A green-tinted photograph of a stone archway over a river. Several people are walking through the archway. The scene is surrounded by dense foliage and trees. A red, jagged line is visible in the upper right portion of the image, possibly indicating a tear or a specific boundary.

THIS IS POUGHKEEPSIE'S
FALL KILL



OVERVIEW

The City of Poughkeepsie originated as an industrial mill town, fueled by a winding estuary that eventually spills into the mighty Hudson River. In a series of decisions since, it has been canalized and culverted, converting this life source into a toxic spillway and dumping ground. Significant storm runoff events such as Hurricane Irene (2011) flooded the adjacent neighborhoods, emphasizing the need for a concerted look at the creek and the aggregation of debris within. However, it is often overlooked that the Fall Kill remains a peaceful ecological oasis. Cleanup efforts, often led by local youth organizations have provided the groundwork for community involvement to revitalize this shared asset.

To study the creek and its adjacent context, a summer workshop has been founded by Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning that has been hosted by MASS Design Group's Hudson Valley Design Lab in Poughkeepsie from August 1-18, 2017. In partnership with Scenic Hudson, and alongside students from Nubian Directions, five Columbia students have teamed up with lab staff to help learn the stories of this incredible creek and its immediate neighbors. This is not a static view of the Fall Kill, but a beginning of an ongoing story that documents historical evolution, learns from personal experiences, and empowers residents to shape the creek's future.

HISTORY

Legend has it that the name Poughkeepsie comes from the Native American term for the falls near the mouth of the Fall Kill Creek, “Pooghkepesingh,” meaning “where the water breaks.” The Dutch, the first settlers of the Hudson Valley, adopted the term for the name of the new settlement and referred to the creek as the Val-kil (“Fall Creek” in Dutch).

The creek powered Poughkeepsie’s early industry. Jon Smeedes and other Dutch settlers constructed the first mills in the last quarter of the 17th century near the mouth of the creek, harnessing the power of the falls to saw lumber and grind wheat. The first mill pond, Red Mill Pond and later known as Winnikee Pond, was created in what is now the Middle Main area. Bartholomew Crannell owned the first dam, located roughly where present-day North Hamilton Street crosses the creek and perhaps created as early as 1730. George Booth built the first large storage reservoir just above the falls in 1803 on the site of a small natural pool, using the water to power a factory for carding wool. Water-powered industry proliferated along the creek until the late 1800s. The 19th century saw the rise of many industries along the creek, extant remains of which include the Pelton Mill Lofts, Piano Factory, Underwear Factory, and Cigar Factory. Industrial use required the construction, adaption, and demolition of many structures along the creek as well as diverting, damming, pooling, and rerouting the creek to create adequate water power. The last mill pond, George Booth’s pond, then known as Pelton Pond, was un-dammed and filled in in 1899.

By the 20th century, the creek had been channelized to pass through the city of Poughkeepsie efficiently. Turn of the century photographs reveal that property owners narrowed passages and directed waterflow with wooden and stone rubble walls. A New Deal project in the 1930s addressing channelization involved the construction of many of the stone and cement walls currently lining the creek path.

Even though water no longer powered industry, land use patterns along the creek have remained predominantly industrial or commercial due to city zoning ordinances. The commercial uses directly and indirectly contributed to significant water quality and safety issues in the last quarter of the 20th century--some of which persist today. Residents, conservationists, and local elected officials became aware of contamination from oil, sewage, chemicals, and debris in the 1970s. Elevated debris levels exacerbated natural flooding, the most devastating and recent of which occurred in August 2011 in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. More recently, Nubian Directions has employed local residents--particularly youths--in clean-up efforts since 2012.

This is not the first time that suggestions have been made to reclaim access to the Fall Kill. In 2012, Clearwater and Columbia University explored the feasibility of a Fall Kill Trail. The history of the Fall Kill Creek--and even the experience of walking the creek--reveals the heavy hand with which humans have shaped and reshaped the creek over time.



Old Reynolds Home

Jun 11, 1864

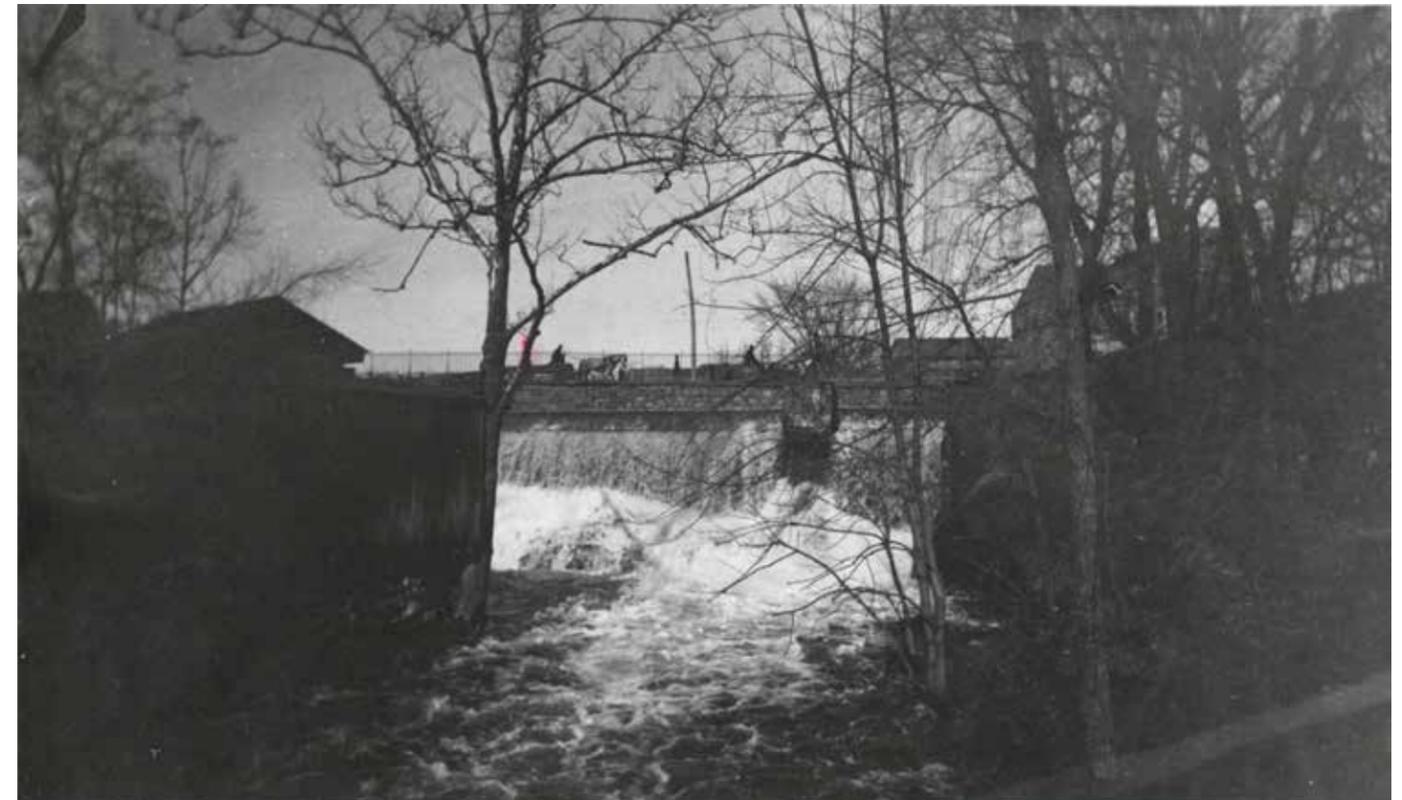
Photograph

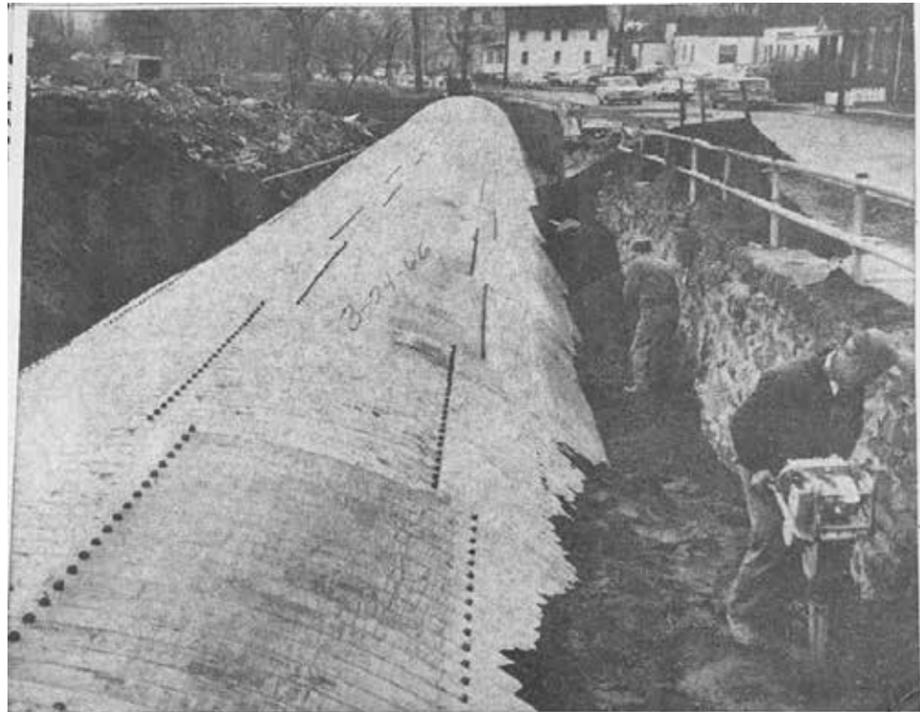
At Upper Landing. Fall Kill Store on left.

Pelton’s Dam

Photograph n.d.

Near Mill St





WORKMEN ARE COVERING OVER the Valkill running alongside Verrazano Boulevard, near North Bridge Street, in the city's first Ward. Alderman Milano, R-First Ward, here has fought the project, pointing out that the creek wall had caved in causing a hazardous condition. Dirt will be placed over the metal covering and a bridge is planned nearby over the Valkill to the Charles Street Housing Project. Poughkeepsie Journal Photo

Verazzano Culvert

Mar 24, 1966
Newspaper article
Article and photo by Poughkeepsie Journal

City's fuel seeping into creek, cleanup begun



Arlington firefighters look over contaminated ground and the Falkill Creek Sunday. The long trucky objects are petroleum absorbing booms, collecting fuel leaking from the city depot.

*By Tom Topouzis
Journal staff*

Firefighters investigating a fuel odor beside a Town of Poughkeepsie apartment complex Sunday found a caved fuel spill in the midst of a cleanup operation.

According to town and city of Poughkeepsie officials, caved fuel leaked from an underground storage tank at the city's department of public works garage on Howard Street last fall.

An undetected amount of fuel seeped downhill to town property beside the Falkill Creek, a small tributary of the Hudson River, near East Avenue, said Lt. Edward Madison of the town's Arlington Fire Department.

Booms had been laid along the bank of the creek and absorbent booms placed on fuel-soaked ground last fall when the leak was detected, he said.

