

PROJECT 31

A Proposed Merger between Hudson Valley Council and Westchester-Putnam Council

Why merge the two councils?

The Hudson Valley and Westchester-Putnam Councils are both strong with active volunteers, good program, quality camps, and strong supporters. However, both our councils have experienced declining membership over the last 10 years. By merging the two councils, we would maintain the critical mass of active Scouting families that would enable us to provide the best possible program for the youth we serve. Our councils have complimentary camping facilities, similar program goals, and diverse donor bases. A merger would also provide an opportunity to have more of our combined funds directed towards our youth by realizing savings in administrative and overhead costs. A merger is also consistent with BSA's efforts to emerge from bankruptcy as a "leaner" organization at all levels.

What will the new Council Name be?

The new name will be the Greater Hudson Valley Council.

How would a merger nest or conform with national efforts?

BSA has been steadfast on their assertion that they (as a "parent corporation") will exit the bankruptcy as a "leaner" organization and will not be handling as many responsibilities that they did for local councils prior to the bankruptcy. In essence, the local councils will have to "shoulder" more of those responsibilities which, obviously, implies that local councils must have the available funding to employ additional staff to execute those responsibilities. Additionally, a BSA project is underway to establish specific minimum benchmarks for councils in membership, finance, professional staff / positions, board governance, and sustainability. Although we do not have specifics on this policy yet, we believe a merged council will be better postured for this requirement.

The BSA is realizing that the levels of support (Area and Region) need to be streamlined and they are moving quickly to achieve that aim, likely as early as 2021. The BSA has always encouraged local councils to conduct their business as a local entity, however, they do grant local councils a charter to operate which grants the BSA authority in many matters affecting the local council. Given the current situation (from a multitude of perspectives) - it appears that the BSA coming out of bankruptcy in 2021, will establish finite criteria and enforce the necessity of local councils to work toward establishing new boundaries. The BSA (to date) has been reluctant to "force" mergers of local councils, however, that may change. Again, a merged council will be more capable of coordinating within any new administrative structure.

National Camp Accreditation Program (NCAP) standards are changing and becoming more encompassing. This program is a massive undertaking and, once again, revolves around available manpower (professional & volunteer). These outcomes must be measured routinely (annually), agreements must be signed, staffing must be trained, capital projects completed, etc. The resources needed to effectively perform all of these tasks is far less difficult when the local council covers a larger territory and combines their efforts to address any deficiencies. We have already taken initial steps in this direction with the Scout Camping on the Hudson program, but more could be done.

Where will the Service Center be located?

We will have a Service Center located somewhere in the middle of the Council or at Camp Bullowa. Once the National Bankruptcy is over, the new Board will consider adding a second store in the Westchester County Area.

How will my Unit be Serviced?

That will not change. The Council exist to service its Units. You will have a District, Commissioner Staff and Council Committees. Some model of full-time staff will also be constructed to help Units with Program, Recruitment, Fund Raising, etc.

What about Council and District Programs?

Those will still move forward. Every Unit will be in a District and Districts will provide; Unit Service, District Programs, Roundtables, Advancement and Training. The Council programs will combine, and a new Program Committee will decide the best way to move forward. Each Council currently holds wonderful events. Those events will be the building blocks for a new program.

What about the Camps?

All camps would be part of the merger. Each one has a unique function and will give all Units even more options.

- Bullowa – has a great Day Camp history and weekend camping opportunities including cabins and Shooting Sports.
- Durland – is over 1000 acres and sits next to Fahnestock State Park. Miles of trails and one of the most picturesque lakes in the area. The Camp also has 9 Unit style cabins. 6 that hold 30 and 3 that hold 40. The cabins alone make this camp a great Cub Scout and Scout BSA weekend location.
- Nooteeming – this camp is becoming a community beacon. The addition of a Softball Field, Swimming Pool, Soccer Field, Visitor Center and upgraded campsites is making Nooteeming a place to come. Local organizations as well as Scouts will be able to use and benefit from the new facilities and it will allow for the New Council to set up exciting programs.
- Read – is one of the best Scouts BSA camps in America. The facilities are amazing and the program can service all Scouts BSA Units – from Aquatics, Scoutcraft to Welding, Equestrian and full Adirondack Treks. Read will give the New Council a Scouts BSA Camp to grow with and to grow into.

What will the Combined Council Budget look like?

Due to the National BSA bankruptcy and the COVID Pandemic, an exact combined budget is not available right now. BSA Standards require that a Council run on a Balanced to Positive Budget. The New Council will work on a 2021 Budget this fall. That budget will help us determine what Staffing Model is available, what kind of Development Events need to occur and how we provide the Programs needed to have a vibrant and quality Scouting program in our area. Both Councils bring enough assets to the merger to deal with the BSA Bankruptcy. The key will be how do we use those assets to make sure all our Scouts still have a local Unit, Camps and Program to grow with.

How will the Strategic Plans of the two councils be reconciled?

The merger offers an opportunity to create a new Strategic Plan that accounts for the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the new Council. Accordingly, the new Board will seek to create a new plan at the earliest possible opportunity.

How will the new Board be selected?

The new Board will have equal representation from each of the old Councils to start with. The Merger Committee will be responsible for selecting the new Officer and Board Members.

Both Councils have a Program Fee, but the amounts are different. How will that be adjusted?

The new Board will deal with that issue in 2021. Nothing will change for the 2021 Recharter Cycle. The new Board will need to look at the Budget, Bankruptcy fall out and the economy to decide the best way to move forward.

Our Unit Sells Popcorn, how will that be affected?

The Council has a responsibility to help Units have the funds they need to provide a quality and effective program. Popcorn is sold in both Councils. We will have a Fall and Spring Unit Fundraising Opportunity for all the Units in the Council.

What happens to the OA?

The two Lodges will be asked to become one. A timetable will be worked out between the Scout Executive and the Lodge Leadership. This process will be youth lead and the Officers of the Lodge will come together to make this joining happen.

How is Wood Badge and other Trainings effected?

The combining of the Councils would allow us to offer a Wood Badge Course each year within the Council. As for NYLT, both Councils have programs and it might be feasible to offer 2 courses. Training is a basic function of the Council and Districts and we foresee more options available.

What is the new Mission and Vision for Camp Nooteming?

The New Council leadership will review the Mission and Vision for Camp Nooteming, consistent with the overall objectives of the Council, the substantial improvements already made to the camp, and the wishes of the donors who have supported those improvements.

How will STEM Ranch at Read be affected?

STEM Ranch is the next phase of the Camp Read experience. The plan is to develop a fourth Camp at Read that will focus on: STEM, Maker Arts, Equestrian, Skilled Trades and hobbies. The development plan is already underway. Nothing is being done without the resources already being secured. We see no reason to deviate from the current plan.

Merger Timeline:

October:

- 5 – WPC Board Vote
- 8 – HVC Board Vote
- Roundtable Visits
- Merger Committee to:
 - Select Scout Executive
 - Decide Service Center
 - Start to work on New Board

November:

- Townhall opportunities for Volunteers & Parents
- Townhall opportunities for Charter Representatives
- Merger Committee to:
 - Finalize New Board
 - Finalize New Officers
 - Start to work on the Working 2021 Budget
 - Marketing Plan for the Summer Camp Programs for 2021
- 30 – WPC Council Meeting – VOTE

December:

- 1 – HVC Council Meeting – VOTE
- 4 – Legal Documents sent to the NY Attorney General for approval
- Merger Committee:
 - Finalizing the Working 2021 Budget
 - Working with SE to finalize the staff

January:

- 1 – Scheduled merger date