

# Looking at Philmont

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*This part of the comprehensive plan focuses on the look of Philmont—everything from its building styles and topology to the cleanliness of its street and the upkeep of its houses.*

*There are four sections in this part of the plan:*

- *Yesterday—a few comments on the past*
- *Today*
- *Philmont outside Philmont—Village-owned property outside the Village*
- *Hidden Philmont—what is not visible although it is here*

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## Yesterday

Philmont was built up in a relatively brief period of time. Maps and lithographs showing the Village 100 years ago depict many recognizable buildings and streets.

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### Living Spaces

Many of the living spaces in the village were factory houses – some owned outright, some rented from the factories. Single family houses with driveways and gardens were common. Sheds and barns to accommodate chickens and horses were also common and still exist today for different purposes, including apartments on the second floor.

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### Land Usage

Land usages were prudent by both residents of the village and industry. The majority of the homes were located on modest plots of sizes of one-third to one-half an acre. The mills followed the watercourses, real and man-made. At its economic height, the village had 17 mills.

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### 100 Years of Progress, Then a Gradual Decline

The village was self-contained. Almost anything needed could be obtained within the village. From the 1850s to the 1950s, mill work was available. In the 1950s, mill work left the industrial Northeast and headed South, where cheaper, non-unionized labor was readily available. One by one, the mills closed and employment opportunities became diminished. The population shrunk from over 2000, to several hundred

less than that. Little remained to encourage new residents or new businesses. One venture in diversified business was a rubber vulcanization industry, located in a former mill on Main Street.

In January 1977 a major fire destroyed that business, the old mill building that housed it and several surrounding buildings. That area today had been rebuilt and includes a town park/memorial, an insurance business, a supermarket, a convenience mini-mart store/gas station, and several new businesses. Most of the half mile long Main Street looks more or less as it has for the past forty years. One addition has been the floral tubs which, in season, have beautiful flowers in them, thanks to the Columbia Hudson Partnership, Main Street Committee, and the Philmont Beautification Committee and their efforts.

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## Today

With the exception of a single large tract of land located just south of the reservoir, most of the Village is built up today. Particularly in the center of the Village, the densities and uses described in the zoning law are not always in effect. Many pre-existing uses and lot sizes were “grandfathered” in with the zoning law. They can remain as long as they do not become more nonconforming.

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### Municipal Buildings

At 122–124 Main Street is the brick-faced Municipal Building, housing the Village Office, including the Mayor’s office, Village Hall, and Police Department Office and Village Justice (upstairs), the Fire Department and Rescue Squad (downstairs), and the Library (within the Municipal Building and adjacent to the Village Hall). It is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Municipal Building**



The original windows in this building are now 40 years old; they are single-glazed and do not close well. As a result, the building is hard to heat. New windows pay for themselves in reduced fuel bills

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should repair or replace the current windows with insulated windows in the Village Hall.

The part-time Philmont Police Department is augmented by the New York State Police and Columbia County Sheriff.

The Library is part of the Mid-Hudson Library System based in Poughkeepsie. The resources of over 60 libraries can be accessed on-line.

**Space Needs** It should be noted that the Village Garage housing its trucks, sweeper, plows, etc. is located on Eagle Street. The Municipal Building is cramped for space, especially for the Village Office and the Philmont Public Library.

The Library has only about 1040 square feet of space and the Village Office has less than that. The libraries of 1962 and the libraries of the 21st century are very different entities in that the former provided only books and magazines, while the latter is expected to provide all that the former did, as well as computer access, videos, DVD films, books-on-tape, large print books, and revolving collections.

**RECOMMENDATION** A good space use analysis of the Village buildings should be authorized by the village.

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## Department of Public Works (DPW)

The Department of Public Works currently includes 3 employees (2 full time and 1 part time) who pick up refuse and recyclables, maintain the 5.2 miles of Village roads (including snow plowing, patching, sweeping, and paving), repair sewer and water pipes for which the village is responsible, flush the water hydrants, and other work as needed. The sewage plant has 2 full time employees.

