



**New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

**AGENCY DECISION
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

Adoption of a Final Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Clermont State Historic Site

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has prepared and released a Final Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), dated July 26, 2023, for Clermont State Historic Site located in the Town of Clermont, in Columbia and Dutchess Counties, NY.

By the authority vested in me in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, I do hereby adopt the Final Master Plan and FEIS for Clermont State Historic Site.

This decision is based on the attached Findings Statement and the content of the Final Master Plan and FEIS, which have been prepared according to the provisions of Part 617, the regulations implementing Article 8 of Environmental Conservation Law - the State Environmental Quality Review Act.



Erik Kulleseid

Commissioner

NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and

Historic Preservation



Date

**State Environmental Quality Review
FINDINGS STATEMENT
Clermont State Historic Site Final Master Plan/FEIS**

August 8, 2023

Pursuant to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act – SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law and 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), as lead agency, makes the following findings:

Title of the Action:

Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Clermont State Historic Site

Location:

Clermont State Historic Site is located in the Town of Clermont in Columbia County and the Town of Red Hook, Dutchess County, New York.

Description of the Action:

The Master Plan for Clermont State Historic Site (Site) provides long term guidance for the development, management and operation of the Site and protection of its resources as summarized below.

Date of Completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS): July 26, 2023

These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the Final EIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; provide a rationale for the agency's decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that included within the Master Plan are those mitigation measures that will avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable.

Findings:

1. The Final Plan was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including two online public meetings and meetings with the Friends of Clermont State Historic Site. The Final EIS contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS. This chapter provides information on modifications to the Final Master Plan (Plan) and FEIS as a result of comments received.
2. Clermont State Historic Site is located in Columbia County in the Town of Clermont and in Dutchess County in the Town of Red Hook. The Site is located approximately 2.5 miles North of Tivoli and 5 miles South of Germantown. The Site is bounded by the Hudson River to the West and New York State Route 9G to the East.

3. Clermont State Historic Site was established as a State Historic Site in 1962 and is comprised of 503 acres of lands once held by the Livingston family. In 1972 Clermont was designated a U. S. National Historic Landmark and the Site is listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Site's significant elements include the Livingston mansion and remains of the Arryl House, the "Red Barn," a carriage house (now the visitor center), two historic cottages, a children's Playhouse, and formal gardens.
4. Clermont is located in the Towns of Clermont and Red Hook and straddles the Columbia and Dutchess county line. The majority of the 503-acre Site is in Columbia, with 33 acres in Dutchess.
5. Clermont State Historic Site is open year-round and hosted almost 200,000 visitors in 2022/2023. During the summer months, the main attractions to the Site are the picnic areas, trails, the mansion, scenic vistas and public events. Additionally, the Site hosts many weddings taking advantage of the scenic nature of the site.
6. Clermont State Historic Site contains significant open space and natural areas in its woodlands, and fields. The Site's largely rural setting provide open space with varying wildlife habitats. Clermont's most significant natural resource is its forestland which contributes to the ecologically important forest complexes in the region, including Appalachian oak-hickory forest community, and Calcareous Talus Slope Woodland.
7. The Site contains a few significant old growth native trees with the woodlands containing predominantly second-growth forest.
8. The Plan identifies a vision statement and goals for the Site. The vision for Clermont State Historic Site is that it will be a cultural, historic, and natural destination that is accessible and relevant to all. It will be a leader in visitor engagement and dialogue. It will reflect our diverse regional heritage along with our present and future role in the Hudson Valley, using the site's historic context and restorative landscape.
9. The Plan presents a series of "preferred alternatives" for future development and operation of Clermont State Historic Site. Status quo alternatives were evaluated for each element of the Plan as well. The Status Quo Alternative consists of the current facilities, programs, and practices. The various preferred alternatives were combined to create a single preferred alternative for recreation development and resource protection into one that best met the goals for the Site. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan. The actions described in the Plan present the long-term vision for the rehabilitation and enhancement of public use facilities and the protection and preservation of the cultural and natural resources at the Site.
10. The Plan considers the historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources of the Site and responds to the needs and safety of park patrons, protection of natural, cultural, and scenic resources and the principles of sustainability. The Plan sets forth a long-term vision to guide future development of new and existing park facilities. The Plan also recognizes that the initiation of each specific action will be determined by the level of funding available to OPRHP in future years, as well as including priorities of implementing capital improvements to meet these goals.

