



**“Let’s talk it over at Mohonk”**

*Mohonk Consultations is an independent nonprofit dedicated to creating opportunities for the meaningful and productive exchange of ideas at the historic Mohonk Mountain House. Please consider a donation in support of these efforts to bring together people of diverse perspectives and create paths for positive change.*

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Support for our 2024 Fall Conference provided by:

**M&T Bank**



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**THRIVING TOGETHER**

Strengthening Community  
in a Time of Rapid Change

NOVEMBER 11, 2024



# THRIVING TOGETHER

## Strengthening Community in a Time of Rapid Change

### Presented by Mohonk Consultations

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The M&T Charitable Foundation

**November 11, 2024**

Mohonk Mountain House Conference Center, New Paltz, NY

### CONFERENCE PROGRAM

**8:30 Coffee and Registration**

**9:00 Song of Convening: “In the Shelter of Each Other”**

- Betty Boomer and Steve Stanne, Musicians

**9:05 Mohonk Consultations Welcome**

- Louisa Finn, Mohonk Consultations

**9:10 Introduction**

- Cara Lee, Mohonk Consultations

**9:15 Topic Overview: Building a Framework for Wellbeing**

- Elka Gotfryd, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress

**9:45 Panel Discussion/Q&A: “Stories in Place”**

- Brian Mahoney, *Chronogram* (moderator)

- Becky Collins Brooks, Hilltop Farm

- Joe Concra, O+ Festival

- Victoria Messner, COFFE (Coalition of Forward-Facing Ellenville)

**10:45 Break**

**11:00 Panel Discussion/Q&A: “Building Resilience”**

- Elka Gotfryd, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress (moderator)

- Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, Mid-Hudson Library System

- Corey J. Allen, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newburgh

- Colleen McMurray, Pine Hill Community Center

**12:00 Roundtable: Conversation**

**12:30 Lunch/Conversation**

**1:30 Panel Discussion/Q&A: “Balancing Self and System”**

- Erica Brown, Radio Kingston (moderator)

- Shaniqua Bowden, Tilda’s Kitchen & Market

- Phoenix Kawamoto, Town of New Paltz

- Duane Martinez, Scenic Hudson

**2:30 Roundtable: Networking**

**3:15 Wrap-up and Next Steps**

- Erica Brown, Radio Kingston

- Elka Gotfryd, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress

- Brian Mahoney, *Chronogram*

- Cara Lee, Mohonk Consultations

**4:00 Conference Space Closes**

(Please return feedback forms at registration table)

### CONVERSATIONS THAT SPARK COLLABORATION

Mohonk Consultations was founded to carry on the Mohonk legacy of creating opportunities for the meaningful and productive exchange of ideas. Conversation and collaboration are central to that legacy, which is why today’s program provides abundant opportunities for conference participants to interact with speakers, panelists, and one another—through Q & A sessions, facilitated roundtable chats and informal social breaks.

Over the course of more than 40 years we have learned that these interactions serve to spark ideas and identify areas of common ground that can serve as a foundation for the development of lasting collaborative solutions. With that in mind, we urge you to keep the conversations going after today’s conference is finished.

In the coming days, all conference participants will receive a followup email with contact information for our speakers and the organizations they represent and an invitation to share your feedback. Thank you for being part of today’s event.

**Louisa Finn, Board Chair, Mohonk Consultations**—Louisa is a fourth-generation Smiley family member. She grew up in the Hudson Valley, frequently visiting Mohonk where her grandmother and family lived. Louisa is committed to preserving the land, philosophy, and ideals of her Smiley ancestors. She is a practicing speech and language pathologist, a reading tutor, and a published poet.

**Cara Lee, Mohonk Consultations Board Member**—Cara has had a 40-year career in conservation in Hudson Valley as an advocate, land manager, policy developer, lobbyist, and educator. She was environmental director for Scenic Hudson before joining The Nature Conservancy in 2001 to work on ecological management in the Shawangunks and then on renewable energy policy. Cara is currently the Chair of New Paltz's Community Preservation Fund Advisory Board.