"They're handling it the way they should," said Madison. "It's not like they were trying to hide something."

Madison said the state Department of Environmental Conservation was aware of the spill. "They're working with the city to get the problem cleaned up," he said.

The city has studied all its fuel storage tanks and is replacing any that leak, said City Manager William Thyroch. The containment booms were placed along the creek several months ago when a leak was first discovered, he said.

Thyroch said he did not know how much fuel may have leaked its way into the creek. "Very little I think, but some did," he said.

The DEC last inspected the wooded site next to Heritage Apartments on Thursday, Thyroch said. Plans to repair the storage tanks are being designed with DEC supervision, he said.

The odors were reported by George Brugal, an Arlington firefighter who was visiting friends at the apartment complex Sunday morning. "Even if it is just fuel oil, it's bad because it's going into the creek," he said.

Brugal was concerned about possible health dangers to children who play and fish beside the creek, and about the possibility that fuel reached the Hudson River, which provides water for the town and city.

The DEC could not be reached Sunday night.

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The DEC could not be reached Sunday night.

Madison said the biggest problem seemed to be the smell of fuel during warm weather. "Nobody wants to breathe diesel fuel, it's not good for you," he said.

City's Fuel Seeping into Creek, Cleanup begun

Apr 11, 1988
Newspaper Article by Tom Topouzis for the Poughkeepsie Journal

He's up to his knees in problems

*By Pamela Golinski
Journal staff writer*

Wallace Beneway has been a flood victim for the past nine years. The problem is not a freak of nature, however.

According to Beneway, the flooding of his Innis Avenue property — which he says has reduced the marketability of his home and made his life miserable — is the direct result of pollution and misuse of area waterways.

Beneway, 34, has lived in Poughkeepsie all his life. He's a house painter by profession, and a trapper in the lean months. He knows the Falkill Creek, which runs behind his property, like the back of his hand. And he's familiar with the animals — the beaver and the fox — that make their homes in the nearby marshes.

When he first moved into 228 Innis Avenue in the Town of Poughkeepsie a quarter of a century ago, he said, it was nice watching the birds and animals feed in the swamp behind his house.

The Beneways were prepared for the annual spring thaw that would cause the Falkill to overflow into their swamp and flood out their backyard.

But they were not prepared for the changes in the area that Beneway says have made the Falkill extremely susceptible to overflowing — and burying the back of his property under fetid water.

It no longer takes an annual spring thaw to wash out the backyard and flood the cellar, Beneway says. It only takes a heavy rain. And now if they want to watch the wildlife, they have only to look out their window.



Journal photo by Morna Moore

Wallace Beneway ...In his backyard

According to Beneway, the trouble started in the 1960s when the City of Poughkeepsie was operating its incinerator about 500 yards down the creek from his home.

"They started dumping what was supposed to be sanitary fill (along the creek)," he said. "Sometimes they would have breakdowns, then the fill was dumped in raw form. After they ran out of space to dump, they placed three corrugated pipes in the creek (to build) a road across and extend their dumping area."

According to Beneway, the dumping strangled the creek, restricting the channel. And the pipes — which some engineers have said are too small and others say are not set into the creek bed far enough — can't handle the flow in times of high water.

In 1970, the Fairview Block Company Inc. was found in violation of town zoning regulations for dumping debris into Morgan Lake, which flows underground into the Falkill. According to Susan Pike, deputy zoning administrator, the company was ordered to remove what was dumped, and town records indicate at least some cleanup was done.

But Beneway, who says the dumping contributed to raising the level of water in the Falkill, gashed out of the manhole installed at the end of his driveway, and into his backyard.

Richard Barnett, chairman of the town's conservation advisory committee, said he agrees with Beneway's assessment of why his property is flooded.

But the problems, he said, "These things were done in a quasi-legal manner. They were idiotic and stupid. Unfortunately, our laws don't cover that."

Beneway says he's fed up — both with the conditions under which he is living, and the lack of response he has received from municipal officials.

The town did send out one of its employees to help him pump the water that poured from the manhole, he said. And about a year and a half ago, the county initiated a cleanup effort, removing some 1,300 tires from the creek. Neither action helped much, he said, helped much, he said, helped much, he said.

Other than that, Beneway claims all he has gotten is "lip service," and he produced a sheaf of letters from city, town and county officials proving they have been aware of the problem since at least 1970.

At one point after a heavy rain that fell on top of snow, he said, water came down through the sewer line with such force that it

Beneway says he has seen the See problems, page 11

He's up to his knees in problems

Mar 5, 1979
Article by Pamela Golinski
Photograph by Morna Moore

Youths scour Fishkill Creek



Journal photo by Morna Moore

A tree limb is heaved from the creek

*By Eric Trilling
Journal staff writer*

What is long, narrow and wet and has pieces of metal and glass running through it? The Falkill Creek.

Monday, 17 youths involved in the Dutchess County Youth Board Conservation Corps began cleaning up the bottles, cans, shopping carts, logs and other debris along the City of Poughkeepsie stretch of the creek.

The youths, between 14 and 22 years of age, are part of a contingent of 88 youths who are doing various conservation projects in the county, according to Ted Browne, the equal opportunity officer in the City of Poughkeepsie.

He reported Thursday that in the first four days of the creek cleanup, the two crews have taken about nine truck loads of garbage out of the creek, including about 25 large bags of bottles and cans, and about 50 shopping carts.

"Some of them (shopping carts) were so far stuck in the mud I had to use a truck to pull them out," said Eric Johnson, 22, the supervisor of one of the cleanup crews.

While most citizens are probably happy to hear the cleanup is taking place, at least one person, Charles Ross, is concerned.

Ross appeared at the site Thursday, where work is taking place along Verrazano Boulevard, and said it was his part-time job at Grand Union to collect shopping carts for the supermarket firm in the city. He became irritated when hearing that the carts and the rest of the refuse are being removed to the city-owned DeLaval property and asked that the carts be left in the creek or along the banks and he would pick them up.

Youths on the project earn \$2.30 an hour for their labors.

Rodney Scott, 18, of 11 William St., said he feels he is helping make the city cleaner and "the pay helps." He said he hoped other kids wouldn't come back next year and throw garbage in the creek.

"It's fun," said Debbie Willis, 15, of 67 Garden St., who said the members of the crew had all become good friends in a matter of days, while in school it usually takes several months.

"We're cleaning the city and helping the environment," said Darren Braxton, 15, of 13 Weed St., who said he thinks people will probably keep the creek clean for a couple of years, but then probably start throwing trash in it again.

"If people saw how hard we're working I don't think they would throw stuff back in," he said.

Browne, however, said he hopes the cleanup will have an impact on people not to throw cans, tires and toys in the creek.

He said next week one of the crews would begin work at Morse School and work their way west to meet up with the other crew that will be moving east with the cleanup.

Browne said when he first viewed sections of the creek they were a "disaster" and "I felt a little leary about the kids going down in there."

He said, however, one crew will spend the rest of the summer on the cleanup, while the other will eventually be moved to Kaal Rock Park to pick up trash along the nature trails.

Youths Scour Fall Kill Creek

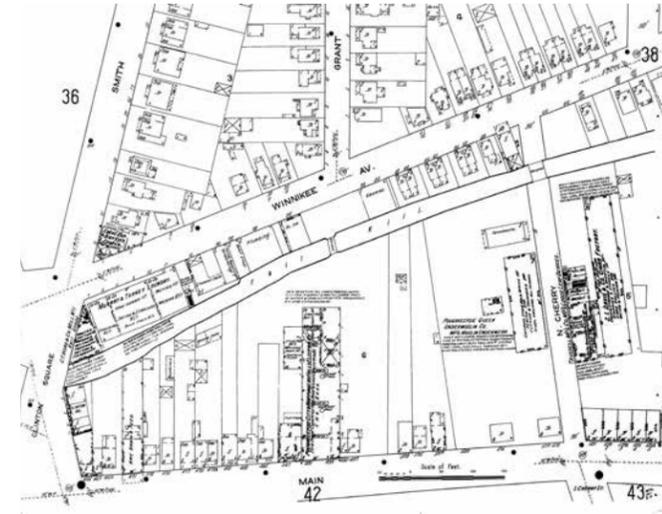
Jul 22, 1977
Newspaper Article by Eric Trilling
Photograph by Morna Moore



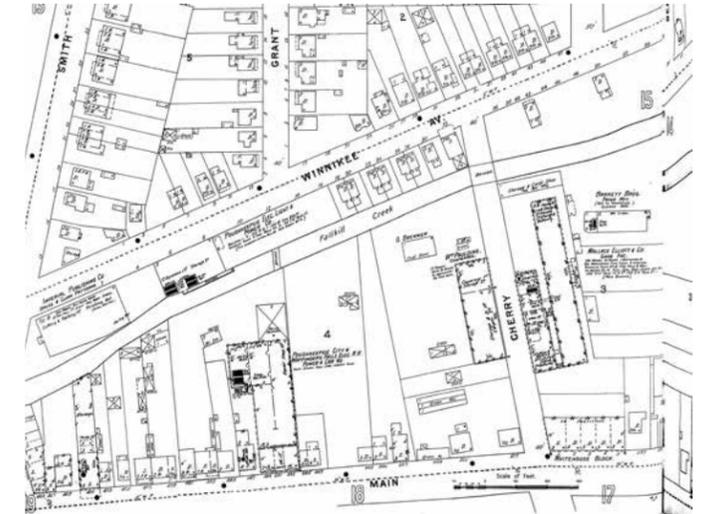
Phoenix Hose Company No. 1 Pumper
c. 1907
Hamilton Street



