was an intense orange sunbeam across the floor.

"How long have I been asleep?" I wondered. "And why is the sun setting in the east?"

My disorientation was the least-harmful effect of the three-day smokeout. Researchers at Stanford University calculated that June 7 was the worst day for wildfire smoke pollution in U.S. history. The day before, June 6, was the fourth worst. (Nos. 2 and 3 were caused by California wildfires over two days in September 2020.)

Outdoor air pollution contributes to the deaths of 4.2 million people annually, according to the World Health Organization, and wildfire smoke is one of the most toxic pollutants out there, partially because as forests burn, they often spread to houses and everything inside. Imagine huffing every cleaning product under your sink. Imagine doing it for every sink in town, plus everyone's melting microwaves.

As I write this, the Highlands sky is again blue and the air quality map has returned to green, so it's understandable if people are relegating the haze to another of those weird incidents, such as a world-

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An unfiltered view of last week's unfiltered sky *Photo by B. Cronin*

BeaconArts Bounces Back

Nonprofit working on recovery after pandemic

By Alison Rooney

Small businesses were not the only establishments hit hard by the pandemic shutdown. Nonprofits that depend on volunteers suffered attrition as well, emerging a touch stunned but also with pent-up energy ready to be channeled.

That's the case with BeaconArts, the 20-year-old focal point of art and artists in the city. Matthew Agoglia, its president, joined the board in January 2020, about two months before the shutdown. Like everyone else, he had no idea what lay ahead.

"Our organization depends on participation from the community to make its programs a reality," he said. "That all went right to sleep when everyone had to focus on their own well-being."

The immediate goal for BeaconArts, Agoglia said, is to "design a stable infrastructure, to bring it back to where it was pre-pandemic. The next step is to come up with a real vision for taking BeaconArts somewhere else with new programs rather than just maintaining the old ones.

"If you walk around town now, you can sense a frenetic energy," he said. "People want to go out and do stuff, start something. There are several initiatives around re-starting Second Saturdays [when

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Beacon: Then, Now and How

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talk to each other, you call somebody in charge. You don't just say what you think is wrong, you suggest a solution. Same thing with the City Council. I would put time for public comment on the agenda so the ward representatives could take notes or say there was already a solution in the doing. It was just a sense of making it our community and not some people up here [on the council] and other people down there.

We tried to emphasize beautification and community involvement. That's when we did hanging baskets on Main Street. I remember the first year; they planted them in my front yard. Then we did the barrels on Main Street, and Texaco donated the barrels. We got that idea from Saratoga. People couldn't reach them to pull out the flowers, and, of course, Randy [who was the highway superintendent] watered them.

Clara Lou Gould

Before the beautification, we were made a Tree City by New York State. We got the merchants to do flower boxes. The boxes were made by the carpenters' union and the schools planted the seeds. The Garden Club also helped. We did the Welcome to Beacon signs. My husband and I used to have dinner at Dutchess Manor every Friday night, and the bartender was a guy from Cold Spring, which is where I grew up. He said that somebody came in and said, "Beacon is the pits," but I knew it couldn't be that bad if we plant flowers to welcome people.

Steve Gold: You're very modest, Clara Lou, because the heavy lifting of Beacon's renaissance took place during your administration. In these older cities, in the mid-1990s, it was hard to find somebody to refurbish a building, to make it look good again. Our Main Street was looking ragged, but during your term, Ron Sauers and Ronnie Beth Sauers and others took the East End and restored those buildings. You left the door open for them to do that and helped facilitate it with some aid from the county. That should be a big part of your legacy. I inherited that [in 2008]. When I took office, we had just passed the comprehensive plan, which was a major step for the city to update the way it was looking at development. My charge was to facilitate those changes, to bring the plan to life.

If you remember, in 2008 there was a severe economic downturn. What began as an effort to implement zoning became an effort to keep Beacon looking good and safe, even though there was no revenue. We had four years of difficult finances, and we had to make some serious decisions on how to keep the city moving forward and not deteriorate. We wanted to be in a good place when the economy got better, so Beacon would be able to springboard from that.

We had one major development during my time — the MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] wanted to put in a transit-oriented development by the waterfront — and the city decided not to accept it. We analyzed the benefits and the consequences. The public came out and said it was not right for Beacon. There was almost nobody in favor of this huge project that was going to transform the waterfront.