11. The Plan calls for improvements to recreational facilities including offering special outdoor events that will encourage new groups to come to the site (e.g., temporary overnight camping for youth or bicycle groups); assessing the feasibility of providing public access to the Site's remnants of the historic dock along the Hudson River shoreline; and maintain connections with the equestrian community by developing special events that highlight equestrian use as a historic recreation activity; the Site will continue to include passive recreation such as enjoying Hudson River/Catskill views, picnicking, kite flying, watching a sunset, dog walking, birding, walking the grounds and trails, and viewing the gardens.
12. The Plan provides guidance for the upgrading, maintenance and expansion of the trail system. Key components include construction of a new trailhead parking lot, a multi-use, accessible trail from the Arryl House Ruins to Clermont Cottage, with connections to the mansion and other points of interest at the Site; repair of low, wet, and eroded areas in the Site's existing trail system; repair of culverts and bridges and improving trail markings and continuing to recognize and promote the connection to the Empire State Trail.
13. Strategies for natural resource protection include; minimizing future development in natural areas and establishing buffer zones for special habitat types, increasing public knowledge of how to protect natural elements, utilizing site elements and conditions to illustrate real-world impacts of climate change, limiting public access to sensitive ecological communities and known habitats for rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, effectively managing the spread of harmful species and partnering with external groups and adjacent landowners to enhance habitat and provide a variety of environmental education activities.
14. Interpretation, education and outreach opportunities throughout the Site will be expanded. The Plan recommends the creation of an updated interpretation program/plan for the Site to define new content goals, presentation methods, and ensure a cohesive message.
15. Cultural resource protection strategies include: develop and implement a comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Conditions Assessment for the Mansion; rehabilitate and retrofit Sylvan Cottage as an accessible, multi-use education center with classrooms, a kitchen, restrooms; improve the Red Barn and implement repairs necessary to ensure its long-term protection; remediate Clermont Cottage for mold and mildew and install appropriate insulation; stabilize the icehouse and root cellar; remove vegetation and add gravel with weed barrier around the perimeter; conduct a Phase I archaeological survey for the entire Site; work with the Bureau of Historic Sites to develop a furnishing plan; with the Bureau of Historic Sites, re-evaluate Clermont's Collections Policy; review its parameters and the scope of collections; provided online access to Clermont's collections and enable wider and more active use by both staff, the academic community, and the general public; and evaluate storage conditions for object collections held in the mansion and make recommendations for improvements.
16. The Plan calls for many improvements for operations, infrastructure and maintenance. These include: developing and implementing a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan; relocating the Site entrance to the original location; improving the maintenance area; upgrading the Site's electricity infrastructure, including phone and internet systems; developing a staffing plan and corresponding operational budget and renovating the park office facilities located in the Mansion.