The DPW garage is located on Eagle Street. As streets get rutted or potholed due to weather or excavations relating to water line problems or sewer connections, the worst of the streets have been getting “chip sealed” to bring the street up to a more drivable condition. There does not seem to be an actual repaving timetable; streets are dealt with as problems arise.

Water lines have been replaced on some streets. Those that have not been replaced can be older than 100 years and constructed of cast iron. Water quality, with respect to discoloration, often depends upon street location and whether the lines have been replaced or not and the frequency of breaks.

**RECOMMENDATION** The village should establish a plan for street paving on a

rotating basis.

**RECOMMENDATION** The village should establish a plan of water line replacement, doing some replacement of older lines every year.

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## Cleaning the Village

Village services include weekly garbage & recyclable pickup (residents do pay a separate village tax and must pay for garbage stickers), streetlights on most streets, and extensive hydrant protection.

Statistical results of the surveys, comments written in, and anecdotal reports from a variety of sources show concern over the appearance of some of the properties in the Village. One issue that the Comprehensive Plan Board has noted is that there are laws on the Village books that deal with property maintenance—laws that are generally not enforced. In part, this may be because their enforcement mechanisms are very awkward.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should review its laws pertaining to property maintenance to make them enforceable; it should then enforce them aggressively.

Due to the fact that only 50% view the Village as being clean enough, and that only 47% think that the Village general appearance is positive (statistics from the Comprehensive Plan surveys), the Village should: adopt the following recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATION** Sweep the streets more often.

**RECOMMENDATION** Provide more small receptacles for garbage.

**RECOMMENDATION** Establish one day/year for a day when volunteers and residents paint/clean/repair/spruce up properties in need of such work. Local contractors might be able to assist with repairs of a minor nature on this day on a volunteer basis.

**RECOMMENDATION** Provide one day/year for free, large dump/trash disposal with Village pick-up and disposal.

**RECOMMENDATION** Provide better publicity about the county Hazmat day(s).

**RECOMMENDATION** It is recommended that the village enact a “pooper scooper” law requiring dog owners to clean up after their dogs when they walk them; the leash law should be enforced.

The state has an “Adopt-a-Highway” program; part of Main Street (a state highway) has been adopted as is shown in Figure 2. The village should encourage an “adopt-a-street” program similar to the adopt a stretch of road projects on highways in the county. Volunteer groups, service organizations, homeowners, and renters should be encouraged to keep a stretch of street clean. The village might provide free bags for this purpose to encourage its citizenry in this effort to maintain a clean village appearance. A slogan, such as “Pride in YOUR village begins with YOU”, could be adopted

**Figure 2: Adopt-a-Highway on Main Street**



**RECOMMENDATION** Create an Adopt-a-Street program.

Looking at the Township of Claverack Town Garage at the village edge, but outside the village on Lower Main Street, the general appearance of the building and the grounds is unattractive.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should work with Mellenville and the Township of Claverack to help with the general appearance of the former Town Garage to render a more attractive alternative to what exists as the “Welcome to Philmont” first impression as one arrives from the west on State Route 217.

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## Developments

Summit Heights, on Overlook Court Street (just off upper Summit Street), has 14 houses at present with room for many more. Union Court Street (off Summit Street just after its highest point) has 7 houses.

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## Zoning

Zoning is in effect in the Village. Because the law was enacted in 1990, after most of the buildings were built, it does not reflect the current conditions in many cases. Often, buildings take up more of a lot’s area than would be permitted for new construction.

There is relatively little new construction in the Village, but there is continuing renovation and rehab work going on. The Comprehensive Plan Board has identified three recommendations that could improve the process of zoning and permitting:

**RECOMMENDATION** Institute an administrative fee for building permits issued after construction has been started without appropriate authorization.