**Elka Gotfryd, Executive Director of the Center for Housing Solutions and Community Initiatives, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress**—Urban planner by trade, Elka believes planning as a field can be leveraged to right our relationships with land and labor. Before joining Pattern for Progress, Elka worked as a planner and facilitator in over 25 cities and towns nationally and internationally across public, nonprofit, and private sectors. When she isn't delving into housing or economic policy research, she can be found making music

with friends, refusing to follow a recipe, or with her dog training team learning how to scent-track.

#### **PANEL: STORIES IN PLACE**

**Brian Mahoney, Editorial Director, Chronogram** (moderator)—Brian oversees the operations of *Chronogram*, *Upstate House*, *The River Newsroom*, *Upstater*, *Rural Intelligence*, and *Explore the Hudson Valley*. Brian has been covering the cultural landscape of the Hudson Valley since 1996 and documenting its ongoing evolution across Chronogram Media's publishing platforms. His publication credits include the *New York Press*, *T* magazine, *Utne Reader*, the *Village Voice*, and *American Craft*. In 2021, he won the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies Award for Best Special Section for "The Future Is Now," a feature package in the July 2022 issue of *Chronogram*.

**Rebecca (Becky) Collins Brooks, Co-owner, Catskill Wagyu at Hilltop Farm**—Rebecca and her husband Barton raise purebred Wagyu beef, roaster chickens and heritage eggs for sale direct to customers at their a small, sustainable livestock farm in Accord, NY, where they also maintain a small herd of dairy cows. Becky is a cheesemaker, and the founder of The Meeting of the Milkmaids, an organization dedicated to supporting and encouraging women working in the cheese industry. Becky is also a writer; her pieces about agriculture and community have been published in local, regional, and national outlets.

**Joe Concra, Co-founder, O+ Festival**—Joe is a painter and original O+ founder. His work examines glimmers of hope and the illuminated edges using the classic techniques of oil painting, with which he creates worlds both familiar and skewed by dreamlike absurdity. Concra is a long-time Hudson Valley resident, and his work is held in private collections throughout the U.S. and U.K. After meeting a local dentist in 2010, he focused on creating a group art project which combines art, music, and healthcare for artists and musicians, a seriously under-insured part of the population. A yearly festival evolved that helped to fill a cultural void that was life in Kingston. He believes that art, music, and healthcare are all essential to our individual and community well-being.

**Victoria Messner, Founder/President, COFFE: Coalition of Forward-Facing Ellenville**—Messner leads the community-based non-profit organization, COFFE, working with volunteers to revitalize Ellenville, support social service partnerships, cultural arts programming, and produce real-life solutions for legacy challenges of the area. Messner owns and operates Morning Sunshine, a cafe and specialty grocer in Ellenville, NY as well as Reservoir Studio, a local creative agency. She was one of the co-founders of Ellenville's weekly farmers' market, Market on Market, and currently sits on the Ulster County Planning Board as well as the village's ZBA.

#### **PANEL: BUILDING RESILIENCE**

**Elka Gotfryd, Executive Director of the Center for Housing Solutions and Community Initiatives, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress** (Moderator)

**Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, Executive Director, Mid-Hudson Library System**—Rebekkah leads a cooperative public library system that serves more than 600,000 residents via 66 public library locations. She is co-founder of the award-winning Sustainable Libraries Initiative and co-founder of The Library of Local Project here in the Hudson Valley. For over 25 years, Rebekkah has worked with public libraries across the world to help them connect with their community needs to help them create viable, vital, and vibrant library services that strengthen social cohesion, serve as a catalyst for civic participation, and ensure that our communities thrive into the future. Rebekkah is the principal author of the award-winning Sustainable Library Certification Program; the recently released National Climate Action Strategy for Libraries; the Handbook for both Library Trustees and new Library Directors in New York State; as well as authoring three books on how libraries contribute to sustainable, resilient, and regenerative communities.

