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August 28, 2015

Ms. Felicia Salvatore, Town Clerk  
Town of Poughkeepsie  
Town Hall  
1 Overocker Road  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603

RE: Hudson Heritage Project Scoping Comments

Dear Ms. Salvatore:

Thank you for including Scenic Hudson as an Interested Party in the SEQRA Review for the proposed Hudson Heritage project, which proposes the redevelopment of the former Hudson River Psychiatric Center (HRPC). We are writing to submit comments on the Draft Scope.

**Background**

The former HRPC is a regionally-important development site because of its size, location, and historic significance, notably its building design by Frederick Clarke Withers and landscape design by Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted. The former Administration Building, "Kirkbride," its north and south flanking patient wings, and the connected service wings to the east, were designated in 1989 as a National Historic Landmark because of its use of High Victorian Gothic architecture, which was used here for the first time in an American institutional building.

Hudson Heritage's proposal for the HRPC site is generally consistent with several important principles described in Scenic Hudson's Smart Growth guide for riverfront communities, *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts (RHR)*:

- One of the guide's most important recommendations is to promote development on previously disturbed sites in places where infrastructure is available (*RHR*, Chapters 1 and 6). This is an underlying premise in the Hudson Heritage proposal;
- Hudson Heritage promotes good urban design (*RHR*, Chapter 6), particularly in the upper portions of the site where a hotel, commercial uses, and residences are proposed to be arranged in a New Urbanist configuration;
- The proposal to conserve the 18-acre "Great Lawn" and integrate it into the development plan could provide an outstanding opportunity to provide public access and recreation at the site (*RHR*, Chapters 3 and 6);
- Demolishing the massive and highly visible 10-story brick Clarence O. Cheney building (1952)—will likely improve views from important locations, such as the Hudson River,

Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park and Esopus-Lloyd Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (Chapter 5); and

- If the applicant is able to restore and reuse as part of the development portions of the former Administration Building and its wings, Amusement Hall, Chapel buildings, and possibly others, another important *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts* goal would be accomplished—the adaptive reuse of historic buildings (*RHR*, Chapter 1).

In order to create a more integrated mixed-use community, however, Scenic Hudson recommends that the site plan should strive to include a more robust mix of uses in both the lower and upper portions of the site, i.e., add residential uses to the proposed commercial uses along Route 9 and add commercial and retail uses to the portion of the site on top of the hill where the hotel and residential uses are proposed. This would accomplish another important *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts* goal (*RHR*, Chapter 1 and 6)

### **Hudson Heritage's consistency with existing plans**

Because of the HRPC's past use as a psychiatric facility and its geographic location on a hilltop, the site is not well-connected to the broader community. However, the Hudson Heritage development offers an outstanding opportunity to integrate the site into the existing road and trail networks. In order to achieve this, development plan must implement key recommendations in the 2007 *Poughkeepsie Town Plan* (the "Plan") and the *Route 9 Land Use & Transportation Study* (the "Study"). Both the Plan and Study recommend that the "Fairview Concept" (Concept) should serve as a guide for new development in the area. The Study carries an implicit agreement that the Fairview Concept should serve as a blueprint for future decisions by the Town, developers, and the New York State Department of Transportation.

The Fairview Concept envisions compact, mixed-use, pedestrian- and transit-oriented development with "village center" character. The Concept recommends a connection between the Hudson Heritage site and Mid-Hudson Plaza as well as a public road (Route 9-9G Connector) through the Hudson Heritage site to Route 9G in order to better distribute vehicular trips throughout the area. The Concept also recommends using the CSX East Branch right-of-way to create a new north-south road with bicycle and pedestrian facilities and link between the Fairview Center, Hudson River Valley Greenway, and Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, now restored and operated as Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. Redeveloping the HRPC in a manner consistent with the Fairview Concept recommendations as described above would provide a compelling and exciting new community that would support and contribute to ongoing revitalization in both the City and Town of Poughkeepsie.

The Draft Scope indicates (III.3.a) that the DEIS will describe various existing local, regional and other public planning documents, including *Poughkeepsie Town Plan* (2007) and *Route 9 Land Use & Transportation Study* and will "generally discuss compatibility" of the proposed project with these planning and public policy documents (III.3.c.(1)). We recommend expanding the scope to include a detailed discussion of how, if applicable, project components are inconsistent with or deviate from recommendations in these planning and policy documents. This discussion should provide an analysis that demonstrates why inconsistent project elements should be considered and identify impacts that would result from deviation from the recommendations of these plans and policies. The scope should also propose mitigation for these impacts.

