

# **The Olana Partnership Scenic Hudson**

Contact: Jay Burgess, Scenic Hudson, 845 473 4440, Ext. 222

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Expert Report Identifies Solutions That Can Boost Emergency Communications, Minimize Impacts to Historic Site and its Economic Contributions**

**LIVINGSTON (COLUMBIA COUNTY)**—The Olana Partnership and Scenic Hudson today released a report, prepared by a nationally recognized telecommunications engineer, that supports their continuing efforts to resolve a dispute in order to both enhance emergency communications and preserve the visitor experience at the Olana State Historic Site. Olana is one of the region's most important historic sites and a major contributor to the local economy. The report concerns a proposal to construct a 190-foot communications tower atop Blue Hill, which dominates views to the south from Olana. The historic site is responsible for 267 jobs and generates \$7.9 million annually for the local economy.

Based on a review of the project proposal, publicly available documents submitted in the project application process, as well as a visit to Olana, the report offers specific options for design solutions while also highlighting gaps and inaccuracies in the currently proposed plans for the communications towers. The Olana Partnership and Scenic Hudson stated that they would still like to work with the project proponents to create a win-win outcome.

#### **New tower would be much bulkier structure than two slim masts currently at the site**

The groups filed a legal challenge in August seeking to overturn an approval granted by the Town of Livingston Planning Board for the communications tower because the town did not adequately consider impacts the proposed tower would create. The owner of Blue Hill currently has two communications masts at the site that reach to 190 feet, but the structures' relatively slim profiles create minimal impacts on the views from Olana. On July 3, 2013, the owner was granted permission by the Town of Livingston Planning Board to construct a much bulkier tower to maintain existing wireless telephone service and enhance communications for emergency service organizations.

#### **Ways to improve proposed project**

According to the report by Walter A. Cooper, the proposed communications structures should not need to be taller than 120 feet. Mr. Cooper is an engineer with 35 years of experience in radio frequency and telecommunications systems design, installation and maintenance. Describing the proponents' proposed tower height as arbitrary and excessive, he contends that the two existing communications masts could be lowered. They have modular construction so this would not be difficult. If necessary, a third slender mast could be added in alignment with the two existing masts with no additional impacts on the views from Olana. Another option would be to relocate the existing masts and any new ones off the hilltop and disperse them around the site at lower elevations so that they do not break the ridgeline and do not appear silhouetted against the sky. This would require more design effort and possibly more than three masts, but it could accomplish the communications goals while largely eliminating damage to views from Olana and other sensitive viewpoints in the area.

#### **Current proposal lacking in analysis**

In addition, Mr. Cooper's report indicates that the applicant submitted little evidence to justify the proposed tower height and failed to offer design alternatives—as required by Town of Livingston Zoning Law—to mitigate the visual obstructions of the proposed facility.

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### **Olana views matter**

Olana, the home and landscape designed by renowned Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church, attracts 130,000 visitors every year. Views from the historic site are integral to the visitor experience and the enjoyment of area residents and schoolchildren who also come to Olana. The views from this national treasure appeal to visitors from around the world because they represent the birthplace of America's first art movement, and Church's painted scenes from his home make Olana one of the most significant artist residences in the United States. Blue Hill can be considered a centerpiece of the views, and the artist captured the promontory in several paintings. The views have not been maintained by accident. Scenic Hudson has worked directly with more than a dozen interested property owners to conserve more than 1,500 acres of their lands, with Scenic Hudson investing nearly \$6 million to make this happen. Other conservation groups have partnered with landowners to preserve nearly another 1,000 acres.

### **State and federal organizations concerned**

The Olana Partnership and Scenic Hudson are not the only organizations challenging the proposed tower. Strong concerns have been expressed in letters by the New York State Historic Preservation Office and the Federal Communications Commission.

### **Representatives of The Olana Partnership and Scenic Hudson comment on report**

Sara Griffen, president of The Olana Partnership, said, "Olana and Blue Hill are close neighbors. We're part of the same community, and these additional facts will help our community move closer toward finding a collective solution which benefits everyone. We're pushing once more for a closer examination of all the facts and options because we believe that through a willingness to cooperate we can reach a solution that benefits everyone."

Jeffrey Anzevino, director of Land Use Advocacy for Scenic Hudson, said, "Through this report we've brought to the table strong analysis and a path to a viable solution. We understand the importance of mobile devices and emergency communications and that a respected farming family that owns the Blue Hill ridgeline has rights to seek economic opportunity from their land. We also know that it's possible to provide emergency communications while also maintaining views from this nationally significant landmark and the community benefits it provides. And we'd like to find a win-win solution to this issue as quickly as possible."

### **About Olana and The Olana Partnership**

The eminent Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) designed Olana, his family home, studio and estate as an integrated environment embracing architecture, art, landscape and conservation ideals. Considered one of the most important artistic residences in the United States, Olana is a 250-acre artist-designed landscape with a Persian-inspired house at its summit, embracing unrivaled panoramic views of the vast Hudson Valley.

The Olana State Historic Site, a historic site administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Taconic Region, is a designated National Historic Landmark and one of the most visited sites in the state. The Olana Partnership, a private not-for-profit education corporation, works cooperatively with New York State to support the restoration, development and improvement of the Olana State Historic Site. To learn more about Olana and The Olana Partnership, please visit [www.olana.org](http://www.olana.org).

### **About Scenic Hudson**

Scenic Hudson works to protect and restore the Hudson River and its majestic landscape as an irreplaceable national treasure and a vital resource for residents and visitors. A crusader for the valley since 1963, we are credited with saving fabled Storm King Mountain from a destructive industrial project and launching the modern grass-roots environmental movement. Today with more than 25,000 ardent supporters, we are the largest environmental group focused on the Hudson River Valley. Our team of experts combines land acquisition, support for agriculture, citizen-based advocacy and sophisticated planning tools to create environmentally healthy communities, champion smart economic growth, open up riverfronts to the public and preserve the valley's inspiring beauty and natural resources. To date Scenic Hudson has created or enhanced more than 60 parks, preserves and historic sites up and down the Hudson River and conserved over 30,000 acres. [www.scenichudson.org](http://www.scenichudson.org) and [www.sh50.org](http://www.sh50.org).