

Ulster County EMC Meeting Minutes September 28, 2016

Members in Attendance:

Dave Haldeman (Chair), Shawangunk

John Sansalone, Gardiner

Kristen Schara, Hurley

Emilie Hauser, Kingston

Virginia Starke, At Large

Jim Mays, Olive

Amanda LaValle, UC Dept. of the Environment

Mary O'Donnell, Saugerties

Jim Littlefoot, New Paltz

Ann Brandt, Woodstock

William A. More, At Large

Tim A. Ganon, Rochester

Guest: Jordan Christensen, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Eric Stewart, Marbletown ECC;

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 pm.

Speaker – Jordan Christensen, Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Banning Retail Use of Plastic Bags

Americans throw away 100 billion single-use plastic bags per year. They are used for an average of 12 minutes. Used bags end up in landfills, and in the environment as litter. They are often washed into storm drains causing flooding due to clogged storm drains. A large part of garbage gyres in the ocean are made up of plastic bags. We don't know how long plastic bags last after disposal. Plastic bag fragments attract pollutants and are eaten by marine species. Wild species become ensnared and strangled by plastic debris. Paper bags are not a good substitute; 14 million trees/ year are used for paper bags in the US. Plastic bags cost retailers 1-2 cents each. Bag debris costs NYC \$12 million per year to clean up. The California ban law is the gold standard. The state has seen a 25 percent reduction in paper bag usage. Money is saved by not needing to clean up. Twelve other, mostly small, municipalities in addition to New Paltz have banned plastic bags. One option is to ban plastic and charge for paper (5¢ minimum). Instituting this involves public education. The result is a 60-90 percent reduction in single use bags. Retailers prefer a fee system. They do not like bans where they have to supply paper bags. The recommended ban would target thin plastic bags (different from those used by clothing stores, etc.). Washington, DC instituted a 5¢ fee for bags; 1¢ goes to the retailer, 4¢ go towards water clean-up. (Comment - In NYS, having the fee go to the government requires enabling legislation as a tax. Also, revenues might be too sporadic to fund a program reliably.) Q- Are there grants for public education programs? EPA or the Pollution Institute may be sources. Issues for the UC legislature to consider include a fee structure, a 6-month transition period, UC could buy reusable bags to give out for free, and which retailers will it apply to. Q- What about low-income people? There could be an exemption for WIC and SNAP clients. The approach varies by municipality. In Washington, DC people brought their bags regardless of income. Comment – There was negative feedback from retailers when Marbletown considered this. The concern was that people would go elsewhere to shop. An outright ban was preferred. Comment – Aldi's does not offer bags. They charge 25¢ per bag. Q- Is there data for stores that give credit to consumers for using their own bags? It did not lead to a significant reduction in plastic bag use.

Mr. Sansalone motioned for EMC to write a letter to the UC legislature supporting a ban such that it is in the sense of the EMC that UC proceed with legislation to reduce the use of single use bags. Mr. More seconded. The motion was approved unanimously. The EMC can help with building support and public education.

Ms. Starke motioned to approve the June minutes as amended. Motion seconded by Ms. O'Donnell. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

Membership - Ms. LaValle and Mr. Haldeman have been reaching out to town with CACs to encourage them to appoint a representative to the EMC. The bylaws allow for an at-large representative for every town representative.

Creek Week – Ms. LaValle requested updates from those who sponsored events with details about the event and the number of participants. Ulster Publishing listed several events in their almanac. Is there a new community event that the EMC could sponsor? City of Kingston CAC and Ulster had an event promoting electric cars.

Fall Training Workshop – The workshop would cover the Climate Smart Communities Program sponsored by the NYSDEC and the Clean Energy Communities Program from NYSERDA. Municipalities that become certified in these programs are eligible for grant funding. UC would like to partner with the EMC for this. UC and the City of Kingston (one of 8 cities) are both certified in the Climate Smart Communities Program. There are some communities that have signed on but have not been active to date. NYSERDA is contracted with regional planning councils to provide 50 consultant hours in support of municipalities working on the Clean Energy Communities Program. An invitation would go out to UC municipalities.

New Business

The October EMC meeting will be moved to Oct 19 so that the fall training workshop can take place on the 26th. The invitation could include a survey of what municipalities have accomplished to date.

NYSDEC is partnering with NYS Association for Reduction, Reuse, and Recycling (NYSAR³) to hold a recycling conference Nov 2-4 in Cooperstown. A pre-conference workshop will focus on clearing up plastics confusion. Other sessions will address reducing food waste, challenges faced by the recycling industry, innovative waste reduction methods and other issues.

