A letter from Oded Holzinger, Executive Director

Dear Friends,

2023 was quite the year for Groundwork Hudson Valley! We said goodbye to Brigitte Griswold who led the organization for over six years. Brigitte leaves behind a focused, strategic organization that is prepared to continue to expand and grow our impact in Yonkers and the surrounding region and we thank her for her incredible contribution to the growth of Groundwork Hudson Valley.

In 2023, we continued to expand our many public-private partnerships, increased the number of education programs and curriculum available to public schools, removed thousands of pounds of trash from our waterways, introduced more nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change risks, and hired a record number of youth under our youth employment program.

This growth would not be possible without the support and commitment of our partners, donors, volunteers, and staff. I am inspired by all who have risen to the challenges brought on by climate change. From transforming public spaces that bring nature to more city residents, to our nationally recognized sustainability education and youth employment programs, to launching our new high school-to-career pathways in urban forestry and environmental science, nothing Groundwork undertakes is done without the leadership and support of its many partners.

We are ready to make a more environmentally just and climate resilient world. Thank you for making it possible!

Sincerely,
Our Mission
Groundwork Hudson Valley creates sustainable environmental change in urban neighborhoods through community-based partnerships that promote equity, youth leadership, and economic opportunity.

Our Vision
Vibrant, diverse, sustainable cities where the economy, environment, and residents thrive.

Our Work
In 2023, Groundwork Hudson Valley implemented nature-based solutions to restore and revitalize underserved areas, carried forward the Climate Safe Yonkers Task Force, educated thousands of people of all ages about climate change science and urban sustainability issues, and provided leadership skills that have brought significant benefits and achievements to the communities that we serve.

Our Values
1. Ensure equal access to a healthy environment for everyone.
2. Promote inclusion of all community members in decision-making.
3. Collaborate with residents, governments, and businesses to accomplish positive environmental change.
4. Foster the development of environmental and community leaders through environmental education and employment.
5. Transform underutilized public sites into vibrant, accessible, green community spaces designed for and with local neighborhoods.
6. Champion durable, sustainable projects that promise lasting impact.
Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership

The Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership examines the intersection of historical housing segregation and the current and future impacts of climate change in Yonkers. Groundwork Hudson Valley compiled and mapped data on heat intensity, demographics, health, and environmental risks. As a result, it established the Climate Safe Yonkers Taskforce in 2022, made up of 30 community members. The Task Force develops climate resilience strategies and was instrumental in shaping the first-ever Yonkers Climate Action Plan championed by Mayor Mike Spano.

The Yonkers Greenway

Groundwork Hudson Valley is collaborating with the City of Yonkers to create an urban trail for walking, running, and recreation along a branch of the abandoned Putnam Railroad. Dubbed as the “Yonkers Greenway”, this RailTrail will stretch from Van Cortlandt Park in New York City to the downtown Yonkers waterfront. The initiative aims to revive the neighborhoods that were affected by the decline after the “Old Put” stopped running. The Yonkers Greenway trail will offer improved access to local businesses and parks, encourage physical activity, and seamlessly connect with transit options and other trail systems to create a vibrant and interconnected community trail.

Climate Resilience

At Groundwork Hudson Valley, we employ nature-based solutions to address extreme heat and flood risks in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Our projects, including the Saw Mill River restoration, the Yonkers Greenway, and the Climate Safe Neighborhoods Initiative, have contributed to the resilience of our communities.
The Saw Mill River Coalition is a partnership of individuals, nonprofit groups, government agencies, municipalities, and businesses dedicated to revitalizing and protecting the Saw Mill River, an important tributary of the Hudson River. Efforts have included sustainable land use, restoring habitat and wildlife, promoting recreational opportunities, and raising awareness of the river’s history and significance by mobilizing hundreds of volunteers to clean and restore its banks, remove invasive vines, monitor water quality, and plant native trees.

**Climate Resilience Impact and Achievements in 2023**

- 9,642 lbs. of trash removed from rivers and streams across Westchester County, including Yonkers.
- 19,500 ft. of riverbank restored.
- 546 trees planted, including saplings and mature trees.
- 1,796 community members engaged to improve climate resilience.
SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION
We deliver sustainability education through our in-person and virtual curriculums across Yonkers public schools and at the Science Barge — our off-the-grid, floating environmental education center on the Hudson River.