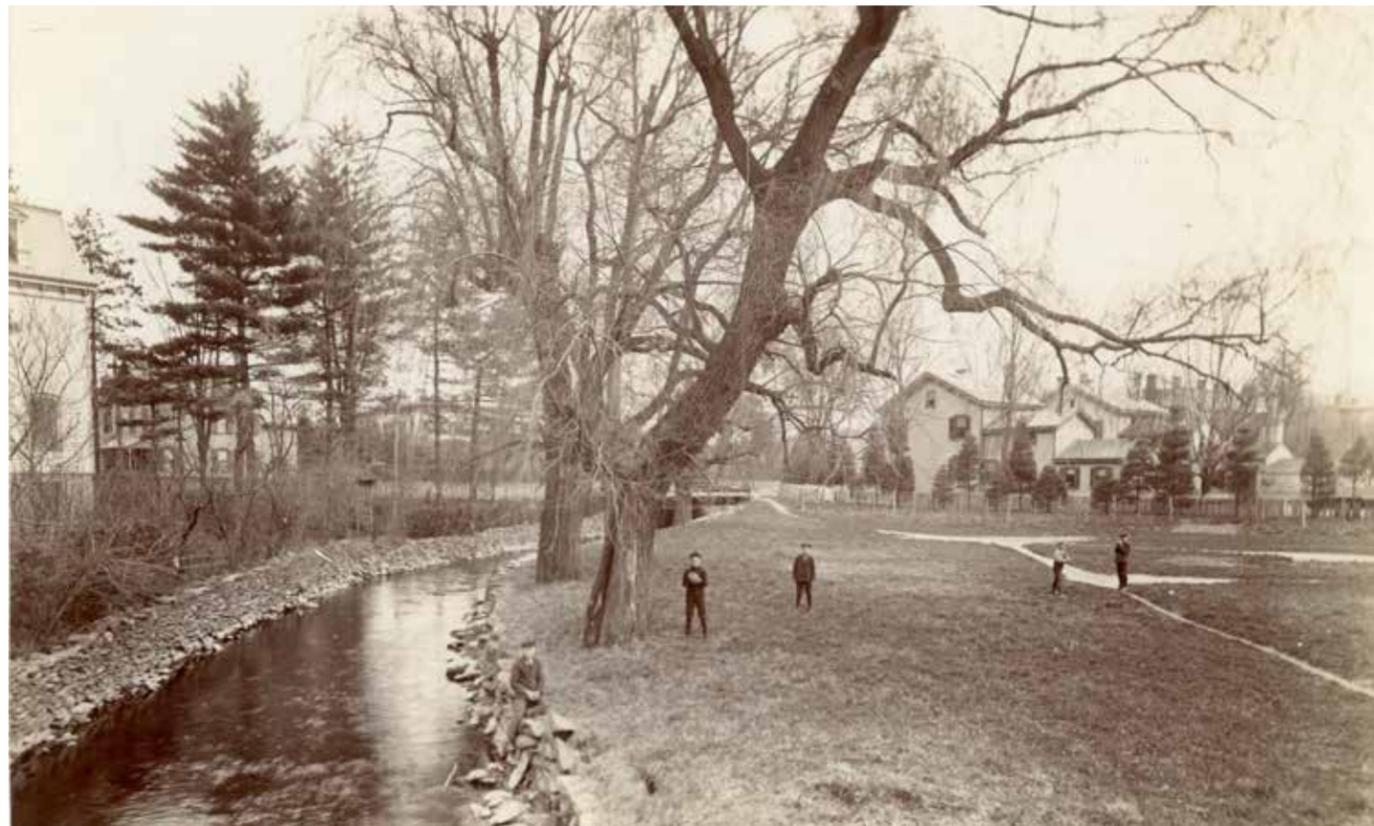
Fall Kill Store
n.d.
Fall Kill Storehouse at Upper Landing



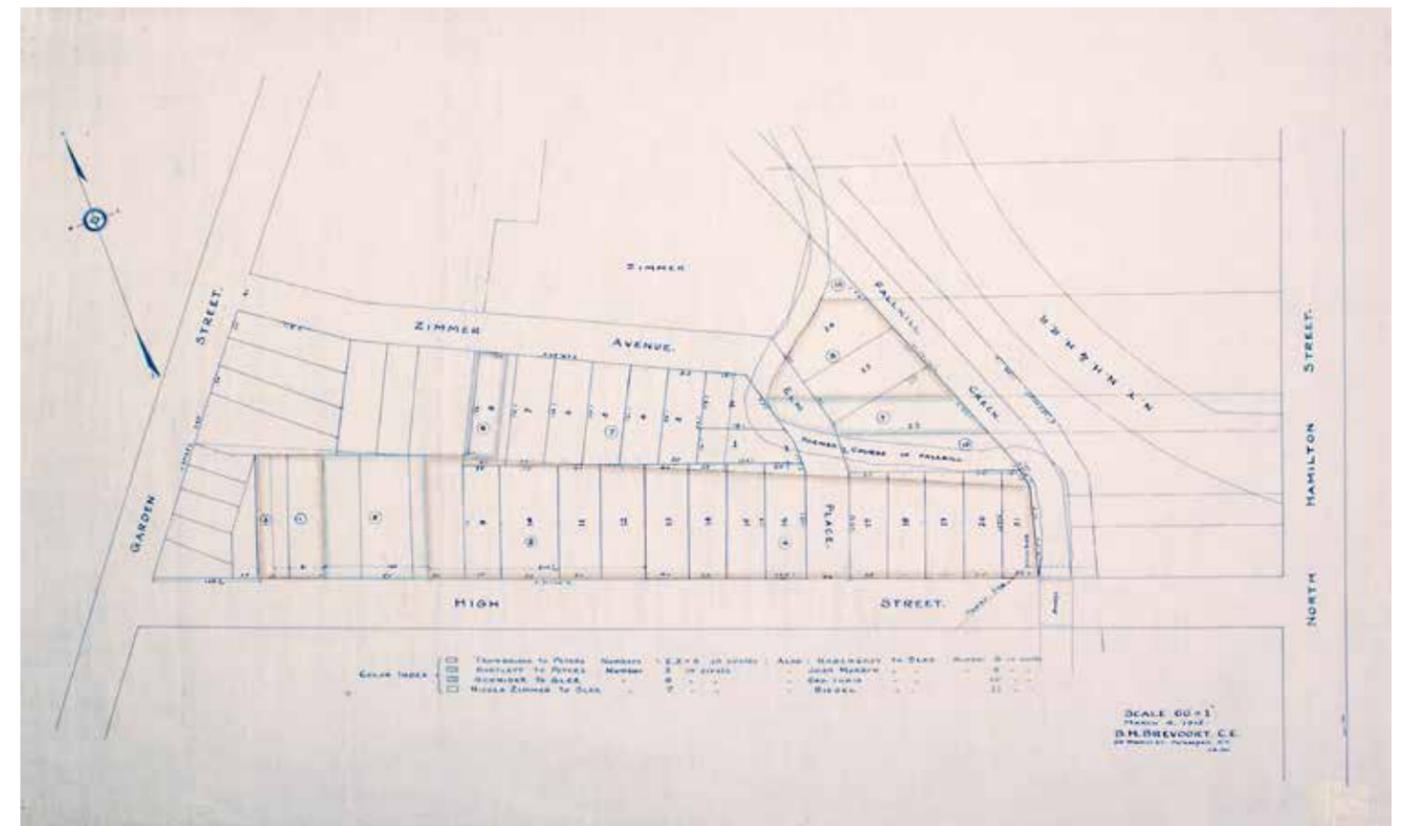
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 14
c. 1895
Parcel and buildings in Middle Main



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 37
c. 1913
Parcel and buildings in Middle Main



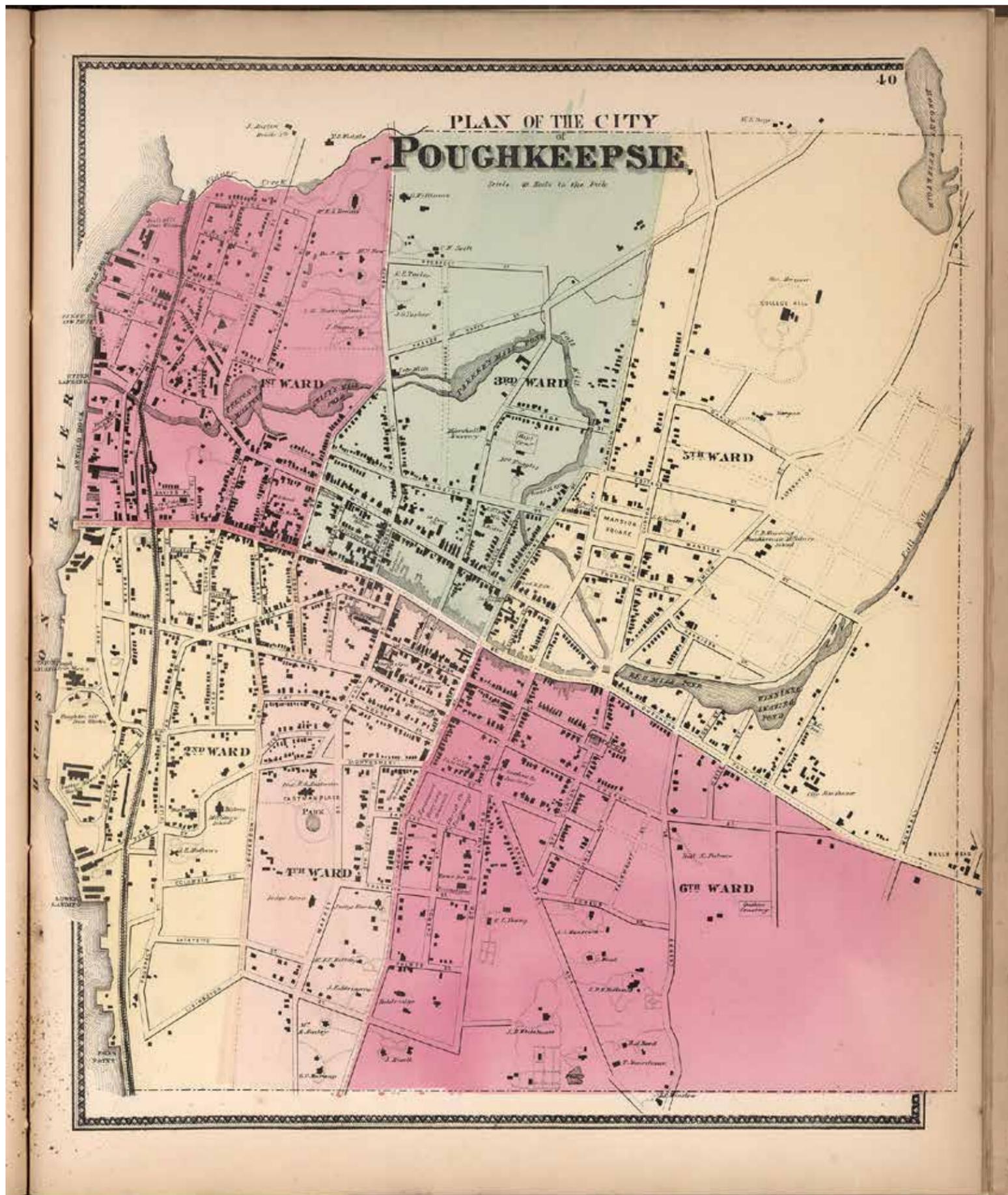
Fall Kill
c. 1910
Baseball field, West of North Hamilton Street