17. The implementation of the Final Master Plan for Clermont State Historic Site is divided into three priority phases. The pace and sequencing of prioritized actions will be determined by the availability of funding, which is a function of the size of OPRHP's annual capital budgets and the need to balance investments throughout the park system.
18. Impacts associated with the implementation of the Plan and mitigation measures identified are as follows:
 - Implementation of the Plan will result in some physical changes to the land, particularly where new recreation facilities, buildings, and trails will be constructed. OPRHP makes every effort to minimize impacts and disturbance to land resources by repurposing existing structures rather than building new structures, and siting new construction in previously disturbed areas, when possible and appropriate. Some construction projects may require some vegetation removal and soil disturbance. To minimize the amount of grading needed, site specific design of these facilities will accommodate the existing grade levels where possible. For all projects, construction documents will include appropriate erosion and sediment controls.
 - For trail construction, disturbance of land will be limited to the required width of the trail corridor; some trails will utilize existing corridors or currently mowed maintained to reduce impacts to currently vegetated areas. Trail construction will follow the policies and guidelines for trail building that have been established by recognized trail organizations and government agencies.
 - Some additional impervious surfaces will be added to develop new facilities such as the multi-use path, new entrance and new trailhead parking lot, pole barn roof in maintenance area and potentially the addition of an elevator in the Mansion. Mitigation such as use of porous paving, bioswales and retention ponds will be considered in projects to reduce overall potential impacts from stormwater runoff.
 - Implementation of the Plan will have minimal adverse impacts on water resources in the Site. All proposed projects will incorporate stormwater management measures; sediment and erosion control measures will be incorporated into design and construction documents, as appropriate. Implementation of the Plan will result in some beneficial impacts to water quality and aquatic habitat by reducing stormwater to wetlands, creeks and the Hudson River. Natural buffers to water resources on the site will be maintained and managed to minimize impacts. Improved management of invasive species and restoration with native plantings where needed will help to restore and protect wetland health and biodiversity.
 - Implementation of the Plan will have minimal impacts on air quality in the Site. An increase in the number of vehicles travelling to the Site is expected to be minor and air quality impacts from an increase in traffic volume are not expected to be significant. Short-term, temporary air quality impacts during large events and during construction are expected to be temporary and localized. Air quality impacts from construction vehicles will be mitigated by assuring that these vehicles are in good running condition and are not producing excessive exhaust emissions.

- Implementation of the Plan will have a positive impact on the biological resources in the Site. The Final Master Plan's vision statement, strategies, and proposed actions serve to protect and enhance these sensitive resources. The Plan proposes to implement a comprehensive approach to invasive species management, to restore and expand habitat when possible, consider new project implementation with wildlife considerations. Limited new development is proposed in the Plan, and therefore direct impacts to biological elements are expected to be minimal. Projects have been primarily sited in previously developed areas with limited environmental sensitivity. All proposed projects will employ design strategies and protections that minimize impacts to sensitive areas.
- Implementation of the Plan will have some minor impacts on the ecological communities. Impacts will be mitigated by providing appropriate site design to reduce vegetation loss and stormwater runoff. To minimize impacts to sensitive areas, locations for new proposed pedestrian pathways and trails will be assessed and will incorporate sustainable design. Facility and infrastructure improvements outlined in the Plan, including improvements to utilities, the maintenance improvements, solar array, parking and picnic area, are primarily in areas that are already developed or in culturally derived natural community types, such as lawn.
- There will be some minor impacts to flora in the Site. The construction of new facilities will require removal of some vegetation during construction. For buildings and other infrastructure, vegetation loss will be minimal and primarily within the building footprint and associated outdoor spaces, which are primarily in lawn or developed areas. Where new trail segments are proposed, impacts will be mitigated by requiring selection of the most appropriate routes, employing Best Management Practice's such as those found in established guidelines for sustainable trail design during layout and construction, and minimizing removal of vegetation to the required corridor width. Consideration for the protection of the Site's old growth trees and significant natural communities will be part of the design process when designing a new site amenity. Rare plant surveys will be conducted during the detailed planning for each new addition to the Site.
- Minimal impacts to fauna in the Site are expected due to the small amount of physical change being proposed in the Plan. Areas proposed for improvements through either rehabilitation or new construction are not located near sensitive environmental areas and are not expected to affect wildlife in the area. Consideration of potential impacts on the fauna of the Site was part of the planning process when selecting preferred alternatives and will also be considered during future implementation of new projects. Any tree removals will follow the OPRHP Tree Removal Timing Guidelines to avoid potential impacts to protected bats and migratory bird species. The Site has many populations of bird species, including songbirds, eagles and other migratory birds. Pollinator habitat will be protected with additional strategies developed to increase habitat. Strategies will be implemented to protect vernal pools, wet meadows, unnamed streams, and the Hudson River. Each of these provide habitat for a wide variety of species. The Plan minimizing future development in natural areas and establishing buffer zones for special habitat types, increases public knowledge of how to protect natural elements, limits public access to sensitive ecological communities and known habitats for rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, effectively manages the spread of harmful species, partner with external groups and adjacent landowners to enhance habitat and provide a

variety of environmental education activities. Best management practices will be implemented with all new development to minimize erosion and runoff to wetland habitat and the Hudson River. The implementation of the master plan will continue to protect these species and associated habitats.