Dept. of the Environment Report

There is \$3 million in funding available from the NYSDEC for clean vehicles (vehicles propelled at least in part by electric motor/battery) and infrastructure to support clean vehicle charging. The funding will be disbursed through rebates for vehicle purchases or leases. Charging stations require a 20% local match. There is also funding for LED street lighting installation which can count toward the NYSERDA Clean Energy Community program. Wawarsing has installed a charging stations with help from UC. NYS negotiated \$29,000 price plus \$5,000 rebate to make it affordable.

There is opposition to the seven new anchorage sites on the Hudson River proposed by the US Coast Guard. Comments by the public and Riverkeeper are concerned about increased barges moving and storing petroleum, specifically Balkan Crude (a highly volatile form of oil) from North Dakota. Other concerns include waterfront development for tourism and clean water threatened by the new berths. There may be a need for short term sites for emergencies and navigational issues (fog, engine problems, ice etc.). Comments can be accessed on the Coast Guard website. Mr. Haldeman will draft a letter and send to EMC members for comment regarding this issue.

Round-About

Dave Haldeman – They are expanding the rail trail north to the boundaries of the prison from Walden. Boy Scouts are doing a tree inventory for town along streets which could help in applying for grants.

Jim Mays– Olive is looking to build a parking lot at the old station location for the Catskill Mountain Rail Trail. They had a successful recycling event at Olive Day.

Jim Littlefoot - Jim was appointed as a liaison to the village of New Paltz. It is believed that trout in a Phoenicia Elementary classroom aquarium tank died as a result of water contamination and that bottled water now being required at the school.

John Sansalone -The ECC and planning board had a joint meeting. The ECC continues to do project reviews. NYWEA had a conference in Saugerties. The Hudson River Environmental Society will be providing a tour of the Schoharie Valley. It is open to the public.

Mary O'Donnell – The Solarize Saugerties program reported 66 new residential and 62 commercial solar installations. Mary credited the presentation made by Catskill Mountainkeeper representative Betta Broad as the impetus for the program. This program counts as an action for the Clean Energy Communities initiative. Watermilfoil weeds are taking over the Esopus and algae is building up on weeds. The creek not navigable. Water is very low because of lack of rain. The mayor has reported this to the DEC. They will look into removal methods for next year.

Anne Brandt – They have a new student on the commission but they are losing a long time member. Bard is looking to partner on micro-hydroelectric projects. The NYS Association of Conservation Commissions is looking for a location for a conference in Ulster County.

William More - There will be pharmaceutical disposal day in October. The USDEA responsible for disposal of the items collected.

Emilie Hauser– They hired a consultant to do their NRI. They are educating the public on hazards of wood burning. The Cornell Climate Adaptation Design studio program to promote climate resiliency is starting starting on Block Park and Island Dock.

Tim Ganon - They are working on a Natural Heritage Plan with Wawarsing with the help of a consulting firm. (Towns are requested towns send their reports via email or links to the Dept. of the Environment.)

Eric Stewart - They are going to provide food scrap composting at transfer station. The Trashfest events were successful. A pollinator garden was installed at the town. They attended workshop by Hudsonia concerning assessing critical habitats. They would like to finish mapping the habitats in the town. Plastic bag legislation has stalled.

Kristen Schara– The Hurley Open Space Plan is going through final revisions to be submitted to the town board.

Handouts provided: Editorial from the *Bangor Daily News* (“A Plastic Bag Ban Makes Sense for Bangor”, 8-15-2016); Flyer - “Stop Plastic Bag Pollution in New York”; “Guidelines for Habitat Assessment”, Hudsonia Ltd., 2013; “Draft “Habitat Assessment Guidelines for the Town of New Paltz”, Hudsonia Ltd., July 2016; “New York State Model Solar Energy Law”, May, 2016.

The next EMC meeting will be on Oct 19 so that the workshop on Climate Smart Communities and Clean Energy Communities programs can be offered on Oct 26.

Adjourn

Mr. Sansalone motioned to adjourn. Motion seconded by Ms. Starke. Meeting adjourned 8:35 pm.

Old Business

Member Roundabout

John Sansalone –

Kristen Schara

Jim Mays –

Emilie Hauser –

Sarah Underhill –

Eric Stewart –

Jim Littlefoot –

Mr. Sansalone made a motion to adjourn. **Ms. Starke** seconded. Meeting adjourned unanimously at **8:12**.