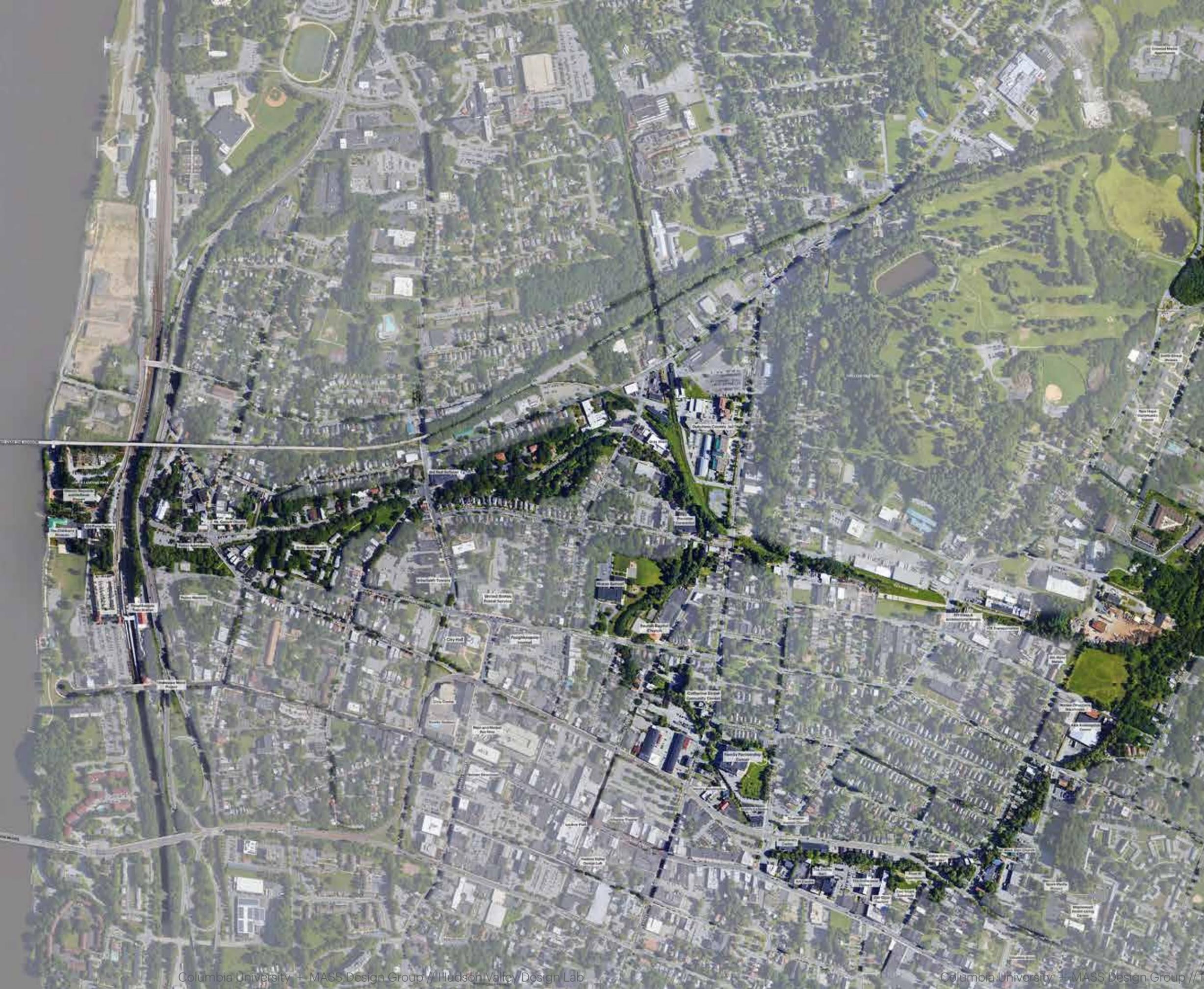
Property Sale Map
Mar 4, 1912
Parcels at N Hamilton and High St



**Incorporated village of Poughkeepsie,
Dutchess County, State of New York**
Ink on paper 1834
Map created by Henry Whinfield (Poughkeepsie)



City of Poughkeepsie, Plan
1867 Engraving
Atlas map showing property ownership



CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

- John Bartelstone Gallery Images
- Mapping the Fall Kill
- Fall Kill Section Cuts
- Images of the Fall Kill



John Bartelstone Gallery Images

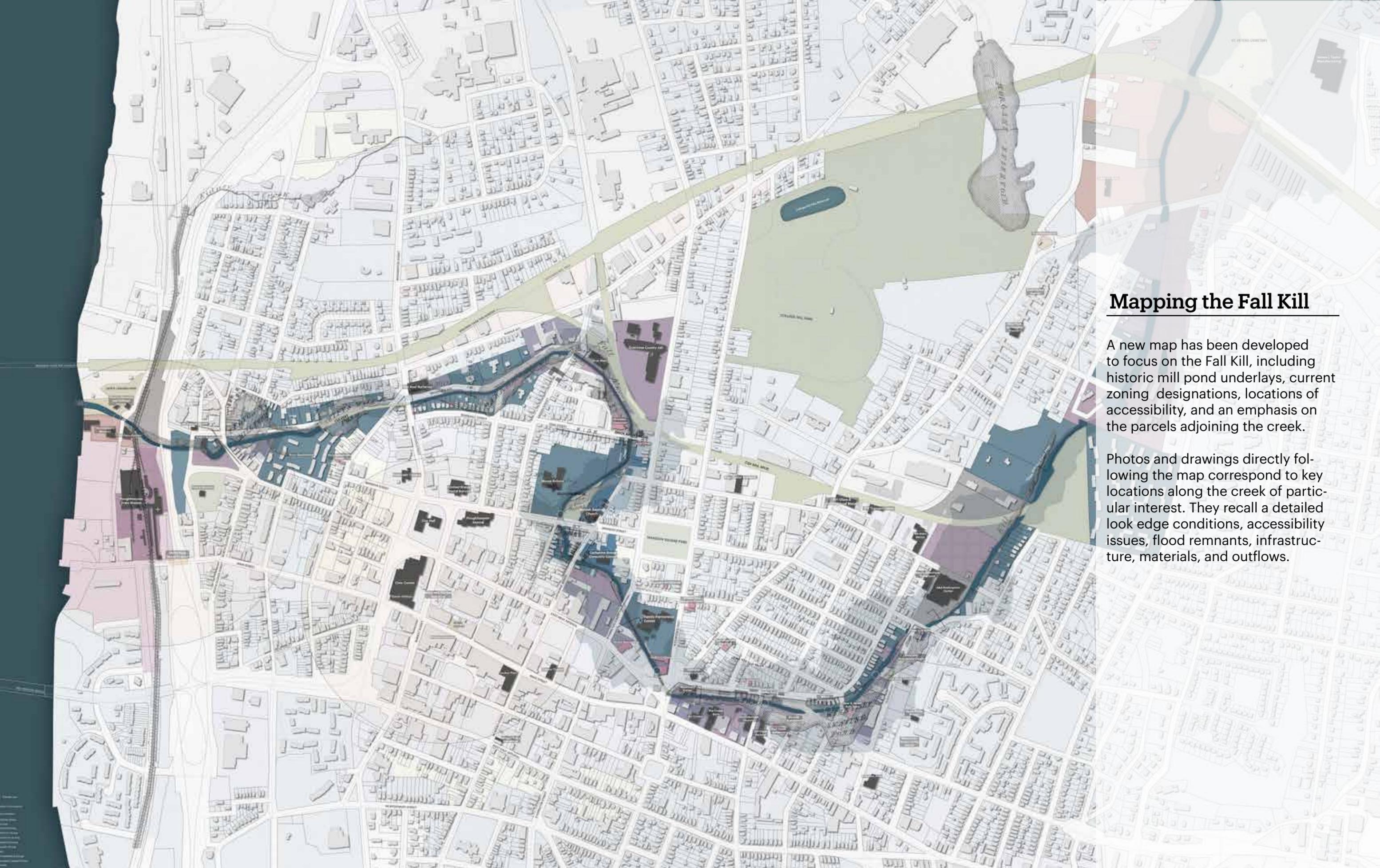
We have had the great fortune to be accompanied by an architectural photographer from New York City with a keen aesthetic eye. He has wholeheartedly immersed himself in the experience of the creek, tromping through the water with all of his equipment on multiple occasions. He has become mesmerized, as we have, with the beauty and intrigue still present within this largely forgotten and neglected local resource.











Mapping the Fall Kill

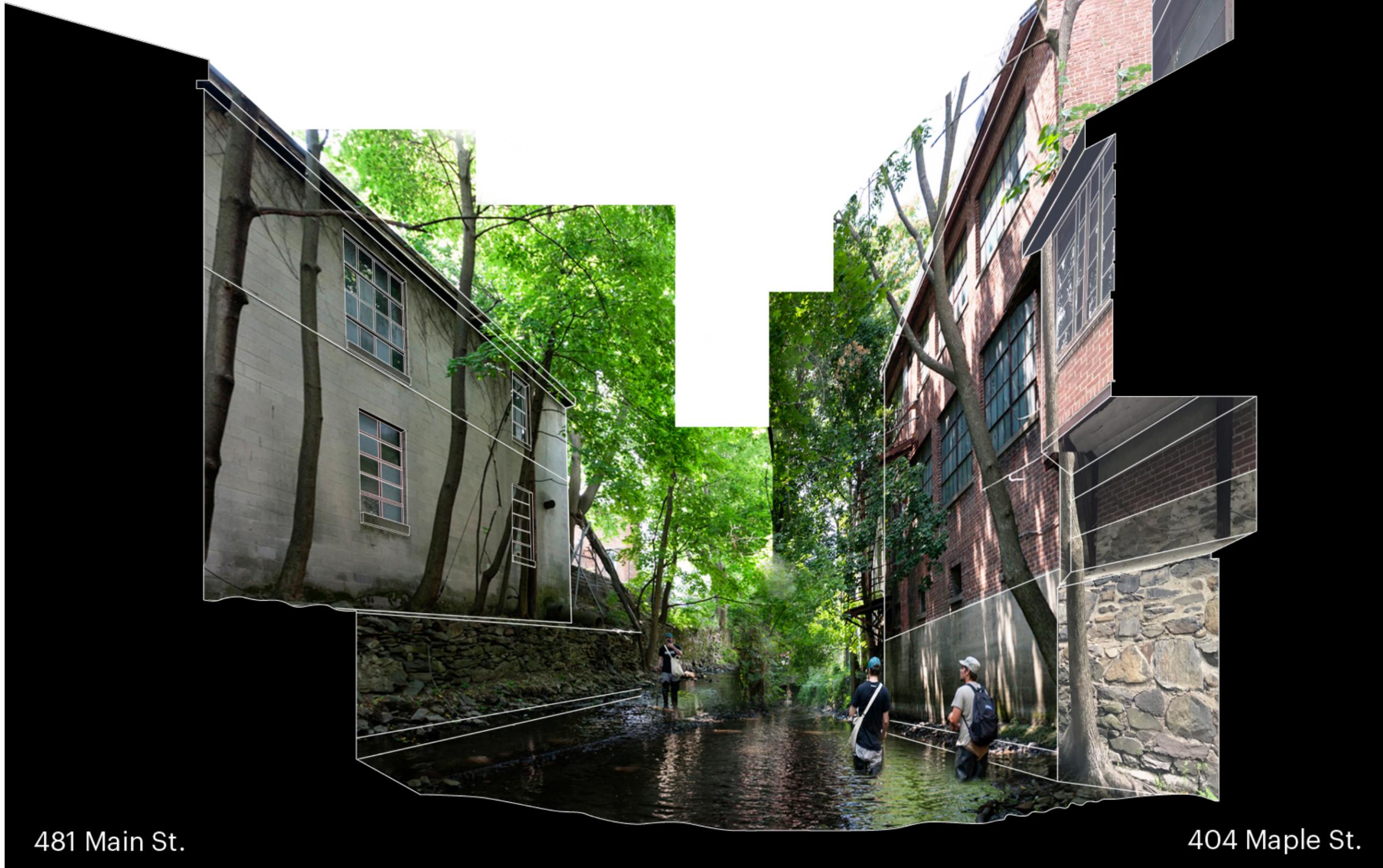
A new map has been developed to focus on the Fall Kill, including historic mill pond underlays, current zoning designations, locations of accessibility, and an emphasis on the parcels adjoining the creek.