However, the other zoning that we put in seemed to be in line with what the city wanted to do. We became a government promoting Beacon as a place to come to, to enjoy. It's safe, it's clean, there are flowers on Main Street, the vibe is good.

Beacon does have a sense of identity, a sense of belonging. When people move here, they quickly take on this loyalty and pride in the city. That has never changed, even though the demographics are different and the people who are here don't always have the long roots of those who were here before. When people come here, they become involved and concerned quickly. I don't know whether that's true about most other communities, but it's true about Beacon.

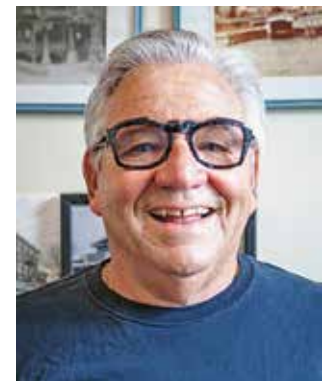
The other thing I've observed is that you always get people coming to council meetings who are opposed to something that's going to affect them. One of the differences I've seen is that more people come to council meetings to advocate change they want to see that would make Beacon a better place. It's not so much of a reaction as it is a proaction. When Lee was leading the council on issues like police reform and good-cause eviction, the public came forward with ideas like having social workers go out with police officers to help de-escalate situations. Those are ideas that are centered around people's sense of identity of being a Beaconite and wanting Beacon to be an even better place.

Randy Casale: What Clara Lou didn't mention was, when she took office, we were a commission form of government. It took a heavy lift to make this a city manager/mayor form of government. The first time that came up, I opposed it publicly and it got voted down. It came back up and it went through, and it's probably the best thing that ever happened to the city. My concern was because I looked at Newburgh and Poughkeepsie and they were firing city managers every other year. To me, continuity is the key to success. Since we went to a mayor/manager form of government, we have had only a few city administrators. The first one was Joe Braun, who taught me a lot. Joe was here for 15 or 16 years, and then Meredith Robson came. When she left, Anthony Ruggiero came and now Chris White is here, and all of them were good administrators. They did the job in a business manner, not in a political manner, which helped the city.

Thinking about Main Street, people complain about parking and about it being congested. When I was growing up in Beacon, Main Street had parking meters and it was still congested every day, and on Friday nights the stores were open until 9 p.m. When the industries closed, Main Street basically closed, too. Storefronts became apartments, which was not a good thing. When Clara Lou took over, both ends of Main Street were in rough shape.

Clara Lou would have a meeting every Friday in the old Lewis Tompkins firehouse, which is now Hudson Beach Glass, with all the Main Street business people, the chief of police, the Highway Department, and we'd go over whatever concerns they had and how we could improve Main Street. That's where the kickoff started. Everybody started working together to try to get Main Street going. Then Ron Sauers did the East End and it started snowballing.

When I took over as mayor, there was a Main Street committee and a river committee. I took the two and made one committee and we opened the comprehensive plan again [for the update in 2017]. Out of that we rezoned Main Street. At the time, you could build up to four stories, and the riverfront never had zoning. As Steve said before, when they were going to do the riverfront, the MTA was almost exempt from any of our zoning. They could plan whatever they wanted. We wound up zoning it so if anything goes up, it will only be on the east side of the tracks. Anything that goes up high would only be on the south end and the north end, where the cliffs are, and in the middle it would be no higher than the MTA police station so it wouldn't block views.



Randy Casale

What people forget is that when urban renewal [in the late 1960s and early 1970s] knocked all the buildings down, the city lost a good chunk of its tax base. They thought they could get industry to come, because the railroad was here, Nabisco was here, our sewage treatment plant was down there. But for 40 years, nothing came. Part of the misconception is that we're building on open space, but this was never open space. When I was a kid, there were buildings on every 50-foot lot all the way down to the railroad tracks. That's the tax base, and your government and your city is only as good as the income you can get from a tax base. You've got to provide safety, recreation, streetlights and garbage, and that all costs money.

It's nice to have open space. And believe me, we have a lot of it. Through development, we've got a lot more. We have a [greenway] trail from the river all the way around to Fishkill Creek, and now that the MTA finally gave up the tracks [the dormant Beacon Line], we'll finally get a trail all the way up to the Walkway Over the Hudson. That will take you all the way up to New Paltz. That's all new open space, and the developers along Fishkill Creek have to pay for part of that trail and maintain it.