**Corey J. Allen, Neighborhood Revitalization Specialist, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newburgh**—Corey J. Allen is a lifelong resident of Newburgh, NY, with over 25 years of

experience in the community organizing/advocacy arena. In addition to his work with Habitat, Corey is chair of the City of Newburgh Affordable Housing Coalition, a member of the City of Newburgh Zoning Board, the Hudson River Estuary Management Advisory Committee, and chair of the Hook Elite Boxing Ministries Board of Directors. Corey is passionate about family, speaking truth to power and above all else, Black people. He coined the phrase “Newburgh is more Mayberry than we are Manhattan,” and is very well versed in the local history of housing and housing discrimination as they pertain to Black people and the present-day displacement of Black people in the City of Newburgh. Lastly, he’s not afraid to say “Black.”

**Colleen McMurray, Executive Director, Pine Hill Community Center**—Colleen leads a variety of programs aimed at strengthening the local community. With a strong background in nonprofit management and a deep passion for community development, Colleen is dedicated to creating inclusive spaces that support families, children, and individuals of all ages. Her leadership is marked by a commitment to collaboration, innovation, and sustainability, ensuring the Center remains a vibrant hub for community engagement and growth.

**PANEL: BALANCING SELF AND SYSTEM**

**Erica Brown, Community Engagement Coordinator, Radio Kingston (Moderator)**—Erica is a native Kingstonian who is passionate about her community and dedicated to making it thrive. She currently serves on the Midtown Thriving Committee and is a board member at both the Good Work Institute and TMI Project. Personally, Erica values meaningful conversations and believes in the power of open, honest communication to bring people closer together. She is always looking for ways to help others learn and grow, encouraging more effective ways of connecting and understanding one another. Erica’s community-minded spirit drives both her work and personal life—she’s a proud mother of two—as she seeks to create a positive impact in Kingston.

**Shaniqua Bowden, Board Member, Hudson Valley Current/Tilda’s Kitchen and Market**—Shaniqua is currently serving as the Director of Cultural Engagement and Sustainable Living at the Kingston Land Trust (KLT), where she is at the forefront of initiatives to improve land access for BIPOC farmers and growers and promote equitable land ownership and stewardship within communities of color. Shaniqua’s work is guided by a commitment to advancing ecological repair, driving racial justice and social equity, democratizing communities and wealth, retaining and restoring

cultural diversity, and relocalizing economic power. She is passionate about exploring the intersection of culture, heritage, and land conservation, leveraging these insights to drive meaningful change. In addition to her role at KLT, Shaniqua is a proud mother and active community member. She has served as a board member of the Hudson Valley Current—the sponsoring organization of Tilda’s Kitchen and Market—since 2020 and is also a co-founder of My Kingston Kids, an organization dedicated to nurturing the healthy imagination of young people. Other community projects she’s worked on include Black History Month Kingston and the Nubian Cafe.

**Phoenix Kawamoto, Community Wellness Officer, Town of New Paltz**—Phoenix works with key stakeholders, parents, and youth to develop and coordinate workshops, programs, and activities for all ages. An extensive network of community-based organizations, service providers, businesses, etc. donate their time and resources in support of the OCW’s efforts to foster wellness within New Paltz. In 2021, Phoenix was awarded the Distinguished Friend of Education from Ulster County’s School Boards Association, for his outsized impact in the New Paltz district, having spearheaded the counterpart to the school lunchroom known by the initialism “CAFE,” short for “cafeteria alternative for everyone.”

**Duane Martinez, Director of River Cities Program, Scenic Hudson**—Duane directs a key program area for Scenic Hudson, a 61-year strong environmental organization serving the Hudson Valley. The River Cities Program addresses the dual biodiversity and climate crises by working collaboratively on community-based plans that connect residents with nature in the three mid-Hudson cities of Kingston, Newburgh, and Poughkeepsie. Though collaboration with residents, local leaders, community organizations, and government agencies, the program develops solutions to combat the nature gap in the region. Duane’s work is rooted in urban design, natural history, and community organizing. He holds degrees in Environmental Design from CU-Boulder and City and Regional Planning from Pratt Institute. Duane is from the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado and currently lives in Kingston, NY.