Photos and drawings directly following the map correspond to key locations along the creek of particular interest. They recall a detailed look edge conditions, accessibility issues, flood remnants, infrastructure, materials, and outflows.



Lawrence Rd.

211 Cottage St.



481 Main St.

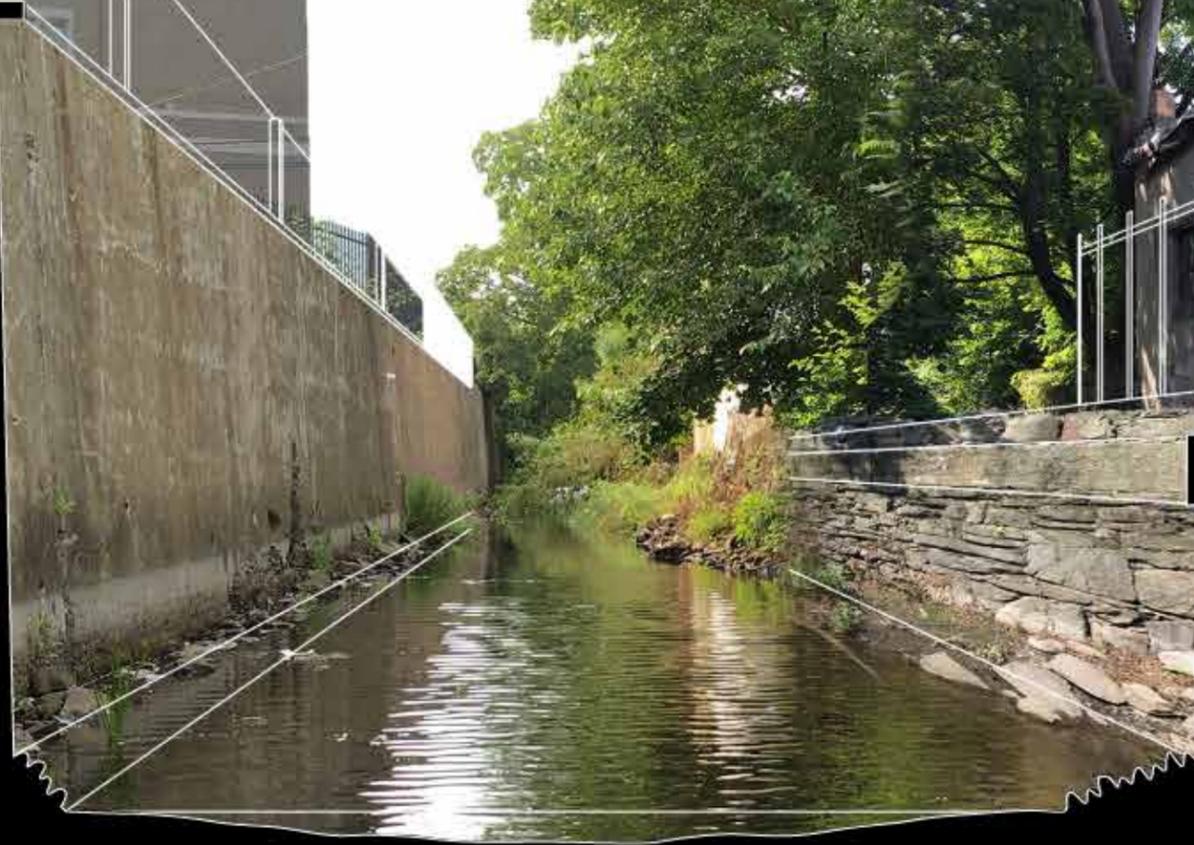
404 Maple St.