After we rezoned the river and Main Street, I put a building moratorium on. I wasn't sure we'd have enough water, so I wanted a study. It came back that we could build for up to 20,000 people, that we have plenty of water and our sewers have capacity. Then when the first [new four-story] building went up [at 344] Main Street, it was a mistake because they went out too far on the sidewalk. People got upset and started complaining about development. They started saying the schools are overpopulated, which is not true.

I'm a believer that the development that goes on in Beacon is good for Beacon, but it's got to be smart. We need to find a way to make it affordable for people to stay here, and that's easier said than done. When you build something that's good, people want to come. And when there's more people that want to come, prices go up. It's hard to control that.

During my administration, the police were also under the Department of Justice watch. We got Doug Solomon as our chief; he was the first chief that was from out of town, I believe. We started putting in rules and regulations based on what the DOJ recommended. I told the cops that I wanted them to wear body cameras. We were one of the first communities. The cops were a little upset about it, but to this day, I think the police believe it was the best thing they ever did. Our department has come a long way. It's community-oriented and I'm proud to say Beacon's Police Department is one of the finest around.

I tried to work on the firehouse over here [Tompkins Hose]. The first thing I did was hire a paid chief, which wasn't a popular thing to do. In fact, supporters of mine were against me when I did it, but I knew it was something that had to be done. I tried to put them all in one firehouse. I was told by the architect that we couldn't do it, it's too much money. Then I heard on the street that Tompkins Hose was selling its parking lot, and I told the city administrator to buy it. If we ever decide to put a firehouse there without that parking lot, we're done. And if we don't put the firehouse there, we've still got a parking lot for the public.

Beacon's on the right track. I've lived here all my life — I've seen it when it was great, I've seen it when it went down and I see it coming back. I know people are upset about costs because, believe me, I worked for public works. I'm not rich. One thing I'd like to see is affordable housing at Camp Beacon [the former Beacon Correctional Facility]. I don't know where else you would put it. I was talking to somebody the other day who tried to put a mini-house behind his house for his mom to live in and it cost him a ton of money. I give Lee kudos because the city is trying to streamline that process, to make it more affordable for people to live together without impacting the city.

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Lee Kyriacou: This is really fun, right? I'm so pleased to listen to all this. I'd like to talk about an earlier period. As Randy said, post-World War II, the factory town went downhill. All the factories shut down, with Nabisco being the last one in 1986. Urban renewal came in, all sorts of homes and businesses were taken down and the expectation was it'd be rebuilt.

The master plan then said that Main Street was too long; we were going to turn Main Street into a pedestrian mall like Main Street in Poughkeepsie. We were going to build 13-story high-rises at Bank Square and in the curve, where the Howland Center is. That first renovation of Main Street by the Sauers was actually not consistent with the comprehensive plan, because that was exactly where the 13-story buildings were supposed to be. It was a disaster of a plan. But if you notice where there's single stories in the middle of Main Street, that was the mall concept. The wide Henry Street and one block of Church Street, those were the returns where the cars were going to be. That was the concept they were going toward, but only bits of it got done. The property we sit on at City Hall was urban renewal property that nobody was doing anything on.

I arrived in 1992 and got on the council in 1994. Steve and I were on the council with Clara Lou as mayor for a number of years. Randy was the head of the Highway Department. In '94, they had started working on code enforcement issues and thinking through Main Street. My first two months on the council, there were two proposals to allow conversions of single-family homes between Verplanck and Wolcott into multi-family for four and five families. That was permitted under zoning.

We started to look at housing and Main Street and a little bit on the industrial side, and we did several zoning changes. On Main Street, we phased out ground-floor apartments. Main Street wasn't ever going to come back unless we made that choice. We had no idea whether it would work, so we put a seven-year limit on it and said we were going to check in Year 6 to see how bad or how good vacancy rates were.

Then we said that between Verplanck and Wolcott, on either side of Main Street, heading up the mountain, we were going to eliminate the right to convert single-family homes into four and five apartments. But we created the first accessory dwelling unit law, probably in the state, and said, "If you're owner-occupied, you could have an accessory unit," because we wanted to help seniors and that was the way we could get the community on board.

That immediately changed who was buying those homes. We started getting young families fixing them up as opposed to someone out-bidding them because they could be converted into apartments. My home, which is a historic Victorian, was zoned for 15 apartments; the one next door for 18. The historic overlay came into place; we got rid of what was called RD-3, which allowed all those single-family areas to start going into multi-unit apartments and we started preserving historic structures.

