

# THINKING OF BUILDING A NEW HOUSE?

If you're looking for land in Columbia County, it's probably due in part to the beautiful unspoiled vistas that this area offers. The very features that make this area so desirable to homeowners, businesses, and visitors are the characteristics we all hope to preserve.



Conservation Advisory Councils in the county have joined together to prepare this brochure to offer planning ideas for prospective home builders and their architects who, like us, value the natural environment.

We realize that the details are endless when siting and building an environmentally friendly new house! Thank you in advance for your consideration of ways to minimize your environmental footprint.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR PLANS, AND WELCOME TO COLUMBIA COUNTY!



This brochure was prepared by members of the Conservation Advisory Councils of the towns of Ancram, Hillsdale, New Lebanon, and Taghkanic.

For more information and ideas about natural resources and conservation in the county, see the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) on the websites of the Columbia County Environmental Management Council and the Columbia Land Conservancy. The NRIs and Natural Resource Conservation Plans for Ancram, Hillsdale, New Lebanon, and Hudson are on their websites.

Colored pencil drawing by Tia Maggio; line drawing by Kathleen A Schmidt; photos by Paul Duerberger, Jamie Purinton, and Craig Westcott. Brochure design by Marielle LaCasse.

## COLORS & LIGHTS

To help your building blend into the new surroundings, consider using **subdued exterior colors** like browns, dark grays, and dark greens for the siding and roof. Use **non-reflective glass and roofing materials** to avoid beaming an unsightly glare across the viewshed. Use “dark sky friendly” **exterior lighting that is motion-activated, shielded, and downward facing** to reduce light pollution that can disrupt the activities of the many kinds of wildlife that depend on darkness for hunting, foraging, travel, and shelter. Your human neighbors will appreciate it too!



## SLOPES & DRIVEWAYS

Plan your driveway to **avoid steep slopes** (15% or greater) wherever possible. Tree removal on steep slopes can lead to soil erosion and increase the stormwater runoff that is harmful to nearby streams and ponds. Using **porous pavement** on any driveway—flat or sloped—will help direct stormwater into the soils.

While walking a prospective building site, **consider the natural features of the land.** Are there forests, meadows, streams, or wetlands? How will you best take advantage of those features? How can you site your house and other structures so that they are visually **absorbed by the landscape?**

Local regulations to protect natural resources differ from town to town—look for those when you begin to plan your project, and meet with the local planning board or building inspector as early as possible. Below are some additional tips for siting and building the house of your dreams while preserving the ecological and scenic values of the land.



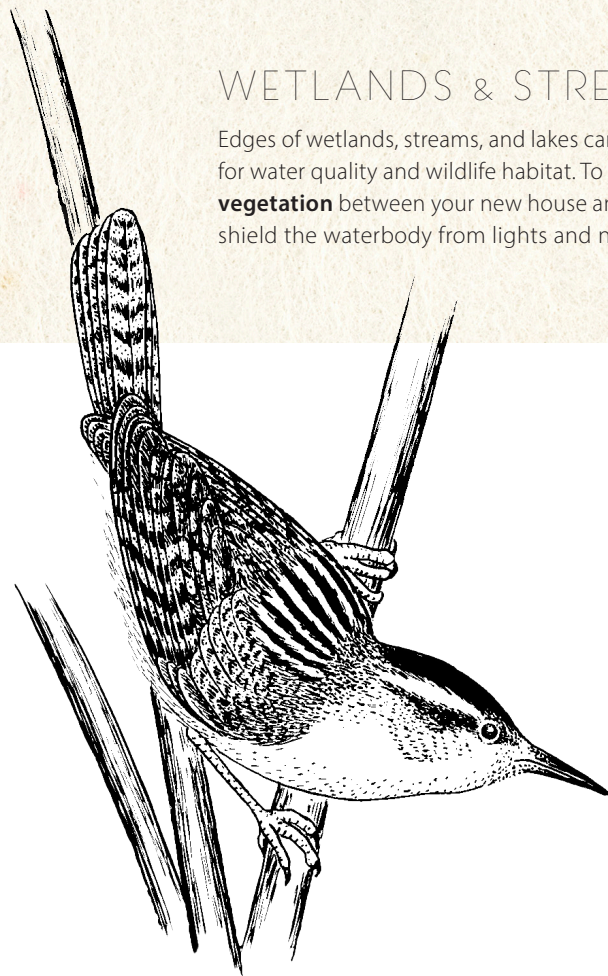
## VIEWS & VIEWSHEDS

Our forested hills and ridges are essential to the county's scenic character, but a house sited high on a hill to capture a spectacular view may disrupt the view of the hill for others. To protect the visual landscape, consider siting any new structure to be **visually obscured from the valley below** and other areas. Preserve as many trees as possible and plant additional trees and shrubs to further screen your buildings from view. Some trees can be pruned to open up view tunnels or corridors from windows, decks/porches, and doors.

Also, think about **siting your new house down the hill instead of at the summit.** A foot trail from your house to a picnic area on the hilltop will always give you a fresh view.

## WETLANDS & STREAMS

Edges of wetlands, streams, and lakes can be attractive house sites, but are also important resources for water quality and wildlife habitat. To foster those valuable roles, **leave a broad zone of natural vegetation** between your new house and the wetland or waterbody. This will help filter pollutants, shield the waterbody from lights and noise, and provide corridors and shelter for wildlife.



## TREES & FORESTS

**Minimize cutting of trees** and protect existing trees from construction impacts. Trees and forests moderate local air temperatures (and thus reduce your heating and cooling costs!), protect and maintain water supplies, and provide valuable wildlife habitat.

**Large forests**, in particular, are especially important for the kinds of wildlife that do poorly where forests have been cut up into smaller patches by roads, driveways, yards, etc. Many of our songbirds and raptors, for example, need large forests to maintain local populations. To help preserve a large area of contiguous forest for area-sensitive wildlife, **site your new driveway and house near the edge of the forest** instead of the interior.



## MEADOWS

Large meadows are valuable for agriculture and can be especially important for grassland nesting birds whose populations have been declining dramatically due, in part, to loss of suitable habitat. Running a driveway through a large meadow not only reduces the meadow's viability for farming but can also render the meadow unsafe for ground-nesting birds. To help preserve both the agricultural potential and the wildlife habitat, **site your new driveway and house near the edge of the meadow** instead of the interior.