

# Living in Philmont

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*Philmont is in the geographic center of Columbia County. The Village is located 40 miles southeast of Albany and 120 miles north of New York City. With a population of less than 1500, Philmont encompasses 1.8 square miles. However, within this relatively dense space there is surprising topographic diversity. There are broad and gently curving Village streets as well as steep hills, dramatic waterfalls, secluded woods and spectacular vistas. While most residents live on village streets that have not changed much since the early 1900's, there are also those who live in multiple unit apartments buildings, trailers, suburban style tract homes, and gracious mansions.*

*Philmont provides for its residents important community services: library; police and fire protection; rescue squad; weekly trash removal, water and sewer. The children are served by the Taconic Hills Central School District, currently boasting the newest facility in the County. Several excellent private schools are within commuting distance.*

*Consumers are afforded the basic necessities without leaving the Village. Grocery, gas station, bank, doctor's offices, and churches are all easily accessed.*

*The Post Office is undoubtedly the social hub of Village activity. On practically any Saturday, even on the coldest winter days, there is usually someone standing outside taking advantage of the fact that everyone who lives in Philmont eventually shows up at the Post Office. So whether it's a Village Trustee campaigning for office, the local Brownie Troop selling cookies, or just two old friends taking a moment to catch up with one another, it's usually the Post Office that provides the backdrop.*

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## A Little Background

The Village of Philmont was incorporated in 1892. For much of the 19th and 20th Centuries, the Village was dominated by seven large textile mills, and was a manufacturing and agricultural center. The mills began to close in the 1950's, and the last mill closed in 1977.

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## A Residential Community for the County

Since then, the Village has been primarily a residential community for all of Columbia County. While much of Columbia County experienced a housing boom in the late 1980's, many long-time residents from elsewhere in the County settled in Philmont after being displaced by the rising housing market elsewhere in the County. This has continued in the 1990s. The fact that almost half the people surveyed indicated that they work in the County outside the Village and Town confirms the notion that Philmont is a residential community for the entire County.

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## Taconic Hills Central School

With the building of the Taconic Hills Central School, significant numbers of families with children have moved into Philmont. It has been noted that the school district is included in a number of real estate listings as a benefit. The school replaces two separate buildings located at either end of the district. Prior to formation of the school district, Philmont's own school served from 1861 until 1952.. It is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Philmont School**



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## Household Statistics

Residents live in a total of 576 households, with an average of 2.55 people per household. (This is almost exactly the national average.) The population is young, with approximately 30% under the age of 18, and a median age of 34.7. (This is substantially younger than surrounding areas.) Households are bigger on average than in the county or the country as a whole; at the same time, there are more single person households in Philmont. Taken together, the statistics suggest a village with many families containing young children as well as many older people living alone. This is typical of small communities like Philmont.

**RECOMMENDATION** Improve and increase library space and funding, particularly for these groups.

Households are almost exactly divided between owners and renters. The number of buildings in the Village has remained relatively stable over time.

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## Revitalization in the 1990s

During the 1990's, there was a renewed interest in revitalizing and improving housing within the Village. A private developer proposed a

large (100+) subdivision and twenty-one new homes were built on previously vacant land.

RECOMMENDATION Plan cooperatively with future developers of the designated subdivision.

RECOMMENDATION Encourage future housing development to be consistent with the historical building patterns of the Village.

RECOMMENDATION Restrict subdivisions of uniform lot sizes in favor of varying lot sizes and densities.

RECOMMENDATION Street design should reflect established Village patterns.

In addition, the Village received Housing Rehabilitation Funding, and money became available to assist residents in making structural improvements and maintaining their homes. Housing Resources of Columbia County was instrumental in obtaining these funds and developing the projects listed here.

RECOMMENDATION Continue to work closely with Housing Resources of Columbia County to improve the housing stock of the Village.