We removed the 13-story high-rise zoning on Main Street. I wanted to do a comprehensive plan update in the 1990s, but I think Clara Lou knew that if we had done it then, we would still be a factory town. The community wasn't ready to move away from factories. Randy, you know, you grew up here. Everyone talked about, "Well, I worked here or my uncle worked here, what's wrong with factories?" It just wasn't forward-looking. It's not that it's a bad thing. It just wasn't going to come back, not at the scale that they had been built in Beacon.

From left, Randy Casale, Clara Lou Gould, Lee Kyriacou and Steve Gold

Photo by Valerie Shively

Lee Kyriacou

The last major step we did was to think through the zoning along the waterfront. Actually, it was not a zoning issue, but the sewage treatment plant, that jump-started us. That plant was out of compliance. Initially, the mayor and the city administrator proposed that we build a new incinerator for our plant, for burning sludge. It took us a year to reach consensus that this wasn't the right thing to do. We realized it was cheaper to de-water the sludge and truck it out than it was to build a plant.

Within a few years, the adjacent properties were bought by Scenic Hudson [the Long Dock Park site]; [Beacon Institute for] Rivers & Estuaries, down by Dennings Point; and then, most importantly, the Dia site. They are all adjacent to the incinerator. Had we not done that, I don't think a lot of this would have happened. That good fortune and those three buyers jump-started our renewal.

There had been activity on Main Street but not a significant redo of a major industrial site. That site was zoned industrial until the day Dia came. The community hadn't been ready. I remember the head of Empire State Development, at the dedication for Dia, saying that they had a fish factory ready to go in the Nabisco site but Dia came along. We were fortunate because the site was being marketed as industrial.

We had a little bit of an arts community because of the Tallix Fine Art Foundry, and the Tallix board chair, Lee Balter, took a look at the Nabisco site and started talking it up in the arts community. Somehow that percolated over to Dia. Randy said something that was absolutely right, which is that the amount of change between one mayor and a second and a third or fourth has been quite small, in the general direction of, "We're probably not going to be an industrial community." It was little zigs and zags. And Randy mentioned the importance of the charter form of government with a mayor, council and a city administrator. For us to have four city administrators over 34 years is a statement as to the correctness of that form of government, and the importance of a professional administration to run the city.

Randy touched on the Department of Justice coming to look at our Police Department toward the end of Clara Lou's period. Clara Lou, if you remember, one thing that was wrong was that all of the jobs reported to the city administrator except one: the police chief. That was asking the mayor to do too much, especially if you have someone who needs to be professionalized. One of the first steps the council did was to change the charter to have the chief report to the administrator.

Steve mentioned the comprehensive plans, which were incredibly important. It's guided where development has gone for years. Randy, you mentioned [344 Main] goes up and it's, "Yeah, we need to make changes." So we made those changes. You mentioned that we weren't ready for the Metro-North proposal. We've done that zoning and I think we are ready now. It's a much more modest set of zonings, and we invited Metro-North to watch what we did.

Casale: When I put the committee together for the waterfront and Main Street, MTA had a person at every meeting, so it would have input from the beginning. If the partner that's down there doesn't have any say in the beginning, it might be hard to get him to agree with you. And we had public hearings. When the public says there's no sense going to meetings because we're doing this — believe me, this government has listened to the people more times than not. It's not as easy as people think, that you just snap your fingers. But this government, over the last 30 years, has listened to the people, adapted and made changes. And, for the most part, the changes were the right changes.

When Clara Lou was elected, we had a mayor, a commissioner of public works, a commissioner of safety, a commissioner of finance. The commissioner of safety was in charge of the building inspector and the electrical inspector and the plumbing inspector, and they would give somebody a part-time job to do those jobs. It was, "Who do you know?" When Clara Lou's administration got in, they decided to clean up the city and adopted the New York State building code. She hired the first full-time building inspector and a deputy. Once they came aboard, we started seeing people do the right thing with their buildings on Main Street. Dan Betterton was the first guy and he was a great building inspector.

When I say the city went down when the industry left, I also believe the city went downhill when the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge was built. Back in the day, the only way you could get from that side of the river to this side was by ferry. Newburgh was booming, Poughkeepsie was booming and so was Beacon. Once the bridge went in and they built Interstate 84, the malls started opening up and the small businesses in the cities no longer got the traffic, and our storefronts started going out of business.