**RECOMMENDATION** Require new construction to meet New York State building standards. This will have the effect of allowing existing trailers to remain in the Village, but it will not allow new ones.

**RECOMMENDATION** Rezone the area south of the reservoir to fit into the Vil-



lage better. Varying lot sizes and densities (as is the case throughout the Village) should be implemented; the street pattern should match the types of streets elsewhere in the Village.

RECOMMENDATION Add a report from the Building Inspector to the monthly reports at the Village Meeting.

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## Topography

Philmont is hilly; much of its subsurface is rock. Because of the hills, many of its streets are hilly. Ellsworth Street, shown in Figure 3, is both hilly and narrow.

**Figure 3: Ellsworth Street**



Throughout the Village, century-old retaining walls of local stone are found. One of them (on Summit Street) is shown in Figures 4 and 5.

**Figure 4: Stone Wall on Summit Street**



**Figure 5: Close up view of Stone Wall**



**RECOMMENDATION** The large number of stone walls in good condition could be an attraction for tourists.

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## Architectural Styles

The Village homes are a mix of architectural types dominated by plain Victorian houses. There are evidences of Greek Revival, Italian Bell Tower, and Georgian with mansard roof styles. Attic windows within the village include round, rectangular, and a few of stained glass. Figures 6., 7, and 8 show some of the Village houses.



**Figure 6: Main Street House**



**Figure 7: House by Reservoir**



**Figure 8: Main Street Houses**



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## Churches

The churches, four in number, reflect turn of the century architectural styles. Two are constructed with brick exteriors and two are constructed with wood and/or siding exteriors.

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## Street Layout

Street layout was basically determined by the hilly topography and the location of the Philmont Reservoir (Summit Lake) and the Ockawamick (Agawamuck) Creek. The Village was built on a series of small hills and the waters fell in a matching series of falls that provided the power for the early mills. Paths became roads; roads became streets.

State Route 217, running east-west, bisects the village and is, indeed, the Main Street. It is shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Main Street**



Most of the village streets are on the north side of the Ockawamick Creek. The only bridge, within the village proper, spanning this creek is on Summit Street, next to the former Summit Mill, with a clear view of the waterfall created by the dam on the Philmont Reservoir. Summit Street and its bridge are shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Summit Street and Bridge**



Maple Avenue has seen a replacement of younger maple trees as older ones have had to be cut down. A Memorial Walk of dedicated trees planted in honor and memory of Village residents has been created.

**RECOMMENDATION** Provide additional space for Memorial Walk trees.

Many of the Village streets are narrow: the entrance to Railroad Avenue is shown in Figure 11. Some people have been known to mistake it for a driveway.

**Figure 11: Railroad Avenue**





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## Mills

Many of the former mills have been razed; none serve as a mill at the present time. Speculative plans include turning the former Summit Mill into condominiums, although it should be noted that this “project” is in the earliest planning stage. What once provided livelihood to hundreds could find new uses in the future. As of this writing, only four mill buildings still exist.

**RECOMMENDATION** Due to their historic significance, the Village should establish a plan to keep the existing mills from being razed.

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## Main Street

The Main Street of Philmont has seen some changes in the last hundred years, but still retains the flavor the past. Visitors to Philmont usually enter by one end of Main Street or the other, i.e., from the west or from the east.

**RECOMMENDATION** The village should plant trees on Main Street. This would provide more greenery in an aesthetic way, and would echo to the Main Street of Philmont’s historic past.

What they encounter visually is a mix of well-maintained houses and businesses and those in need of some exterior work, including painting and/or repairs. This is demonstrated in Figure 12.

The overall image is not a completely positive one. A general “sprucing up” of both residences and businesses that are not what they should be would do wonders for the first impressions of the village and make it more inviting to visitors and prospective home or business owners.