Simultaneously, two major housing and rehabilitation projects significantly improved the appearance of downtown Philmont and while increasing the availability of quality rental units for people of lower incomes. The rehabilitation of the old Rock Street Mill resulted in 6 new rental units and the creation of a pre-school and offices. Then,

In the spring of 2001, the new Richardson Hall opened. Richardson Hall, a project paid for by public and private funds, not only rehabilitated two large vacant Victorian structures right on Main Street, but also provided 24 quality housing units for senior citizens. The culmination of both projects has served to revitalize and beautify the Village Business District.

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## How People Feel About Living in Philmont

Survey results showed that residents gave generally high ratings to all Village services such as fire protection/rescue, library, garbage collection/recycling, water/sewer, and snow removal, and police. Services rated less highly were street/sidewalk maintenance.

Qualities of the Village such as ease of getting to and around Philmont, small town life, schools, friendliness and convenience were considered the biggest advantages for living in Philmont. Convenience of shopping was rated as an advantage, although choice of shopping/services was rated as a disadvantage. Other qualities rated as disadvantages related to cleanliness and appearance of the Village.

In addition, a significant number (70%) of property owners indicated that the condition of surrounding buildings was seen as a problem. However, this issue seems to be gaining recognition within the village, since 57% of those responding to the survey said they intended to improve their property during the next year.

The Village can build on its strengths in these areas and address residents' concerns by implementing the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION Improve street and sidewalk maintenance.

RECOMMENDATION Encourage new businesses to provide more choices.

RECOMMENDATION Enforce existing building ordinances.

Anecdotal evidence shows that some realtors are less than enthusiastic about Philmont.

RECOMMENDATION Include realtors in Village promotional activities.

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## The Building Survey

In 2001, DBS Planning, a private consulting firm, conducted a building survey to study the condition of the buildings in the Village. Every building was examined according to standard criteria used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The results showed that the buildings in Philmont are generally in good condition. Of the 454 rated buildings, 80% were determined to be "Standard." That is, buildings that are "decent, safe, sanitary, and in good repair." The building-by-building survey indicated that the overall condition of the buildings in Philmont is good. There are some sections of the Village with clusters of substandard buildings.

**Table 4: Building Conditions**

CONDITION	NUMBER
Standard	364
Moderately Substandard	85
Severely Substandard	1
Dilapidated	4
Not Rated	2
TOTAL	456

RECOMMENDATION Identify existing homes and other structures in need of repair and improvement.

RECOMMENDATION Encourage and assist owners in maintenance and repair.

RECOMMENDATION Reduce the number of substandard buildings.

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## The Look of Philmont

With the exception of the area south of the reservoir, Philmont is largely built up. Its look is that of a typical small northeastern town from a century ago. In many cases, the buildings were built before zoning, and they are larger than would be permitted today. For that reason, it is likely that many of the buildings will remain.

RECOMMENDATION Encourage rehabilitation of housing where needed.

Trailers are permitted in the Village only in one area. Other trailers scattered throughout the Village are grandfathered in—they predated zoning. The grandfathered trailers can be replaced with trailers the same size or smaller. In the one area in which trailers are permitted to be installed, quite a few could be. Significant input from residents suggests that they would not like to see more trailers there. Accordingly, it is proposed that zoning be modified to no longer permit any new trailers in the Village. This can be accomplished by requiring that all new construction adhere to New York State building code standards.

RECOMMENDATION Require all new construction to adhere to New York State building code standards.

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## Zoning

Philmont adopted the local zoning ordinance in 1990. Many members of the community recognized that there were conditions that negatively impacted on the quality of life for all residents of the village. Other communities had successfully addressed similar conditions through zoning regulations.

RECOMMENDATION Continue strong enforcement of current Zoning Regulations.

RECOMMENDATION Charge an administrative fee for building permits to property owners who are cited for violations.

RECOMMENDATION Provide periodic training to members of Zoning, Planning, and Village Boards;

RECOMMENDATION Adopt New York State Building Standards.

RECOMMENDATION Regularly review and revise Zoning Regulations to most appropriately reflect the needs of the community.