Kyriacou: The other thing I would mention is that fiscal caution across administrations was very much there. We had to be careful because our tax base had gone down so far that our tax rates were quite high. The two of you [Clara Lou Gould and Steve Gold] had to go through a stressful situation fiscally, and you lost the first sales tax deal [to receive funds from Dutchess County] at that time, which made it harder, but you got us through that. Now we're in a position where we've got the advantage of sales tax [Kyriacou recently negotiated a 10-year tax-sharing agreement with the county that will net the city $20 million] this time. Our tax rate is substantially lower because of the increase in property values, while we've been careful with the pace at which we raise taxes.

Gold: The comptroller has always given us good ratings on our books. There were times, especially during that 2008 recession, when a lot of the neighboring communities found ways to get through it that were not so popular with the state comptroller, and they received some negative reports. But we did what we had to do to keep the city in good condition. Sometimes it hurt a little, because we had to raise taxes, but in the end, we got out of that recession in a good place for development to take place.

For a while I was working for the state and was involved in some of the Newburgh issues. One of the key things that they learned from Beacon was code enforcement. They realized that that's what they had to focus on, because a lot of the housing and commercial development there

(Continued on Page 8)

Beacon: Then, Now and How

(from Page 7)

would skirt the zoning and regulations, and the quality of the buildings and the neighborhoods went down. Our full-time code enforcer helped with situations where absentee landlords might have tried to get away on the cheap and let things fall apart. Beacon never got down to that level.

It was important when you connect the dots with the waterfront and the changes that we made there, particularly the smokestack for the sewage treatment plant. You see how that benefited the area for Dia to come in. While Ron Sauers and a few others were restoring buildings on the East End, the west end of Main Street still had a lot of problems. The middle was looking shabby with all the first-floor apartments, there was drug dealing, it was dangerous.

When Dia moved in and people started to walk up to Main Street, all of the sudden there was commercial value in those properties. They were converted before we even had to do any regulations. I hadn't thought about connecting those dots before but I think you're right. If the sewage treatment plant would have stayed, emitting toxic fumes through the incinerator, we wouldn't have had major development.

Kyriacou: It's hard because it was a factory community, and people would love to have had factories, but they're just not compatible. Think about the waterfront. It's no longer compatible with the waterfront uses that we look at today. Clara Lou, you were around when Riverfront Park was the dump and we had to cap it and turn it into a park.

Casale: We passed an ordinance during [Steve Gold's] administration that we wouldn't let [property owners] neglect industrial buildings. You had to get an inspection every year. I remember the guy from Craig House, when I became mayor, said, "You're killing me with this new law. I'm paying so much money." I said, "Sell the property if you're not going to develop it." He said he was trying to and I said, "No, you're not, not with the price you've got on that building. You're trying to appease us by saying you're trying to sell it." That's why we put the law in effect. We didn't want people warehousing old buildings so they get demolished.

Gold: After the Tuck Tape building on Tioronda Avenue was demolished because of neglect, we pulled in all of the major owners of industrial properties and sat them down with the code enforcer and identified what needed to be done with their properties to seal them up, so that they would be in good condition to be sold as is. That made all the difference in the world for the Roundhouse. It made all the difference in the world for the Hip Lofts.

What are your hopes for Beacon's future?

Gould: I want to see people get involved. When they are involved, the students and their parents get involved, you get things done in a positive way. A positive attitude is the best rule that anyone can have. It's important to keep getting people involved — people who have lived here a long time and people who have just come here.

Gold: The city is moving in the right direction. As it continues its development, we have to be concerned that it might reach a tipping point where it becomes too congested and the quality of life becomes too diminished. But we haven't gotten there yet. It requires some fine-tuning and cautious steps. I'd like to see more Main Street-type buildings on Beekman Street, so we have more of a continuous Main Street going down to the train station. As Randy was saying, that's what we had before urban renewal. It makes for a more interesting walk for people taking

Steve Gold

the train and coming up here.

The people who are moving in have a sense of involvement, similar to what Clara Lou was trying to build. That's natural for people who come to Beacon and love it; they want to be involved. The council has always been receptive to what the public has to say, and it's important that the council stays like that. Lee has done a great job in working with the public through some difficult times with COVID, with police reform and housing legislation. The other three mayors before Lee all had that approach of listening to the public and being professional. One of the things I've seen in Beacon is that there's a degree of civility and professionalism that takes place in council meetings that I haven't seen in too many other communities. There isn't any place I know where people work so well together, in a collegial effort to do what's best for the city, not what's best for themselves. I hope that continues, and I think it will.