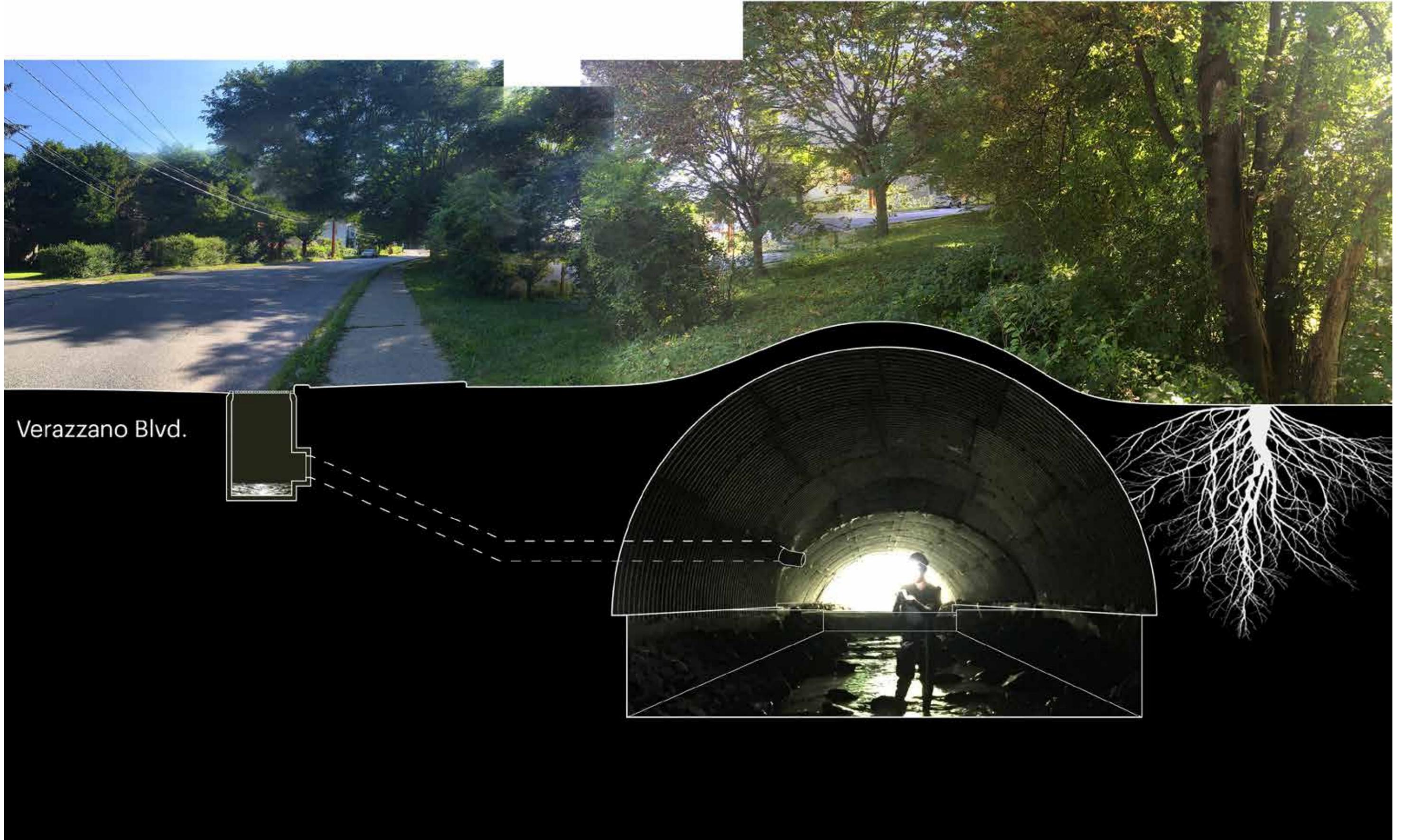


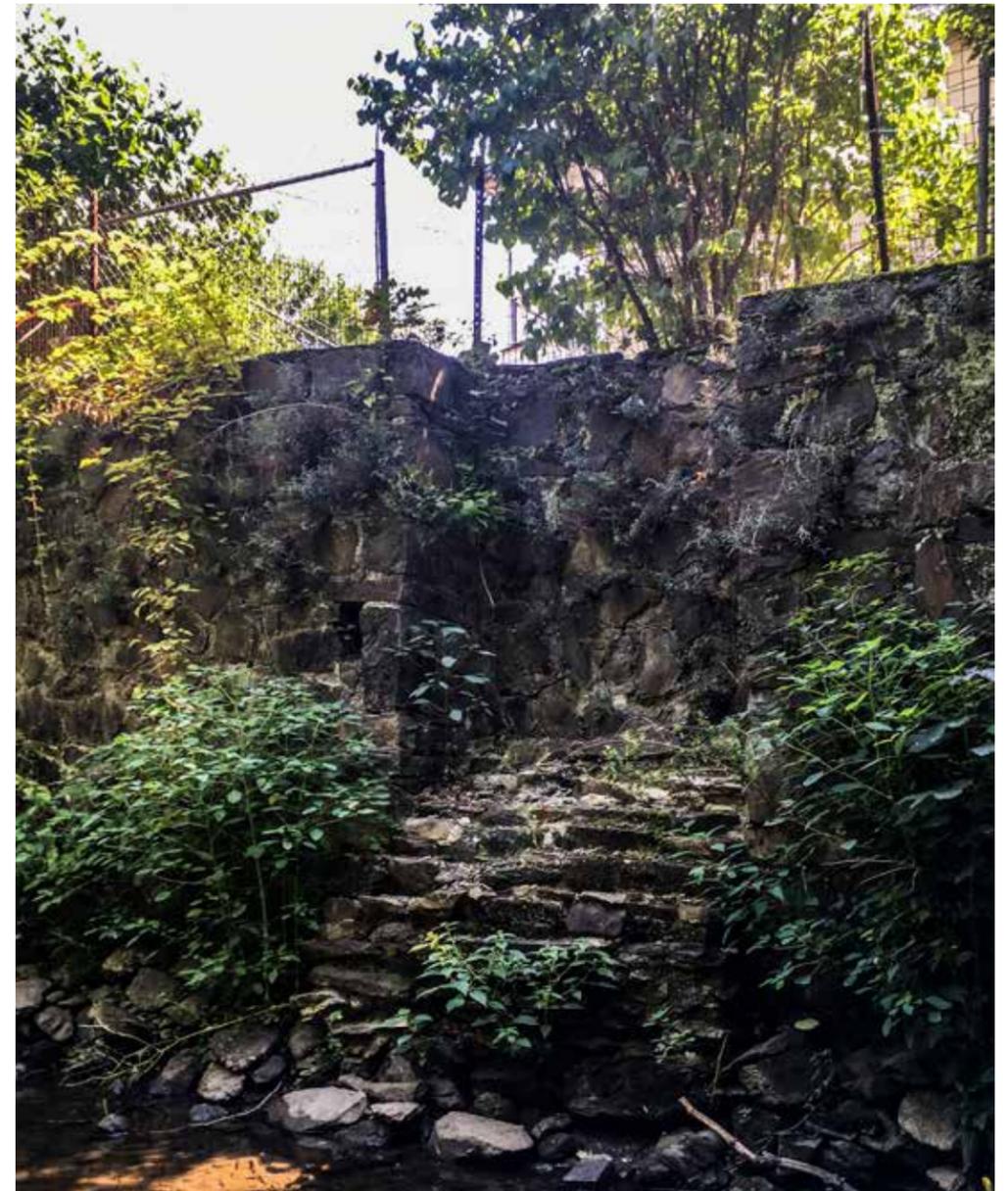
Family Partnership Center

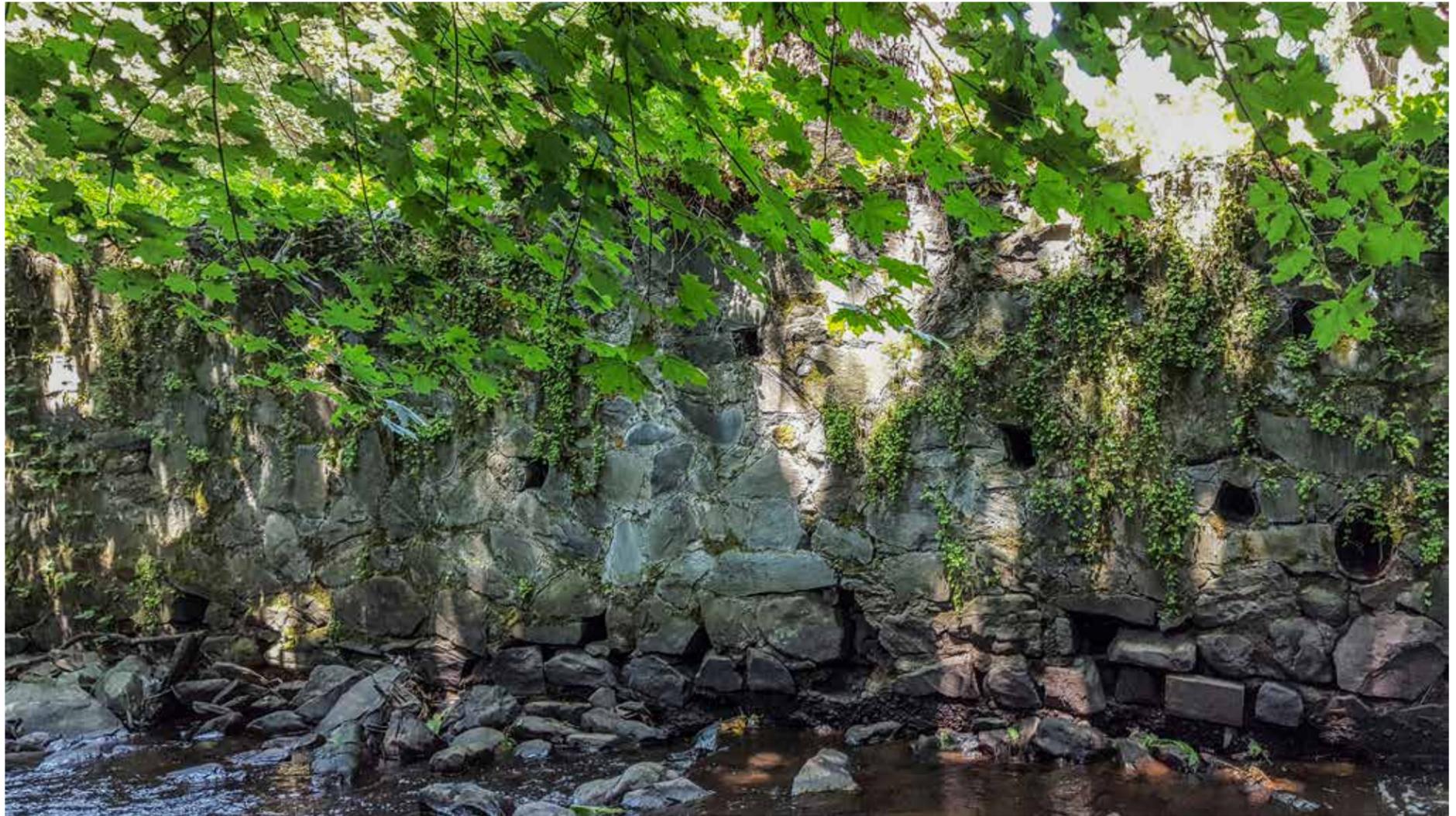


25 N Hamilton St.

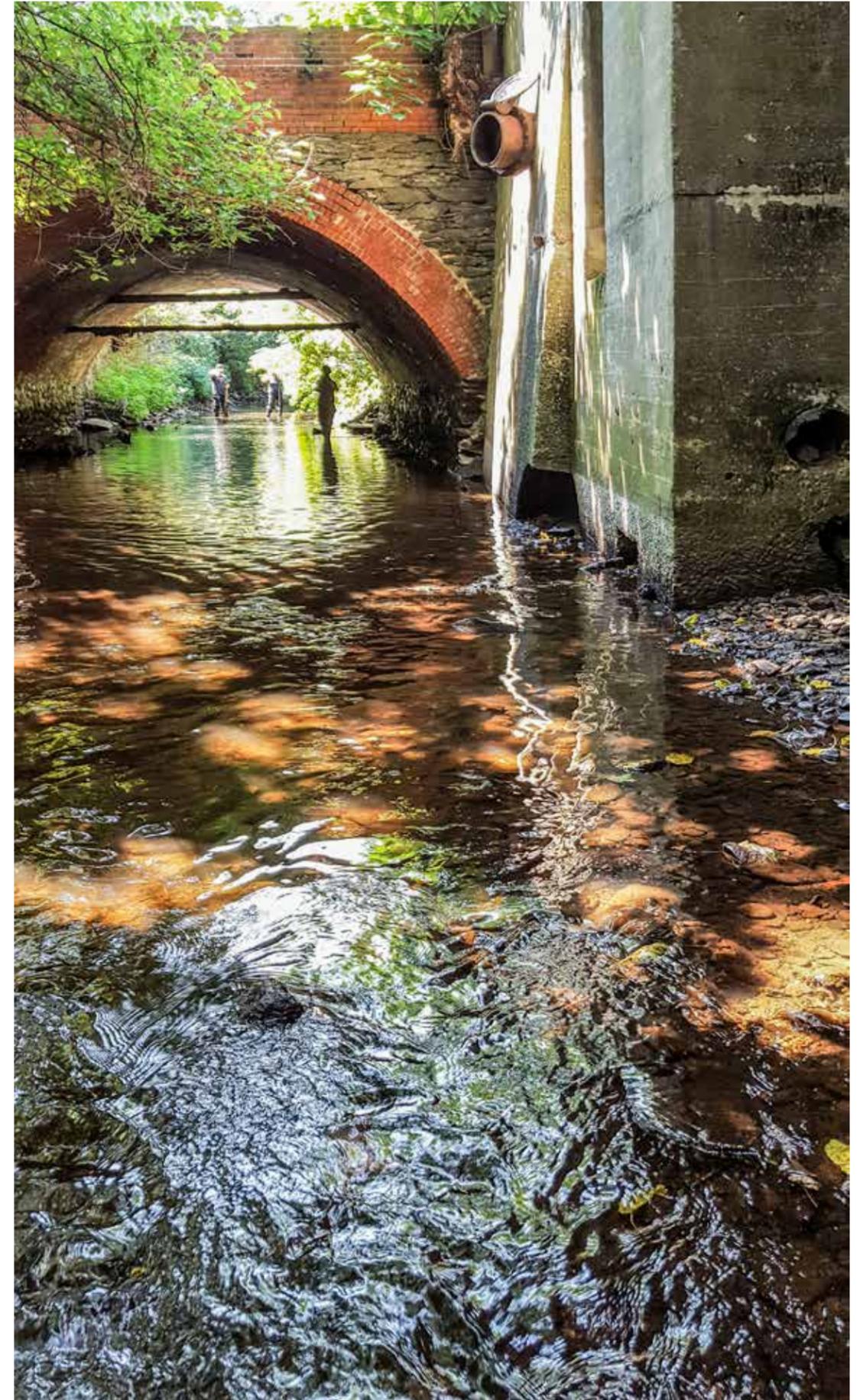
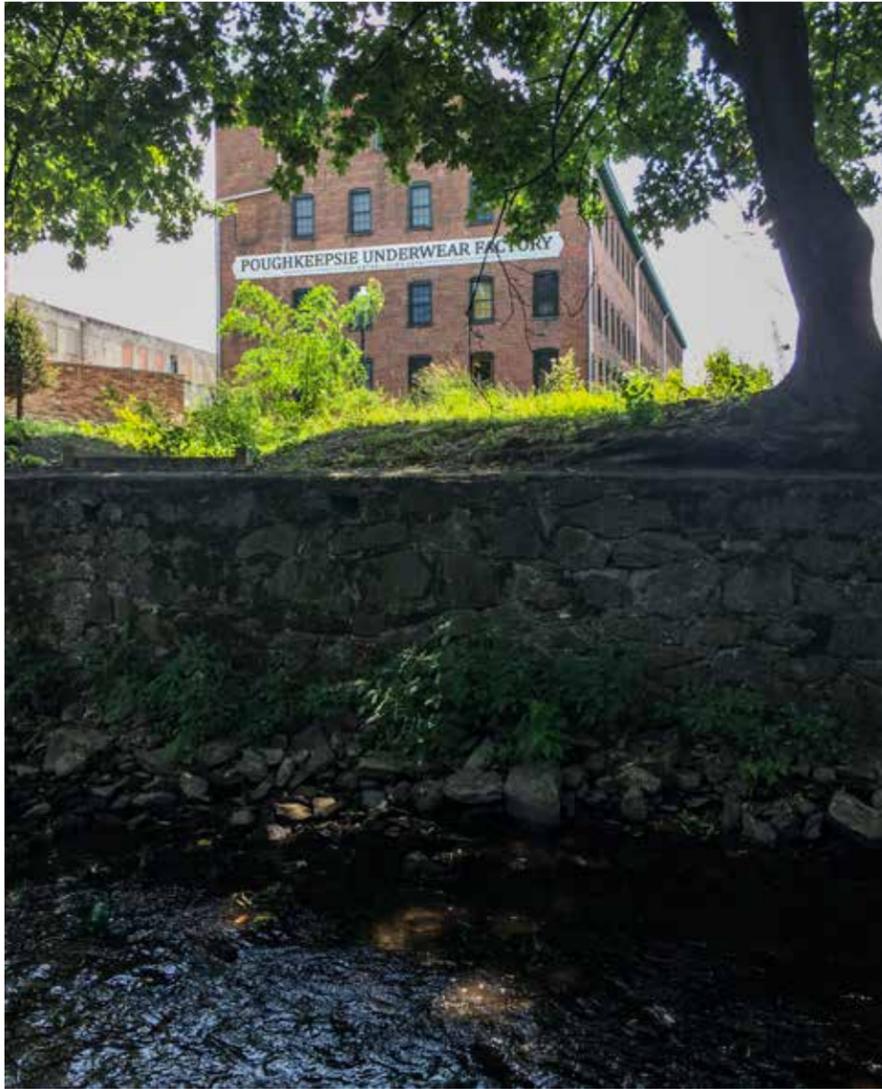


