

Gina Giuliano, Trustee, Village of Castleton-on-Hudson, 12/15/18

I'd like to thank Scenic Hudson for inviting me to be on this panel. I believe Castleton on Hudson is a cautionary tale for the other Hudson River communities presenting today. As Jeff mentioned, in 1994 the only public grade-level crossing in the village of Castleton on Hudson was closed. As a result, there has been no public access to the Hudson River within the village for nearly 25 years.

It's no secret that the historic villages on the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers declined economically during the last third of the 20th century. However, many other communities have taken advantage of things like tourism and have experienced some revitalization. Unfortunately, Castleton on Hudson's downtown hasn't been able to capitalize on its biggest asset: Geography. It is located on the East Bank of the Hudson River, but is cut off from the shore and Riverfront Park by railroad tracks, a fence, locked gates and no trespassing signs.

In 2014, something terrible happened in the village. (pause) The Stewart's Shop closed after 40 Years of operating on Main Street! Although the Village's business district had been gradually declining for years, the sudden loss of its anchor store, Stewart's, was a wake-up call. The Village had been negotiating since the 1990s to restore access, but the effort had been unsuccessful. When Stewart's closed, it became clear that more needed to be done about public access to the river or the few remaining businesses might also be shuttered and new growth would be at best difficult.

I will close by sharing that this cautionary tale just might have a happy ending. In the Spring of this year, the Rensselaer Land Trust released their Estuary-funded Study of Hudson River Access, which designated Riverfront Park in the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson as a high priority site for public access. Last month, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation awarded the village a 2018 Estuary Grant that will be used to develop plans for Riverfront Park and to secure public access to the shore. I am hoping that this story is now one of optimism and that all communities on the Hudson River can be spared Castleton-on-Hudson's quarter-century of blocked access. Thank you.