Casale: Congestion in Beacon is not because of development. It's because we are driven through tourism from the arts. If you go down Main Street on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, it's not congested. When people say they don't want any more congestion, do you want us to tell the tourists not to come here? It's not from the development, and I can't emphasize that enough.

We have to get a recreation center. When I was the mayor, we went before the state twice and put in requests for $10 million. One of our plans was to put a rec center on the lower half of Hammond Field [next to Matteawan Road]. I thought it would be good because you could put afterschool programs for kids; both the middle and high schools are on that road; they could walk. You have the field there for recreation, and you could put a kitchen in for community and senior things. I thought it was the ideal place. Unfortunately, we didn't get the $10 million, but I think that's the next improvement.

The next big hurdle for the city is ambulance service. Going from an industrial community where everybody worked here, and everybody was a volunteer fireman and everybody belonged to the Beacon Volunteer Ambulance Corps — once the jobs left Beacon, and people began commuting, they don't have time for the mandates the state requires to be a volunteer. I'd like to see the county take a bigger role in managing fire and ambulance services. They need a coalition where the expense is spread.

Kyriacou: I don't think another community in the Hudson Valley has had as rapid and as thorough a success story, in terms of turning a pretty worn-out Northeast industrial city into a vibrant, highly attractive community. I'm not even sure in the country whether it's been done that quickly and comprehensively. The problems that we face going forward are problems of success, and those are much easier. A crowded Main Street — that's because we're attractive to tourists. That's wonderful, but we have to manage it. Affordability — it's because housing prices have gone up and because people with a lot of money want to rent and are willing to pay higher rents. On the other hand, 30 percent of our rental housing is in some form affordable or subsidized. That's a true asset for us as a community, because the towns [in Dutchess County] have almost nothing like that.

Moving forward, the issues are going to be how we connect our Main Street to our waterfront. How do we keep a long Main Street in business? In our comprehensive plan, it says Main Street suffered because we didn't have density. We need some density so that when the tourists go away, we can still have a Main Street that gets supported by the local community.

I'm with Randy, I'd like us to get to a community center. We're doing our firehouse. We're going to manage that carefully. We added $200,000 — every time I say $100,000, that's about 1 percent of our tax base. We added $200,000 [in costs] for ambulance service. We added four and now a fifth career firefighter in the last four years. They're about 1 percent each. We're doing a firehouse, that's a $14 million project, and it's not affecting taxes in a significant fashion.

Inflation is running 5 or 6 percent; our tax levy increase is 2 or 3 percent and is covered by new construction, which is incredibly important for us to provide the quality-of-life services that we want. We've been keeping the tax increase on existing properties as limited as we could. We're staying at or under the [mandated state] tax cap, because we've had these other sources of revenue. Let's be clear, if you're delivering services and you're not raising people's taxes, 90 percent of the problem [is solved] and the other parts we worry about. These four people sitting at this table have been doing that for a generation and a half, and I think we're going to keep doing that.

Casale: When I was the highway superintendent, I worked out of a building that was falling down even before I started. When we finally built a new garage on state property, we freed up a spot along Fishkill Creek that now has housing and one of the few industries that came here: DocuWare. We have to find some niches like DocuWare. You're not going to find the industry like we had in the old days, but if we can find some workplaces that bring 50 or 60 jobs, that will help Main Street during the week. We had all our marbles in the industrial factories. When that went out, we went belly-up. Now we've got most of our marbles in tourism through the arts, and we have to balance it out somehow.

Kyriacou: We've adjusted our zoning along the creek, which Randy set up, to require minimum 25 percent commercial. At the old highway garage, it's 80 percent commercial. That's new tax revenue without [adding] kids in the schools. If you think out 20 or 40 years, we're going to have to build out the housing shortage, and we're going to have to create affordability. So Beacon is probably going to get denser. We're just back to our density when Randy was a kid. We have to figure out how to do that effectively. It makes a ton of sense to have something down at the waterfront, at the train station, consistent with our comprehensive plan and the zoning that you all put in place.

Casale: I've been to a lot of places and Beacon has everything you need. You've got a river, a mountain, a creek running through the center of it, open space galore, trails going from the river to the creek. What more can you ask for? And it's only 5 square miles.

Gold: It's that special chemistry that makes the sense of identity that people have about Beacon work. It's because we have this secluded area in the midst of beautiful natural resources, and we've protected those resources.