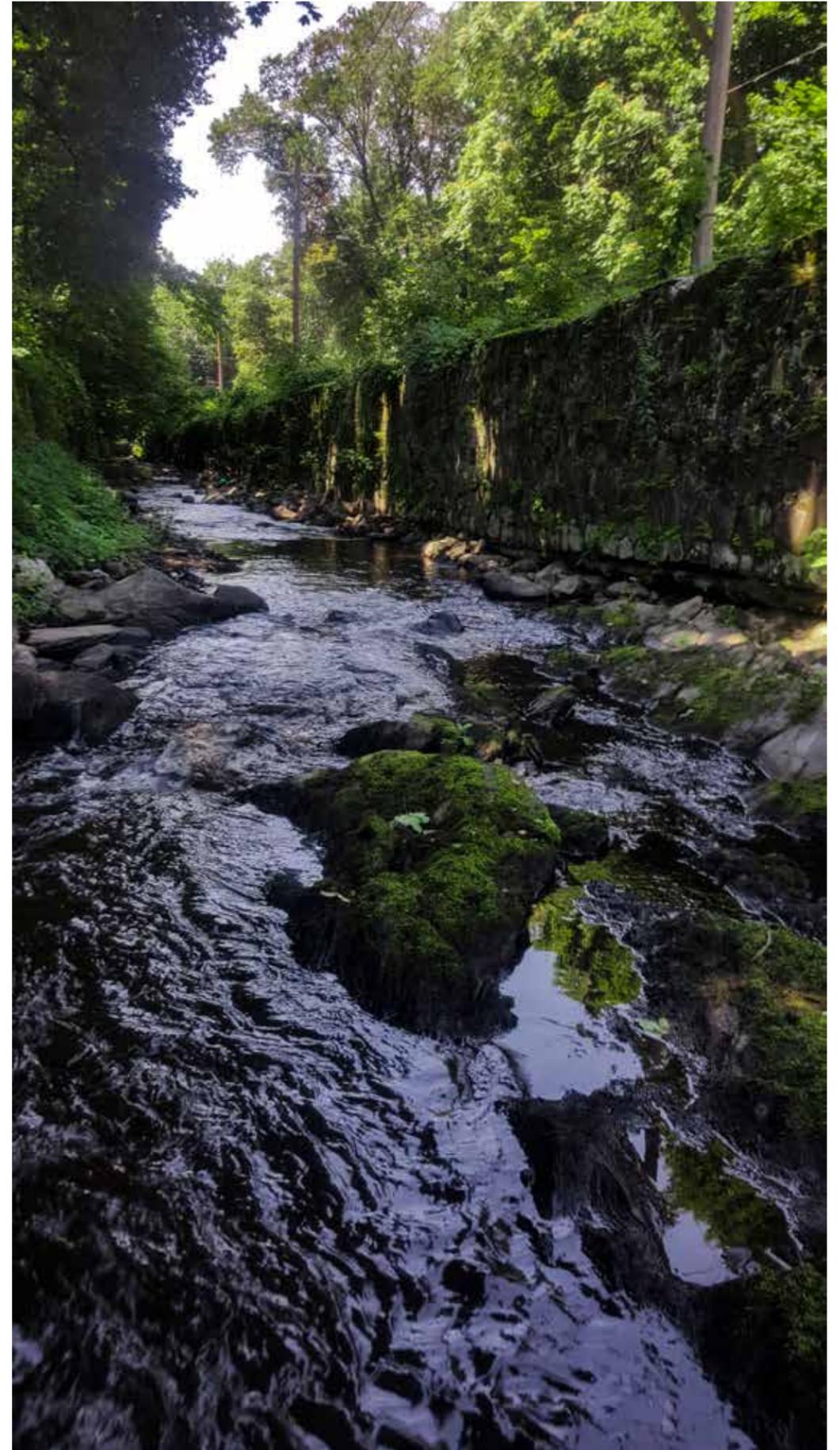


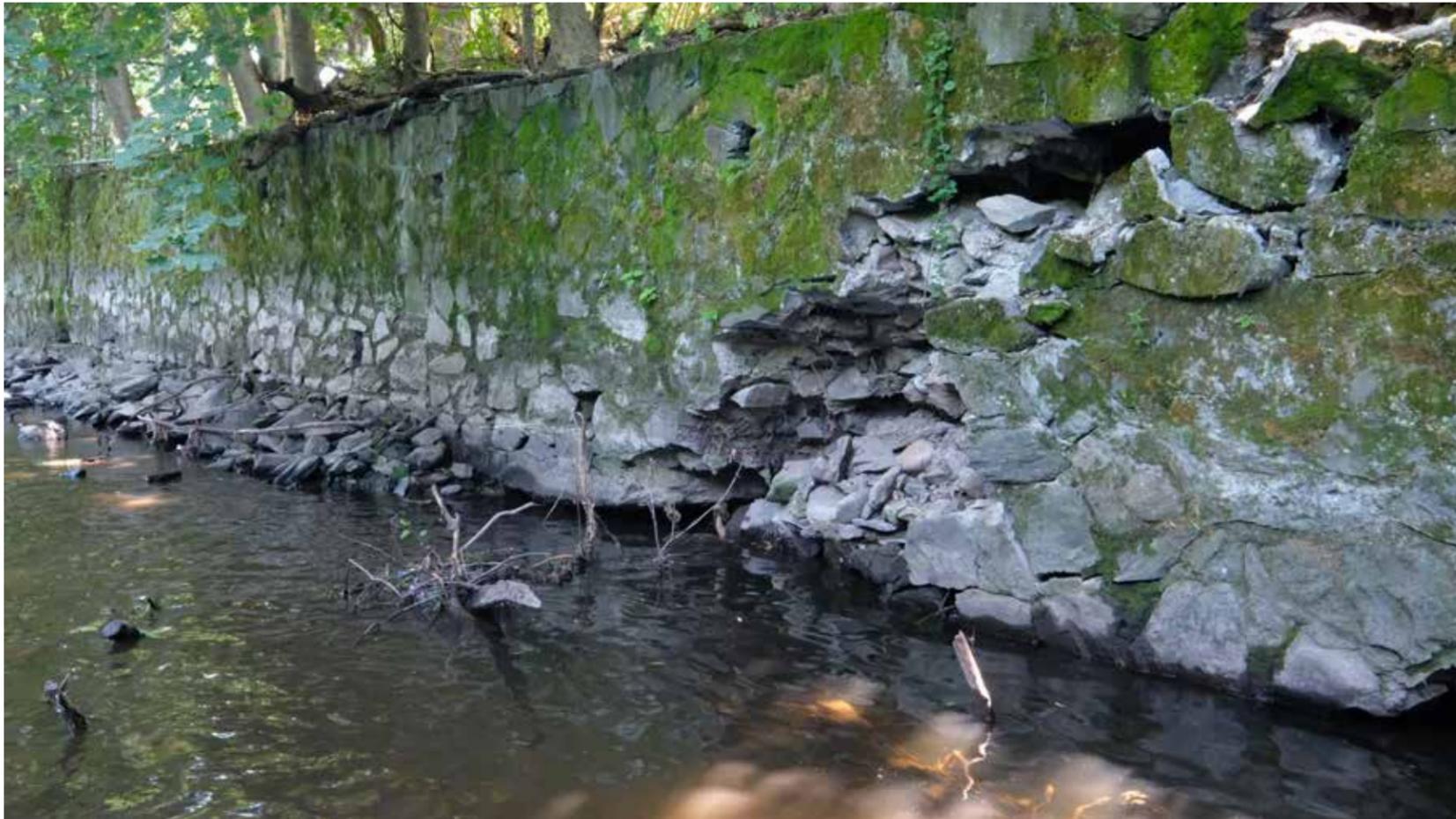
















PROCESS

Out of House

Walking the Fall Kill
Neighborhood survey

In House

Lectures
Workshops
Gallery renovation and curation

Photo information here
Photo information here



Out of House

Walking the Fall Kill
Neighborhood survey

Not only did we have the amazing opportunity to walk through the Fall Kill, but we walked the creek's edges, chatting with local residents about their relationship to and opinions on the creek. Although this process is on-going, it set the foundation for future conversations with community members that are and will continue to be affected by decisions made regarding the Fall Kill.