### **Visual impact**

The demolition of the 10-story mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century brick structure (Cheney building) will likely improve views of the site, particularly views from Walkway Over the Hudson, the Hudson River, and opposite shore. We support the scope's inclusion of a visual analysis, which will help decision makers better understand the full effect of the demolition of the Cheney building in combination

with new construction. The Draft Scope (Section 3.B.3a.) states that visual simulations will be prepared from sensitive (visual) receptors within the project's viewshed. We suggest that in lieu of Mariner's Harbor, Bob Shepard Highland Landing Park be chosen as the opposite shore receptor from which simulations will be prepared. It should be noted that mitigation of visual impacts of new development would be easily achieved with the choice of natural building materials, earth tone, and strategic plantings. These techniques are outlined in *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts*, Chapter 5.

### **Historic Preservation**

The site includes Kirkbride and its wings, a designated in 1989 as a National Historic Landmark, as well as many other historic buildings. These include the Superintendent's Residence, Chapel, Protestant Chapel, Library, Staff Residence, and Amusement Hall. Additionally, the semi-intact Vaux/Olmstead landscape plan that lies west of the Administration complex is also historically significant. It is our understanding based on the application that many buildings are in poor condition and that only select buildings are proposed for restoration and adaptive reuse. The potential loss of so many historic buildings makes it all the more important to restore and reuse the signature structures, such as Kirkbride and its wings, the Amusement Hall, and Chapel buildings, Great Lawn, and Olmstead/Vaux landscape.

While Scenic Hudson commends the applicant for proposing the restoration of the entire 18-acre "Great Lawn" and integrating it into the development as public open space, we urge that every effort will be made to fit the proposed development program into other elements of the Olmstead/Vaux landscape. Further, as indicated above, we urge that the applicant consider adaptive reuse of the Withers-designed Administration Building and its surviving wings, the Amusement Hall and Chapel buildings, and other buildings.

It is our understanding that similar National Historic Landmark structures at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center are currently undergoing restoration and construction as the Richardson Olmsted Complex and its first phase, Hotel Henry <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/learn/reuse/>. A similar outcome in Poughkeepsie would contribute to the Mid-Hudson Region's array of historic attractions.

### **Alternatives**

Scenic Hudson suggests that the scope include an alternative that is consistent with the 2007 *Poughkeepsie Town Plan* and *Route 9 Land Use and Transportation Study*. This alternative should also include the adaptive reuse of the Administrative complex, its wings, and other historic buildings described above. This alternative should also arrange new buildings around existing roads, drives, and paths as laid out in the original Olmstead/Vaux landscape, particularly on top of the hill. We recommend that the basis for this alternative should be the "Hudson Heritage Site Illustrative Sketch Plan" as submitted by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development in their July 19<sup>th</sup> comments.

### **Project phasing**

While project phasing is important to the Hudson Heritage's success, phasing must also ensure that Town and broader Town and regional interests are served. As noted in a recent Poughkeepsie Journal editorial (July 24, 2015):

"The overall fit of the plan is imperative. For instance, the Town of Poughkeepsie was right to resist earlier attempts to let a standalone big-box store get constructed on the site. The developers seem intent on building a large plaza with a major anchor store and several smaller buildings first, then homes in the second stage. The sequence of such a massive project will be key and will bear much scrutiny throughout the approval process."

Therefore we recommend that the scope include provisions to ensure that restoration of the Great Lawn, stabilization of the Administration Building, Amusement Hall and Chapel buildings are done at the same time as the retail component along the site's lower elevations. It would be detrimental to the community to construct the retail portion of the project without financial assurance that provides for the important work related to the stabilization of historically significant buildings and preservation of the Great Lawn.

### **Conclusion**

Scenic Hudson is pleased to provide these scoping comments. Because of its size, location, and historic significance, the redevelopment of the Hudson River Psychiatric Center is critically important to the Mid-Hudson Region. As indicated earlier, the proposal is generally consistent with many recommendations in *Revitalizing Hudson Riverfronts*. However in order to ensure that the Hudson Heritage fits within the context of the community, the project's design and phasing should not undermine the goals of the *Poughkeepsie Town Plan* and *Route 9 Land Use & Transportation Study*.

Further, every effort must be made to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the National Historic Landmark status of the former Administration Building and wings, Great Lawn, and Olmstead-Vaux landscape. If properly planned, designed, phased and constructed, the Hudson Heritage project has the potential to benefit Poughkeepsie and the broader Mid-Hudson Region for years to come and serve as a model for historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

As an Interested Party to this environmental review, we appreciate being kept apprised of meetings, deadlines, and work products related to the proposed Hudson Heritage project. Please change the Scenic Hudson contact person from Ned Sullivan to Jeffrey Anzevino, AICP ([janzevino@scenichudson.org](mailto:janzevino@scenichudson.org)).

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Anzevino  
Director of Land Use Advocacy