**Figure 12: Main Street Houses in Varying States of Repair**



**RECOMMENDATION** The village should pursue a plan to “spruce up” Main Street by requesting that homeowners/landlords paint and/or repair their



properties as needed. If the homeowners/landlords are unable to effect the work themselves, then the village should try to obtain grant money for this purpose.

In addition, some of the Main Street businesses break the traditional Victorian building line with large parking lots in the front and buildings placed askew on the lots as shown in Figure 13.

**RECOMMENDATION** Parking lots in front of businesses are not conducive to walking and window shopping; therefore, the village should require parking in back or, new Main Street buildings. To help with this requirement, the village should waive/reduce requirements for off-street parking to avoid “in-front” parking for ground floor retail uses.

**Figure 13: Parking Lot and Building Askew**



**RECOMMENDATION** Parking lots should have low hedges/plantings to help break up the linearity of the parking lot and to be more visually pleasing.

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## Property Ownership

Homeowners and renters are split nearly 50-50 (U.S. Census Bureau – Census 2000). There are many multiple-occupancy buildings in the village. Large pluses include village water and sewer. In-home businesses are on the rise. Some properties are in need of a coat of paint, exterior repairs such as a new roof, chimney repairs, or porch planking, cutting back of shrubs, lawn mowing, leaf raking, or snow shoveling, depending on the season. Some of this is due to limited funds and/or energies of home owners. Some can be traced to absentee landlords with minimal concerns about property appearance. When the sewer project was done in 1977-78, some of the sidewalks were replaced in part or in whole where the pipeline ditches were dug. Other parts of the village have sidewalks in need of repair or replacement.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should notify residents that fixing up their property does not increase their assessment if they paint their structure(s), or if they make similar replacement, e.g., a new set of steps for an old set of steps.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should establish a plan to assist/aid lower income and/or disabled or elderly residents with property upkeep, with possible funding by means of a grant.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village can sponsor a photo contest—perhaps as part of Philmont Community Day—highlighting houses and properties throughout the Village that are distinctive.

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## Reservoir

The reservoir (sometimes called Summit Lake) lies at the center of the Village. Originally built to provide a reliable supply of water power to the mills, today it is available for recreation. It is shown in Figure 14.

**Figure 14: Reservoir and Lakeshore Drive**



Amenities include a beach and boat launch, shown in Figure 15.

**Figure 15: Boat Launch and Beach**



In the expanded Mill District, the reservoir will anchor the south end (with Main Street the north end). The narrow streets (Elm, Ellsworth, and Ark) provide a pedestrian-friendly area, and the existing density of houses allows for expanded use by home businesses and craftspeople.

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## Play and Recreation, Present and Future

Play and recreation areas within the village include the Memorial Field (on Church Street) for softball games, either in the daytime or under the lights. A playground, with gazebo containing a picnic table, one-half basketball court, and jungle gym/slide is located on Lakeside Drive. The playground also houses the newly formed Summit Lake Community Center which is a merger of an existing 10' X 40' bath house and a new 15' X 30' addition. It is shown in Figure 16.

**Figure 16: Summit Lake Community Center (under construction)**



Play areas for village children and teenagers are limited. Village youth are seen skateboarding in streets, paved parking lots, and on sidewalks. A skateboard park would help with this problem. Teens are also seen hanging out in groups, sitting on business steps, and walking Main Street for lack of something better to do. Many years ago, the Crusader Club offered them an alternative; however, that Club no longer exists and the building is now in private hands. Efforts by village adults to provide a space for teen activities have been limited. The most recent effort was terminated due to damage by the youths to the space provided for them.

Future recreation plans include a small bandstand and landscaped garden behind Richardson Hall, and a possible walking trail through the Village including the reservoir.

In the Comprehensive Plan surveys, youth programs ranked last in perception as being good (14% said so, while, 38% rated them as fair, and 49% rated them as poor.)

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should provide more recreational opportunities for teens, including a skateboard park.

