

Ulster County Environmental Management Council

Minutes for Meeting on May 30, 2018

6:30 pm

Present:

Amanda LaValle, Dept. of the Environment
Bill More, At-Large
Dave Haldeman, Chair and Shawangunk
Emilie Hauser, C Kingston
Jim Littlefoot, New Paltz
Jim Mays, Olive

John Sansalone, Gardiner
Judith Karpova, Rochester
Kristin Schara, Hurley
Margot Becker, At-Large
Mark Ellison, Esopus
Mary O'Donnell, T of Saugerties
attended by phone
Virginia Starke, At-Large

Guests:

Tracey Bartels, Ulster County Legislature; Laura Hartman, Town of Ulster Citizens; Sarah Brainard, Kingston Land Trust; Eileen Murphy, Town of Ulster Citizens; Regis Obijski, Town of Ulster Citizens; Tim Weideman, Ulster County Executive's Office, JoAnne Steele, Evelyn Wright, Citizens for Local Power, Rebecca Martin, Kingstoncitizens.org

Meeting brought to order by Dave Haldeman

Minutes from April 2018 accepted as amended by EMC input.

Old Business

The letter from EMC to the Town of Ulster regarding the GlidePath peaker plant that was prepared during the April meeting was sent out after that meeting.

Presentations by Rebecca Martin and Evelyn Wright re: the proposed GlidePath (Lincoln Park Grid Support Center) a gas-diesel-battery power plant in the Town of Ulster.

Rebecca Martin, Director of Kingston Citizens (kingstoncitizens.org); stated that the organization has been in existence for 12 years. She also works for Riverkeeper. Last fall Kingston Citizens learned about the proposed power plant, got involved in SEQR, and is working with Citizens for Local Power. They have been involved in Scoping Process. Goal for today to find ways to start a larger dialogue for all the municipalities to have a voice. Experts like Evelyn Wright and others spoke at the Citizens for Local Power (CLP) educational forum in February (2/13/18). A video of Evelyn Wright's portion of the forum about the emissions aspect was shown.

A. A power-point recording of a presentation to the T/Ulster, by Evelyn Wright, of the “Citizens for Local Power”, on the proposed plant in Ulster (called “GlidePath”). Other members of her organization were also present. They have been involved in the SEQRA scoping process, and are awaiting announcement of hearings, etc.

Points that were highlighted included the amount of emissions CO2. It was reported that the emission of carbon dioxide and methane per year would match residential emissions in the Town of Ulster.

Evelyn Wright addressed the EMC: CLP has concerns about the project, especially since Ulster County has been such a leader in clean energy. But given the economics, this project may be first of many. We don’t have “levers” right now to say, “no, this is not where we want to go.”

Other aspects of the GlidePath proposed project were discussed and reported on. The final scope has been delivered. There is now a period during which the response to the scope and parts of the SEQR process will take place.

There are inconsistencies in what GlidePath has presented for CO2 emissions and what experts suggest. The GlidePath generator will operate about 5 hours per day; averaging more in summer and winter.

The speakers noted that GlidePath presents its case as providing peak capacity. They can come on and off quickly. Others feel that gas peaker plants will force renewables off the grid, where there’s a large %, 20 to 30%, to make room for the energy they generate through fossil fuels. If the wind drops, and the generator starts, it can’t stop; the grid can’t then take the renewables onto the grid while the generator is running. GlidePath says it can turn off quickly and not “curtail” renewables going onto the grid. But we don’t have enough renewables for this to be an issue. There are better ways to compensate for drop in wind or solar.

GlidePath has not yet filled out its air permit application. Notably, Ulster is one of the few counties in the area that is in compliance with air standards, and emissions have declined somewhat, over time.

An option would be to build a (battery) storage only project. New rules are being rolled out but might not be until early next year. Current rules require a plant be available at any time. If battery storage ran out, they’d be violating their contract. But NJ and other states have successfully implemented storage-only. New rules in NY state will also allow this but they’re not in place yet.

All presentations are available on the kingstoncitizens.org website

Further discussion:

Renewables can’t supply all the power we need right now. Collectively, are we obligated to take our share of pollution because we want and need that power? Yet we

still must consider climate change. We need to ask first, is the plant needed, and if not, don't build it.

It's ultimately up to the Town of Ulster; we're a home rule state. Emissions estimates should be talked about in the context of the county, state, how does it fit in. In the state, this plant would have very little impact. In the county, with its current clean air status, the impact is larger. If the County had a greenhouse gas target, this target could be considered. It may be time for the County to start setting these goals, especially since there may be more of these plants. The County is an involved agency.

The company has been asked to consider alternatives. The location is not optimal solar or wind, the best use would be all-storage, and for the company to get involved in the new rules in development.

