

final

Minutes of the EMC General Meeting March 8, 2012

Voting Members Present (13): Poney Carpenter, Kenny Christianson, Brian Eden, Kate Engler, Martha Ferger, Bill Halton, Emily Hamilton, Jim McGarry, Steve Nicholson, Kristine Shaw, Gary Stewart, Lucia Tyler, Ed Wilson

Voting Member Excused (4): Spring Buck, Katie Kelly, Dan Lamb, Roger Yonkin

Non-Voting Members Present (2): Peter Harriott, Dooley Kiefer

Guests Present: Will Burbank, Pegi Ficken, Eric Nicholson, Carolyn Peterson

Staff Present: Scott Doyle, Kathy Wilsea

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chair Steve Nicholson at 4:05 p.m.

Privilege of the Floor – There were no visitors who wished to speak under Privilege of the Floor.

Changes to the Agenda and Approval of Minutes – There were no changes to the agenda. The draft minutes were accepted without change. Dooley Kiefer objected to the brevity of the minutes, as she missed the meeting and the minutes did not describe what occurred. It was explained that the staff person could not cover all of the breakout groups at one time. Final minutes are available on the EMC webpage: www.tompkins-co.org/emc.

Committee Reports – Environmental Review: Jim McGarry said the group has addressed the Big Red Marching Band facility in addition to the information that was provided with the agenda. Brian Eden has met with Ed Marx about coordinated watershed planning, and Brian made sure Ed was aware of our dredging comments. Jim said ERC will try to do some follow-up this year and see how municipalities use our comments. He will make calls about ERC comments on the Cornell Sailing Center project. Gary Stewart had questions about that, and committee members said the CU compliance officer was unaware of the dredging component, and there is no mention in the DEC permit application about dredging or what actions would be taken if Hydrilla is detected. Steve mentioned EMC efforts to sponsor an April public event on Hydrilla, and Brian said there are difficulties in finding a meeting place. Energy: Brian Eden reported their meetings will be the third Tuesday of the month at the Planning Dept. Plants are growing in the spaces at the edges of the solar panels on the public library, and will affect the equipment's efficiency. The Liberty Solar installations on other County facilities will require regular maintenance, and Brian has suggested to Ed Marx that the library be added to that schedule. The committee is encouraging Tompkins County to invest in renewable energy sources. Brian submitted an article for the TC Climate Protection Initiative annual report.

Announcements – Brian reported EPA released a report on dioxin this week. Steve Nicholson said Black Oak Wind farm is seeking investors, and there was discussion on whether this is an IPO or an interim step that differs from an IPO. Steve referred interested members to the Black Oak website.

Strategic Retreat: Next Steps – Brian felt last month's work was a nice exercise. He reviewed the chart of member support for topics, which was prepared by Steve based on each member's three votes. Now the Executive Committee seeks ways to put energy into the priority items by examining EMC's role, gathering input from the community, advocating for action, and building relationships across municipal boundaries. The two topics that ranked highest were: reduce disposable bag use and improve composting opportunities. Some areas charge for bags, some ban bags. Brian mentioned some ideas for sliding scales. If a regulatory law is enacted, penalties would need to be enforced, so that would be a drawback. Communities with per-bag fees have seen large reductions in use. Brian has been talking with Barbara Eckstrom at Solid Waste about some of these ideas. Concerning composting, curbside collection might be possible. A meeting will be held with Solid Waste during the week of 4/23 to interact with others who might be interested. This date would follow Barbara Eckstrom's visit to BioCycle. On March 18, Solid Waste will begin accepting compostables on site at Commercial Avenue.

Odors, emissions, attraction of wildlife are concerns. Peggy Ficken, who was visiting from Groton, suggested encouraging people to raise chickens and use of worms in composting are valid ideas. Carolyn Peterson, visiting from the City of Ithaca, reported the City will be charging residents when they find yard waste in their trash. Common Council member Jennifer Dotson is looking into having neighborhood composting sites. Cayuga Compost generally accepts compost materials from schools and restaurants.