The Science Barge
The Science Barge is a public education destination that hosts school groups from the tri-state area during the week and is free to the general public on weekends. It’s equipped with a hydroponic greenhouse where an abundance of fresh produce is grown with zero net carbon emissions, zero pesticides, and zero runoff. All of the energy needed to power the Barge is generated by solar panels and wind turbines while the hydroponic greenhouse is irrigated solely by collected rainwater, thus operating completely “off the grid.”

The Virtual Curriculums
Groundwork Hudson Valley supports educators in their dedicated efforts to empower the next generation of environmental leaders. Our lesson plans and virtual curriculums were adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide educators with access to an array of environmental education subjects from plant anatomy and animals along the Saw Mill River, to sustainable lifestyles, climate change, and emergency preparedness. All of our virtual learning units adhere to Next Generation Science Standards.

Sustainability Education Impact and Achievements in 2023

- 288 lbs of produce grown at the Science Barge and donated to local organizations and families.
- 1,161 people participated in environmental or science education at the Science Barge during the summer weekends.
- 5,175 students taught from public and private education centers.

50 x 2 = 100
YOUTH LEADERSHIP

We train, employ, and mentor youth in climate adaptation, conservation, and leadership development. Our youth leadership program focuses on building leadership skills and a variety of valuable, hands-on conservation skills that youth apply in a variety of settings both in downtown Yonkers and in the surrounding region.

The Green Team

The Green Team program hires local youth enrolled in the Yonkers Public School system for paid environmental jobs to explore future careers in environmental conservation. The Green Team completes projects that include building community gardens, cleaning the Saw Mill River and other local waterways, removing invasive species, reclaiming unused outdoor spaces, planting trees and shrubs to mitigate urban heat, and educating the community about the causes and consequences of climate change.

Leadership Development

Green Team members receive leadership skills training that they apply in their day-to-day fieldwork. They develop these skills in a structured, supportive environment along with new skills in wilderness camping, canoeing, night hikes, trail restoration, and park conservation in places like Yellowstone National Park, Gateway National Recreation Area, Lenape Wildlife National Refuge Complex, and Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge. Combined with mentoring, the Green Team members are encouraged to explore a range of future education and career opportunities. For some, it is the launching pad for a career in the environmental field.

Youth Leadership Impact and Achievements in 2023

- 30 Yonkers public school youth hired as part of the Green Team.
- 6,320 hrs. dedicated to working on environmental improvement projects.
- 1,152 hrs. engaging youth in community outreach and civic engagement activities.
Partner Spotlight: MHACY and Groundwork Hudson Valley

MHACY and Groundwork Hudson Valley Join Forces for Greater Sustainability and Environmental Impact in Yonkers

In a groundbreaking collaboration, the Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers (MHACY) has partnered with Groundwork Hudson Valley, fostering a dynamic alliance to address environmental concerns within public housing communities. MHACY and Groundwork share a common goal of enhancing environmental sustainability, community resilience, and overall well-being for Yonkers’ most climate-vulnerable residents.

Groundwork’s bilingual education programs bring MHACY tenants up to speed on climate science and resilience efforts and emphasize how they can both participate in and benefit from nature-based solutions. MHACY tenants, through their lived experiences and Groundwork’s Climate Safe Yonkers Task Force through their research and advocacy, played a crucial role in the planning and development process of the first-ever Yonkers Climate Action Plan. With continuous engagement with the tenants, Groundwork and MHACY collaborate on the planning, design, and implementation of nature-based climate adaptation measures at several public housing properties. Creating opportunities for those most impacted by the climate crisis to express their concerns is a hallmark of Groundwork’s partnership with MHACY. We look forward to creating a more climate resilient community with them.

Scan here to read more
Groundwork in the News 2022-2023

**National Geographic**
The article addresses the tension between urban density and the necessity for green spaces that are critical for both human well-being and the health of wildlife habitats. The article highlights the “daylighting” of the Saw Mill River in Yonkers, an undertaking led in part by Groundwork Hudson Valley, as effective urban conservation.

**USA Today**
Disparities in temperature are evident between poorer, majority-Black neighborhoods lacking shade and wealthier, tree-lined areas. The article explores the often-hidden impact of heat on vulnerable populations, highlighting the link between discriminatory practices of the past and current climate-related health risks.

**The Atlantic**
Groundwork USA and similar grassroots organizations are implementing hyperlocal projects in Yonkers to address climate change impacts in disadvantaged communities. Federal funding supports these initiatives, emphasizing community-led efforts in historically marginalized neighborhoods.
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