Why This Series

In the past quarter-century, Beacon has transformed itself from a city of boarded-up windows and crime to a vanguard of culture and environmental sustainability. But many residents feel the resurgence has come at a steep price, criticizing the pace and scale of development and arguing that housing prices are robbing Beacon of its diversity and working-class character.

Who has benefited most from this transformation? Who has been left behind? For this series, we're talking to people who live and work in the city as we attempt to address these questions, as well as document changes in housing and demographics, the arts, politics and activism. Earlier installments are online at highlandscurrent.org.

Main Street Survivors

For Beacon businesses, the community is key

By Brian PJ Cronin

When the Thomas family opened Matcha Thomas at 259 Main St. two years ago, everything went right. They had delicious products (matcha beverages and homemade vegan snacks), an inspiring story (the family was able to reverse their father's type 2 diabetes with a healthier diet) and a built-in audience (the eldest sister Haile, then 20, is a well-known food activist and author of a vegan cookbook).

But the teahouse's instant popularity led to problems. The family was the only staff, and the 400-square-foot storefront was often filled with customers waiting for orders, far from the quiet, peaceful spot the family had envisioned. "We were completely in awe of how well things were going, but with only three people running the business we just couldn't accommodate everything," said Haile.

The family regrouped, found a bigger space at 179 Main and hired staff. Last month, they reopened with expanded hours and a room for people to relax, based on a customer suggestion.

It's been an eventful two years, but the family has learned two hard-won lessons: If you're a small business and doing everything yourself, you need to avoid burnout, and if you invest in the Beacon community, the community will invest in you.

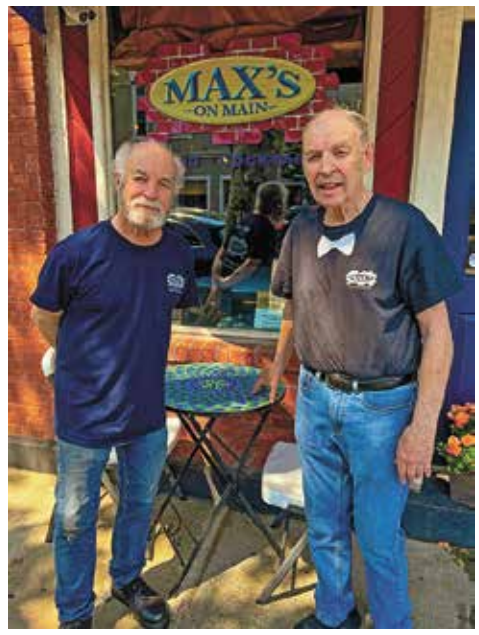
"Coming from a Jamaican immigrant family, we're bringing our own flavor to Beacon," said Haile. "At the same time, we want to respect the community that exists here and want to build in partnership with them. How can we root back into that foundation? How can our businesses become a co-creative space, rather than promoting cultural and communal erasure?"

Mountain Tops Outfitters went through a similar trajectory. Buddy and Katy Behney, lifelong residents who were high school sweethearts, opened it in 2006 at 143 Main before moving across the street into a space that had been a grocery store. As might be expected, the Main Street of 16 years ago was far different.

"It was strange when we started to see people walk by the store on the street, because for so long there was nothing on this side of the street until you got to Hudson Beach Glass," Katy said.

"We didn't start out with a loan and a ton of inventory," she recalled, so stocking a shoe meant spending thousands of dollars to have every size. The couple learned that there wasn't any point in selling anything they couldn't personally vouch for.

They also learned that they needed to keep costs low so they could build inventory. They moved into the basement of Buddy's parents and worked other jobs. When a coffee shop opened across the street, Katy applied and learned how to make coffee and how *not* to run a coffee shop. It became clear that the shop was not going to be open much longer. The shop had the same landlord as Mountain Tops, so Katy mentioned to him that, when the coffee shop closed, they'd like to take over the space.



Richie and Harvey Kaplan of Max's On Main

Bank Square opened in 2009 with two bright rooms and a patio that became Beacon's unofficial front porch. In her 2017 book, *What I Found in a Thousand Towns*, Dar Williams, the singer-songwriter who lives in Cold Spring, explains why coffee shops with multiple rooms are integral to a community's health and well-being.

Speaking at the Howland Cultural Center that same year, Williams noted that at Bank Square, "the second room is where poetry readings happen and the depressed teenager can go to write in her journal and get hooked on caffeine instead of heroin." Bank Square opened around the time that Beacon's two community centers closed, and the coffee shop quickly became (and remains) one of the only places for Beacon teens to hang out.