- Implementation of the Plan will include the utilization of Best Management Practices to minimize the spread of invasive species. Surveying and monitoring for forest pest species will be included as part of a more proactive invasive species strategy. Education of patrons will include natural resource protection and methods to reduce invasive species spread.
- The Plan recognizes and protects the historic and cultural resources within the Site. Adaptive reuse and/or rehabilitation of some of the Site's cultural elements has been proposed including Sylvan Cottage, the Mansion and the Red Barn. To assure that there are no adverse impacts on cultural or historic resources, projects will be reviewed under Section 14.09 by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- To assure that there are no adverse impacts to archaeological resources, any project that could result in ground disturbance and potentially affect the Site's cultural resources may require consultation with the Archaeology Unit of SHPO to determine if a site-specific archaeological survey is needed. The majority of the projects proposed in the Plan will require review under Section 14.09 for historic and/or archeological resource considerations.
- Recommendations in the Plan help to protect the Site's scenic resources and historic vistas. The Plan recommends continued monitoring and maintenance of current, as well as to-be-identified, scenic vistas throughout the Site, following Agency policy. Projects proposed in the Site will not have any significant effect on the view of the Site from off site.
- There will be temporary, minor adverse impacts to open space from implementation of the Plan; this will occur during construction projects where the project sites are temporarily closed off to public access. Overall, the implementation of the Final Master Plan will result in significant beneficial recreation and open space impacts. While current recreational opportunities at the Site will remain available, a variety of new and improved recreation facilities and visitor amenities are proposed. All improvements will follow ADA guidelines. Improvements and additions to the trail system will increase the variety of recreation experiences for walkers, hikers, cyclists, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers.
- Implementation of the Plan will enhance safe access to Clermont with proposed redesign of the original entrance. While full implementation of the Plan may result in some increased visitation to the facility, it was determined that the Site's existing roadways will accommodate the anticipated added volume. The Plan recommends vehicular circulation strategies are reevaluated for large events as well as the addition of a multi-use path which will separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic and provide a safer environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles using the Site. The Plan proposes developing a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to improve wayfinding, entry/arrival, traffic management, wildlife protection, and interpretative signage.

- Public health and safety are vital to park operations and an important component of OPRHP's mission. New or substantially rehabilitated facilities will be designed and constructed to meet all applicable health and safety codes.
- The increase in energy use is anticipated to be minor and represents only an insignificant increase at the facility over existing uses. Sustainability principles and energy efficiency will be incorporated into the design of all new park buildings and rehabilitated structures, to the degree feasible. Lighting at new or rehabilitated park facilities will be designed to be "dark sky" friendly and to minimize impacts on adjoining properties. The proposed solar array will offset the Site's usage from the electric grid and contribute to OPRHP's green energy initiatives and Executive Order 22.

19. Supplemental Environmental Review Process.

The Plan provides guidance on when additional environmental review may be required and identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include: new actions not addressed within the EIS that are not Type II actions within Part 617; any change from the preferred alternative for resource protection, recreational and facility development, or other elements of the Plan that would result in significant adverse environmental impacts; any leases, easements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between OPRHP and other entities that would affect resources in a manner that is not sufficiently addressed in the Final Master Plan and FEIS; and any project determined through SHPO review to have an Adverse Impact on historic resources at the Site.

Certification To Approve/Fund/Undertake:

Having considered the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement and having considered the preceding written facts and conclusions relied on to meet the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617.11, this Statement of Findings certifies that:

- The requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and
- Consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is the one that avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that adverse impacts will be avoided or minimized to the maximum extent practicable by incorporating as conditions to the decision those mitigative measures that were identified as practicable.
- Consistent with the applicable policies of Article 42 of the Executive Law, as implemented by 19 NYCRR Part 600.5, this action will achieve a balance between the protection of the environment and the need to accommodate social and economic considerations.