

Visioning Committee Statement

New York State Assembly Casino Hearings
April 7, 2005, Monticello, NY

There are many who say that the quality of life is gone from their communities. There are many who lament their favorite sacred places are gone—gone by the way of shopping malls and subdivisions.

Here in Sullivan County and specifically in the Upper Delaware River Valley—Sullivan County's western border—we still have many of those sacred and special places intact. We can still find undisturbed lands and marvel at the rock moraine paths left by glaciers eons ago. We are still blessed with an abundance of bio-diversity in fauna and flora, a forest industry, small intact communities and working farms.

But it will not always be this way unless we make a concerted effort to educate our neighbors, our leaders and ourselves of its precious and fragile nature.

And thus an initiative—Visioning the Upper Delaware—was born. Started in 2002 as a civic journalism project of **The River Reporter**, it started as a simple idea to get people in a room—from the Pennsylvania and New York communities that border the Upper Delaware River—who have similar jobs (hospital administrators from both states, legislators from both states, county planners, real estate agents, builders, performing arts executives) to share ideas, to know each other and to facilitate an understanding of the many individual shareholders shaping our collective future.

A visioning committee was born out of this forum.

The basic idea of the Visioning Committee of the Upper Delaware River Corridor has been to encourage collaborative thinking as a means of shaping the future of the region. It has been a mechanism to raise the consciousness of public officials, business professionals and residents about the impacts of the unprecedented growth facing the Upper Delaware River Valley. At monthly meetings for almost three years, key players in the growth scenario—county planners, National Park Service personnel, Upper Delaware Council officials, county and state leaders, land conservation experts and business people—have shared their perspective on the present and their vision of the future with the goal to establish a common vision.

Through several series of community meetings and educational forums up and down both sides of the river valley, residents identified and prioritized key community issues. They are, in specific order, 1) the conservation of open spaces and protection of water quality and farmland; 2) the encouragement of family sustaining jobs, preservation of the area's rural character; and 3) the maintenance of private property rights. Also on the list was the support of businesses consistent with rural character, the education of local officials and citizens on “safe” planning methods, village revitalization, development of a means to act on urgent local issues including the proposed Pegasus power line and casinos, the encouragement of long-term stewardship of the land based on science, the establishment of partnerships between citizens and support of town planning boards and officials.

Interestingly enough, while the Upper Delaware River Valley spans two states and 75 miles of the Upper Delaware River, a national Wild and Scenic River since 1978, the major issues of protection of water and air quality, open space, farmland protection and private property rights were consistently rated as top priorities.

And it is in the name of these community priorities that the Visioning Committee of the Upper Delaware River Corridor presents this statement as testimony and as a recommendation to the New York State Assembly that the economies of natural preservation and conservation of the Upper Delaware River Valley be considered as precious and economically and socially advantageous to conserve, specifically as it relates to the concept of inviting five casinos to Sullivan County.

Stephen Hawkin in his book “Natural Capitalism” writes “business and governments avoid the task of planning for issues related to the environment or society because the timeframe for environmental and social change always seem over the horizon, whereas the challenges and modification times required in other areas are measured in years if not months. Yet, any attempt to form a coherent assessment of the future that does not take into account what is happening to the natural and human capital is incomplete strategic thinking.”

The Upper Delaware River Valley is that precious “natural capital” that needs to be protected and preserved in the face of the unprecedented growth that will be thrust upon its borders with the construction of five casinos in Sullivan County.

We, the members of the Visioning Committee of the Upper Delaware River Corridor, ask you to consider the very serious secondary impacts of casino- induced rapid population growth and development on that character of the Upper Delaware River Valley, which has served so well to attract second-home residents, vacationers and other new forms of tourism to the area to replace the hotel resort industry. We do not want to lose what we have labored so long to protect as an economic resource and high-quality living environment.

Thank you for your attention to our residents’ concerns.

Daniel Card, Waste Management Co., Beach Lake, PA
Sue Currier, Delaware Highlands Conservancy, Hawley, PA, Narrowsburg, NY
Chris Cunningham, Sullivan County Legislature, Monticello, NY
William Douglass, Upper Delaware Council, Narrowsburg, NY
Phil Dux, Berlin Township Board of Supervisors, Beach Lake, PA
David Forney, National Park Service, Beach Lake, PA
Mark Graziadio, Honesdale National Bank, Honesdale, PA
Neal Haloran, Town of Cochection, NY
Judy Harlan, Editorial Service, White Mills, PA
Tom Kane, **The River Reporter**, Narrowsburg, NY
Kathy LaBuda, Sullivan County Legislature, Monticello, NY
John Ligreci, Town of Lumberland, Glen Spey, NY
Jeffrey Moore, Town of Fremont, NY
Buck Moorhead, Buck Moorhead Architect, New York City, NY, Callicoon, NY
Michael Mrozinski, Pike County Planning, Blooming Grove, PA
William Pammer, Sullivan County Planning, Monticello, NY
John Riley, First National Bank of Jeffersonville, Jeffersonville, NY
Kate Schmidt, Sullivan County Planning, Monticello, NY
Thomas Shepstone, Shepstone Management Co., Honesdale, PA
Laurie Stuart, **The River Reporter**/Stuart Communications, Narrowsburg, NY