If all these projects are stopped and we run short of power, there could be a backlash. Utilities have kept rates down and were capital-short and unable to make repairs after the storms. If we run short of energy, environmental considerations will be discarded and there'll be a rush to build new polluting plants.

The EMC should connect with the Legislature, the Environment and Energy Committee, Amanda LaValle, and start conversations as to how to have input re: the bigger picture. We need to respect the Town of Ulster's local home rule powers. But this issue has bigger implications.

Presentation by Tracey Bartels, Ulster County Legislator:

The Legislature passed a resolution on plastic bags and a hearing is set for June 19th. A vote is expected to happen at the July Legislative meeting. The ban is on all plastic bags below a certain mm level (set high to avoid companies making their own heavier bags) and a fee (about 5 cents) will be charged for provision of paper bags. The ban is on point of sale plastic bags only, on checkout, not for plastic bags for fruits, or meats, and has exemptions for dry-cleaning bags, restaurant take-out bags, and a few other uses. The legislation began with the Marletown ECC coming to the Environment and Energy Committee. There will be no phase-in for larger vs. small businesses.

The legislators have studied the impacts of similar laws in California, Chicago, and elsewhere, and have tried to avoid mistakes made there.

The entity for enforcement has not yet been decided. Weights and measures is a possibility. Suffolk County used high school students to monitor. We are not far off from state-wide ban. Tracey asks for support of the EMC for the Ulster County legislation: "We are proposing the Gold Standard." EMC/Dave will draft a letter of support for the plastic bag ban.

It was noted that the European Union is looking at a total ban on single-use plastic bags, plastic utensils, straws, etc.

There was discussion on how Energy and Environment Committee and the EMC can work together more effectively – Dave attends the EE meetings, but we can do more to work together.

New Business

Recycling and Solid Waste–

There was an extensive discussion on the solid waste situation in Ulster County, including the history. The difference between “single stream” and “dual stream” recycling collection was discussed. The UCRRA materials recovery facility (MRF) is set up to sort dual stream. China has been a major market for recyclables, but as of this year, they are no longer accepting them from the U.S. or elsewhere unless they are not contaminated. This has disrupted the economics considerably. Some haulers and the City of Kingston collect single stream and deliver to UCRRA, which reloads it on large trucks and ships it to a single stream MRF in Beacon. There are higher service costs for single stream. MRFs cannot accept single stream recycling at the front end if they can’t get rid of it in the end.

Because of the way UCRRA was set up as a public benefit corporation by State legislature, UCRRA does not have flow control over recyclable material. UCRRA has been sending solid waste to Seneca Meadows landfill for many years. The landfill has an estimated life span of 10 years – about the same length of time it takes to build a new facility. New York City is also shipping waste to Seneca Meadows, which effects the economics.

The bigger issue is Ulster County needs its own system. UCRRA is working with Greene and Sullivan County (GUS) on issues. The Solid Waste Management Improvement Commission has conducted research but not issued a report. The Recycling Oversight Committee could be re-constituted.

Discussion included need to coordinate interested people and organizations. Need for recycling education including reduce and reuse.

Dave asked for suggestions on expert speakers to discuss future options on solid waste. Tracey will make suggestions.

Announcements:

Update with DEC on June 4th in Albany

NYWEA spring meeting in Lake George on June 11 to 13, 2018.

Amanda mentioned Drawdown by Paul Hawken on how to drawdown CO2 from atmosphere. Very comprehensive book. Paul Hawken will be at Omega in October 19-21. Scholarships available. Omega is looking on how to integrate communities with municipal and civil engagement. Members are encouraged to attend.

Due to the length of discussions on the above, there was no “round-about”, or other business conducted.

Motion to adjourn by John Sansalone and second by Jim Littlefoot.

8:45 pm

Addenda:

Town of Saugerties

Mary O’Donnell sent in a report via email.

The CAC is working toward Climate Smart certification and several members are participating in the Climate Action Training Institute. Following a presentation on Community Choice Aggregation (CCA,) the CAC is recommending that the town explore participation in a CCA. Water chestnuts and Eurasian Milfoil continue to spread in the Esopus Creek impeding recreational use of the creek. CAC is continuing to explore removal efforts. The CAC is recommending that the town install signage at its boat launching sites regarding cleaning of boats to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. The town is moving forward to provide road access to Bristol Beach and create a trail on the property. Work will begin in October. The town’s representative on Esopus Creek watershed issues advised the CAC of beginning efforts to establish a Plattekill Watershed Management Plan and Advisory Council.

Summary of meeting by Judith Karpova and Emilie Hauser with help from John Sansalone.