Buddy didn't even drink coffee but is, in Katy's words, "a tinkerer." He became fascinated by the espresso maker, became an espresso drinker, grew fascinated with coffee roasters and realized that they should be roasting their own coffee. The Behneys opened a second coffee shop, Trax, at 1 E. Main St. in 2017, and a second Trax location at 469 Fishkill Ave. in 2020.

Katy said that while the growing numbers of tourists have been good for business, locals keep their shops afloat, which is why they are open seven days a week, a philosophy their old neighbor John Gilvey at Hudson Beach Glass shares.

"People come into town on a Tuesday and everything is closed," Gilvey said. "By the time they get to our store, they shop angry. If you're only open 20 days a month, your rent is actually a lot higher than you think."

"We stay open seven days a week because we have to pay rent seven days a week," said Richie Kaplan, who, with his brother Harvey, opened Max's on Main in 2006. (The bar is named for their immigrant father.) They attribute their success to one thing: "We knew we were never going to quit. We expected to still be here 17 years later."

Tim Buzinski and Mei Ying So of Artisan Wines


Charmaine, Nia and Haile Thomas of Matcha Thomas *Photos by B. Cronin*

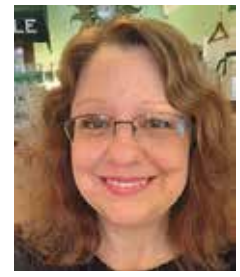
They believe that businesses that have been around for years create a consistency on Main Street that reassures residents. That became clearer during the pandemic. People weren't allowed to come inside, but they were happy to order food, which Richie would deliver. He jokes that he finally learned where all of his customers live.

"A sense of community is important," Richie said. "During the pandemic, Beacon supported us, Brother's, The Yankee Clipper, because they wanted to keep us going."

From the beginning, Max's stayed open until 4 a.m. to give people somewhere to go, even if it meant Richie and Harvey walking customers to their cars at the end of the night. Richie dropped off free food to other businesses opening on Main Street. They rented a crash pad above Homespun Foods, a few doors down, so that Harvey, who insisted on closing on Saturday nights, would have a place to get a few hours of sleep before opening early Sunday morning.

"My wife decorated it," Harvey said of the apartment. "I don't know why."

They also have donated gift certificates to what they estimate is 99 percent of local nonprofits and school fundraisers. It's not 100 percent, Richie said, because 1 percent haven't asked.


Brenda Murnane of Beacon Bath & Bubble


Katy Behney of Mountain Tops Outfitters

A similar philosophy is in place at Beacon Bath and Bubble, which Brenda Murnane opened in 2006. She took a break from renovating the interior recently to say she is always happy to donate a basket for a raffle. "I don't advertise," she said. "That's what I do instead. If I did not have my support from locals from Day One, I would not still be here."

Murnane, who has lived in Beacon since 1993, said she has watched the sense of community grow since her store opened. "There's more to do now," she said. "More clubs, more social activities, more to get involved in. When people move here, they're hungry to learn. They're asking me about all the things they can do here, how to get involved in the community. That's the best thing that's happened here, in my opinion. People are looking for community, and they're finding it."

The biggest boon is Main Street itself, she said. It's long, it's walkable and, as she pointed out, "you go out to get a bagel and see three people you know." It's also narrow, which, while being a problem for cyclists and drivers sharing the road, makes it easy to have a conversation with someone across the street.

"What you get when you invest in Beacon, whether you open a business here, move here or stay here, is Main Street," agreed Mei Ying So, who opened Artisan Wine Shop with Tim Buzinski in 2006. The two met while attending the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park; Buzinski now teaches there. "You don't have to go to a mall to entertain yourself. Then you have the mountain, the river, the creek. You're not just renting an apartment or buying a house — you're getting an entire ecosystem."

Owning a wine shop was not on their minds when they started to look at Beacon. Fancy sandwich shops were all the rage, but it looked like Homespun Foods had that market cornered. In one way, Artisan was like every other store that came to Beacon in the first decade of the 2000s and is still here: It's a small shop with a small staff that wanted to build a larger community. "We found so many like-minded people here who were committed to the same thing, to opening up a business and investing in the town," said Buzinski.

"We felt like we would do anything to help Main Street thrive," said So. "And now it's like a runaway train. There are other Hudson Valley river towns, but none like this."

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