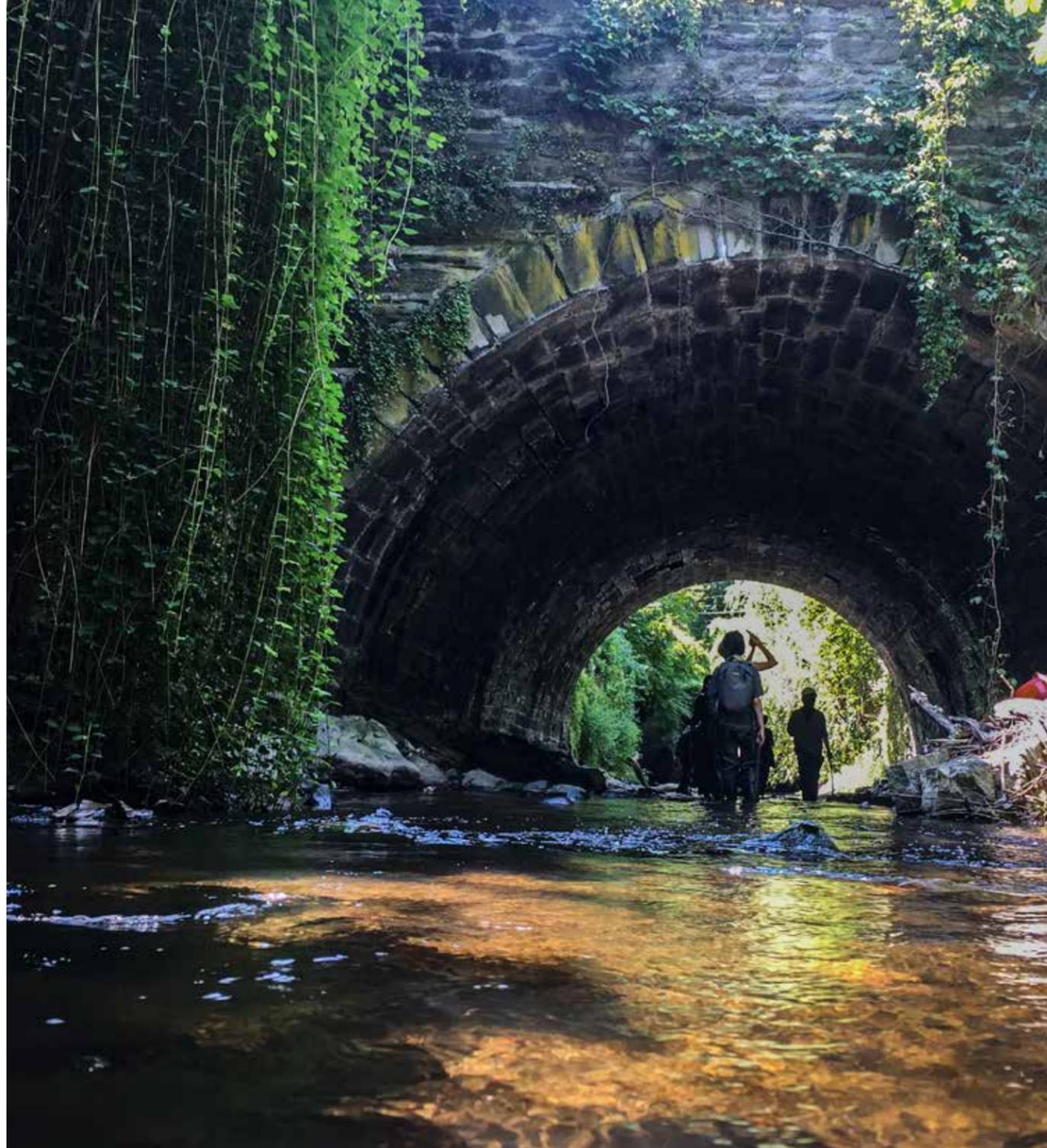


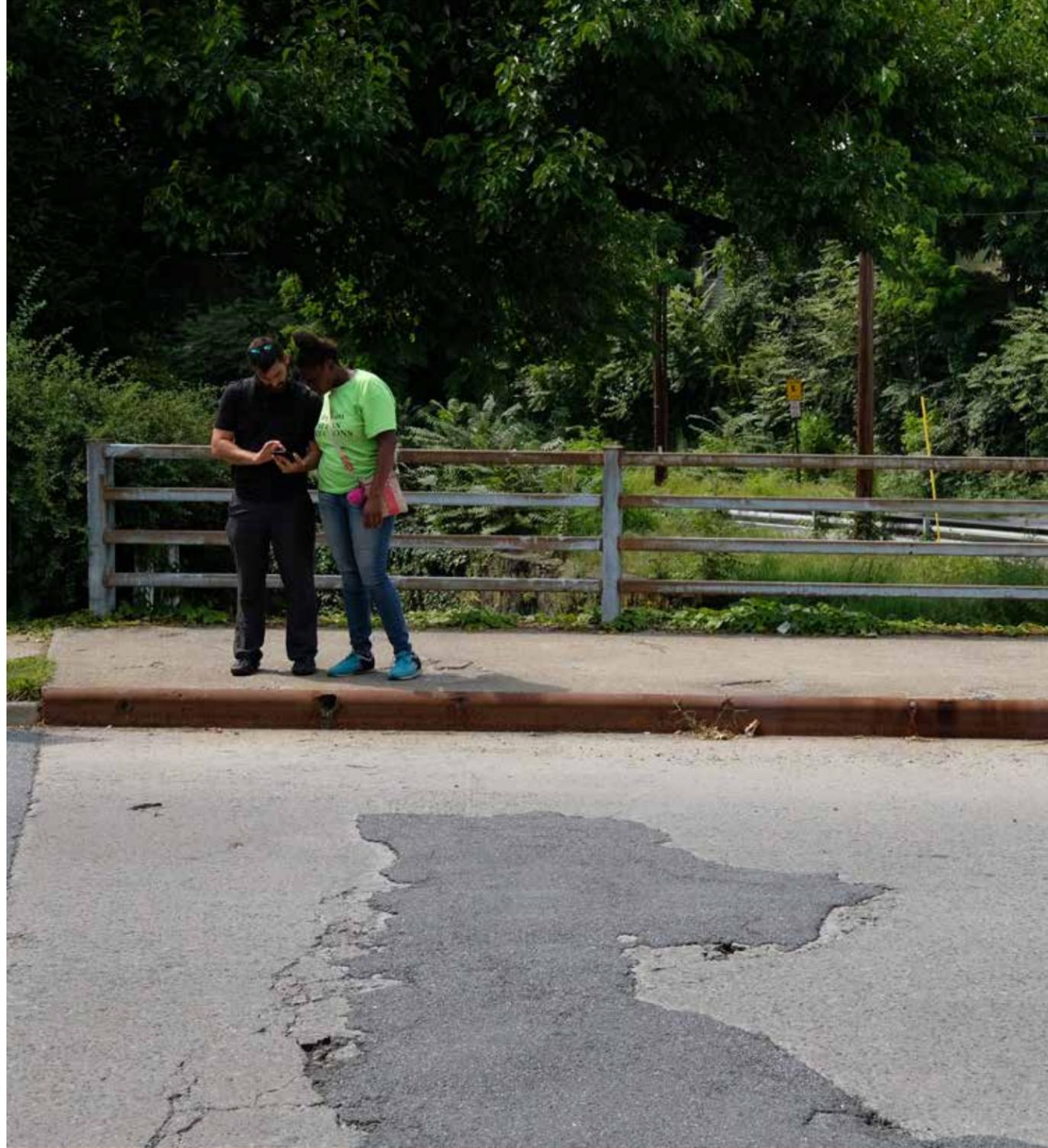


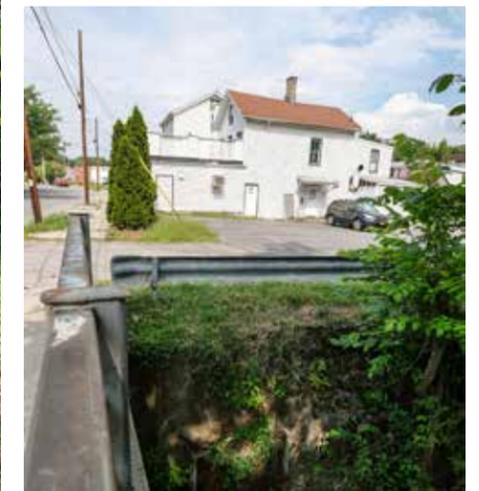
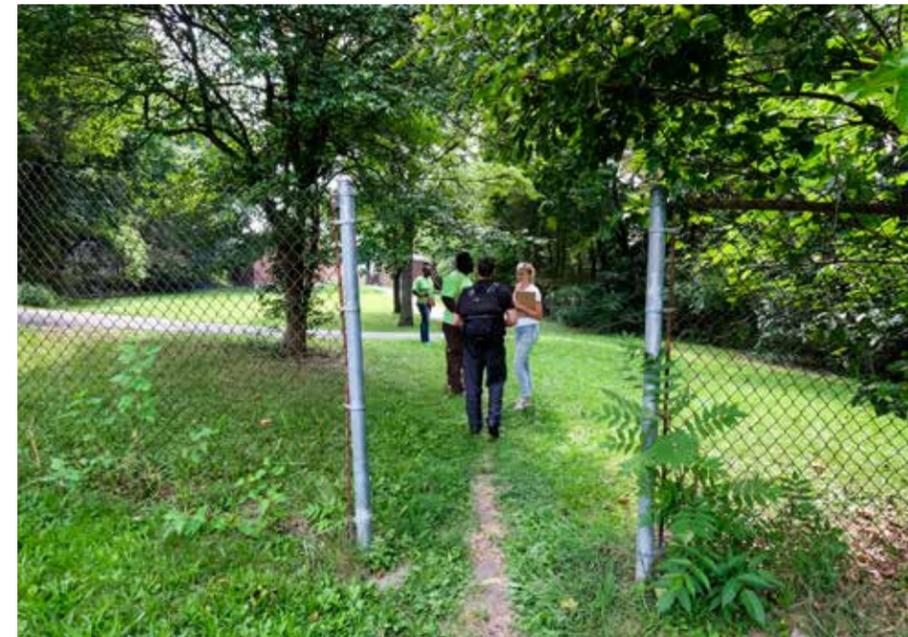
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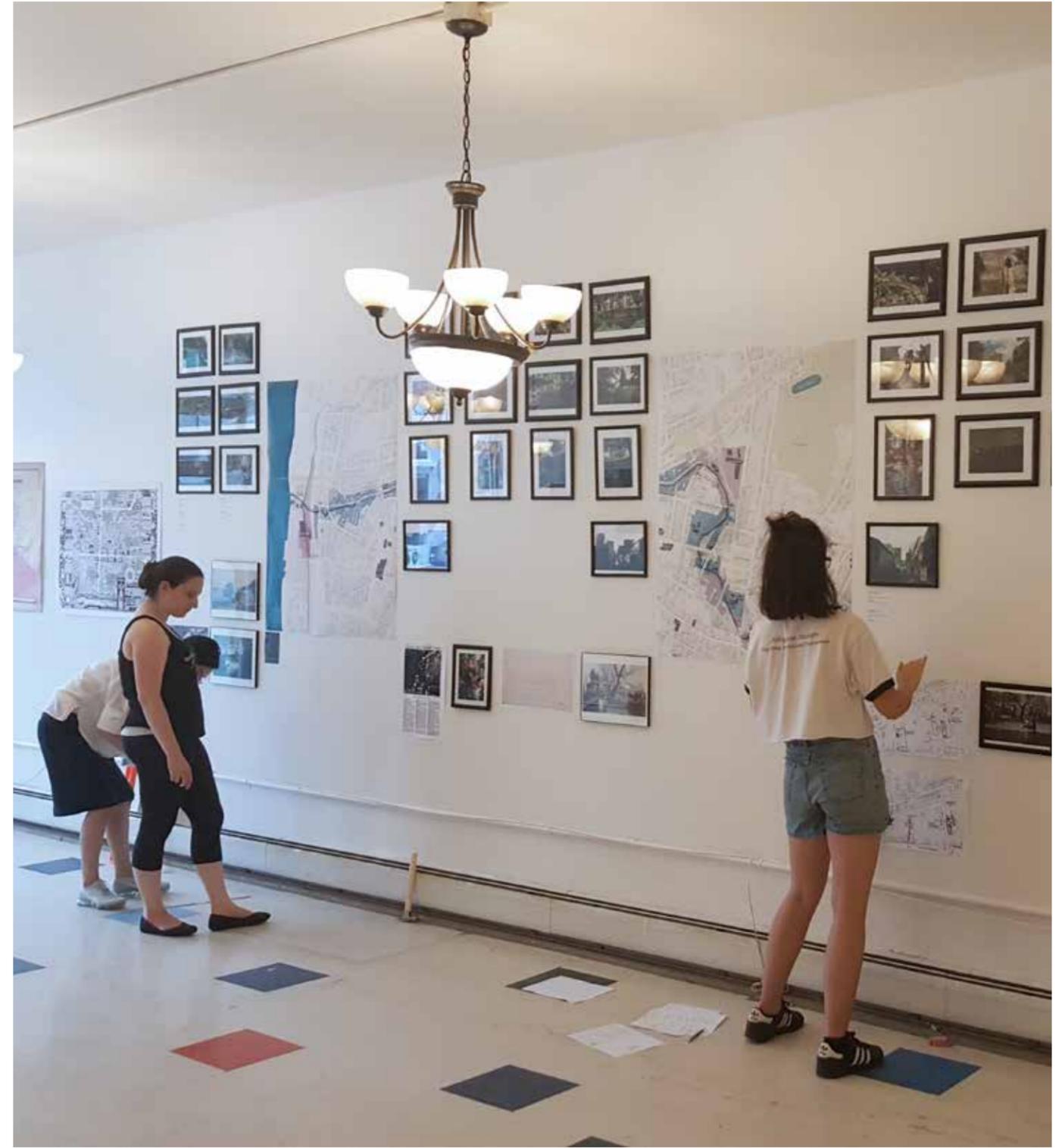
Gallery Space Renovation







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PRODUCTION

Exhibition Contents

- Interactive Map
- History
- Map with Photos and Sections
- Community Comments and Drawings
- John Bartelstone Gallery
- Video

Photo information here
Photo information here



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