Brian also mentioned Earth Day and the Ithaca Festival as events that EMC should be working on. Dooley suggested update of the Invasive Species list, which came from Cornell Plantations. Kristine Shaw said Spring Buck began working on that when she chaired the Communications Committee, and it had been agreed to use the list from Plantations, which is updated regularly.

Working Towards Paperless Goals – Steve reported three members of the Executive Committee met with Ed Marx about eliminating paper usage. We hope to use the projector in the future and put the meeting documents on the room screen so members don't need to print meeting materials. Lucia Tyler pointed out it is difficult to connect to the Internet in this room.

City of Ithaca Priorities Concerning the Environment – Mayor Svante Myrick joined us for discussion. His four main goals are to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of City operations, which is a continuation of former mayor Carolyn Peterson's goals; purchase renewable power; increase use of solar panels; and green the City's fleet. Most of the City's land conservation efforts involve its parks. In terms of land use, he feels if the City provides dense housing it will help prevent sprawl in other municipalities. Citizens can benefit from locating housing near transit. Better building codes will help attain GHG goals. He also wants to promote technologies like combined heat and power, and innovations for transit.

During discussion with members and visitors, Mr. Myrick agreed the greenhouse gasses produced by the manufacturing process for electric cars can't be separated from the calculations of benefit from vehicle use, which means decision-making on this topic is difficult. He understands public transit doesn't always work, as routes and scheduling are not always useful. Even agriculture and local foods are concerns for the City. But if the City works best as a city, other municipalities can pick up the agriculture. The City may change codes for chickens, and increase the number of community gardens. Some CSA operations are now delivering, so that helps people who use transit but can't get to the right spot or carry the produce on the bus. A visitor commented that the City can control its operation emissions, but needs to have a big effort to encourage the community to follow suit. The Mayor acknowledged some citizens are having trouble with wood stove emissions from their neighbors. This is difficult when the wood stoves meet standards but still are bothering the neighbors. The density of housing in the City required certain regulations. Concerning solar panels and renewable energy, he was interested by Poney Carpenter's suggestions to use the City's buying power to help citizens get bulk prices, perhaps through cooperatives.

Carolyn Peterson suggested adding cleanup of contaminated sites to the Mayor's priority list. This is another facet of a clean environment, and there are several huge, difficult spots in the City. He said it is very easy to consider staffing as the main business cost, but it is also necessary to keep the environment clean, which is sometimes expensive for businesses. Concerning interaction of staff from various municipalities, he acknowledged it is difficult to get them to interact, and sees this as a trust issue. Currently there is some interaction between the City and Town of Ithaca planning staff, as they are both updating their comprehensive plans. And the County is working on meetings for municipal planning boards and elected officials on the topic of nodal development. Peter Harriott said he had voiced objection at the January EMC meeting to the City's purchase of green energy certificates without specifics on how that price would be used by the agent. The Mayor was interested in this and will follow up with Peter. Concerning the Cayuga Lake Waterfront Trail, there are no new strategies, but some new energy. On historic preservation, some areas are formally protected, and concerning construction on E. State Street, the former mayor and common council members didn't realize zoning would allow the type of housing project that is being built. There were no rules for parcel consolidation that would have blocked the project. Emily Hamilton, a member of the City's CAC, asked how CAC can tell how "green" a project is, and asked if the City has standards. Mr. Myrick acknowledged the process is unwieldy. They have completed a local action plan, a green fleet plan, and a green purchasing plan. A green building code is being researched, and he suggested CAC could work with the building commissioner on that.

Adjournment – Kathy Wilsea announced there were paper copies of the EMC annual report, the bi-annual T C Local publication, and membership applications available by the exit. The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary, Tompkins County Planning Department
Approved by Council on May 10, 2012