Philmont is incorrectly perceived as being a town full of older people, when in fact, it is just the opposite. Columbia County has 16.4% of its population being 65 or older, while Philmont has a 13.8% rate or about one in seven who is 65 or older. Of households in Columbia County with at least one person under 18, 32.2% fit the requirement, while in Philmont 36.8% fit the requirement. Philmont is much younger than is

generally perceived, and it is recommended that the village promote itself as such. Senior citizen resources far outweigh the resources for youth programs.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should promote itself as being more reflective of its median age of 34.7 years, which is the youngest median age of all Columbia County communities.

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## Armed Services Memorials

On the corner of Elm Street and Main Street is the Memorial to soldiers of all wars who honorably served their country in time of need. A large stone and plaque honor those who served in World War I, including honored dead.

A second memorial to veterans of World War II is located at the south end of Memorial Field, just off State Route 217.

The Minkler-Seery American Legion Post No. 252 on upper Main Street (State Route 217) has a small memorial area on its front lawn.

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## Group Homes and Subsidized Housing

**Senior Citizens** Resources for senior citizens include Richardson Hall, a newly created 24 apartment complex, in the heart of the village on Main Street. The buildings involved were originally Richardson's Hotel and Richardson's Hardware. Although separate buildings, they are connected by a second story-covered walkway. Other resources include the Al Tripp Center, serving some meals to senior citizens. The Tripp Center displays a painted mural on its outside wall. The Tripp Center is also located in the heart of the village, on Main Street. It provides lunches to local senior citizens both at the center and through the Meals-on-Wheels program.

Another resource is Philmont Terrace Apartments, located on upper Main Street, which provides apartments for senior citizens.

**Nursing Home** Just beyond Philmont Terrace Apartments, heading east on upper Main Street is Pine Haven Home (Columbia County). This Home offers 120 beds for skilled nursing only.

**Group Home** The Philmont Hearth on Maple Avenue provides services to 14 residents.



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## Philmont Outside Philmont

Village owned properties outside the village boundaries include Forest Lake (located off NY State Route 23, just east of Martindale and entirely within the Township of Claverack. Forest Lake is approximately 50 acres in size and the entire site, including Forest Lake, is approximately 100 acres), the Solid Waste Treatment Plant (located in the hamlet of Mellenville on the south side of Claverack Creek and 5.11 acres in lot size), and the Gravel Bank (located between Preusser Road and the Taconic State Parkway. It covers 40 acres on the west side of Preusser Road and 88.4 acres on the east side of Preusser Road).

Forest Lake has the potential for recreational use or alternate water supply.

RECOMMENDATION The Village should keep Forest Lake and not sell it.

Finally, it should be noted that the Village provides many views of the Catskill mountains as shown in Figure 17.

**Figure 17: Catskill View**



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## Hidden Philmont

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### High Falls and the Associated Water Course

The telephone poles on Main Street display banners with drawings of a magnificent waterfall known as High Falls, which is created by water dropping from Summit Lake.

The High Falls area is part of a unique watercourse that drops 250 feet over the course of half-mile in a series of cascades. In this half-mile, Ockawamick Creek continues to fall, passes under the Roxbury Road

bridge, just outside of the Philmont village limits, and continues to Melenville, where it joins with another small stream to become Claverack Creek at the bridge over State Route 217, near the old 2nd Reformed Church of Claverack (now Amble Dance Studio). Access to the High Falls is in private hands; consequently, one of the most spectacular outdoor areas of interest to visitors and locals is denied them. Efforts to provide safe access could generate interest in Philmont as a place to visit to view its water fall system.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Village should either get and provide safe access to the High Falls viewshed, or it should change its banner symbol of the High Falls, which at present are visible only in photographs or the imagination.

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### Underground Canal System

Another not visible aspect is the underground canal system that powered some of the 17 mills (Canal Street bears testimony to the canal system's existence). The canals were man-made, gravity fed waterways that eventually emptied into the Ockawamick Creek.



