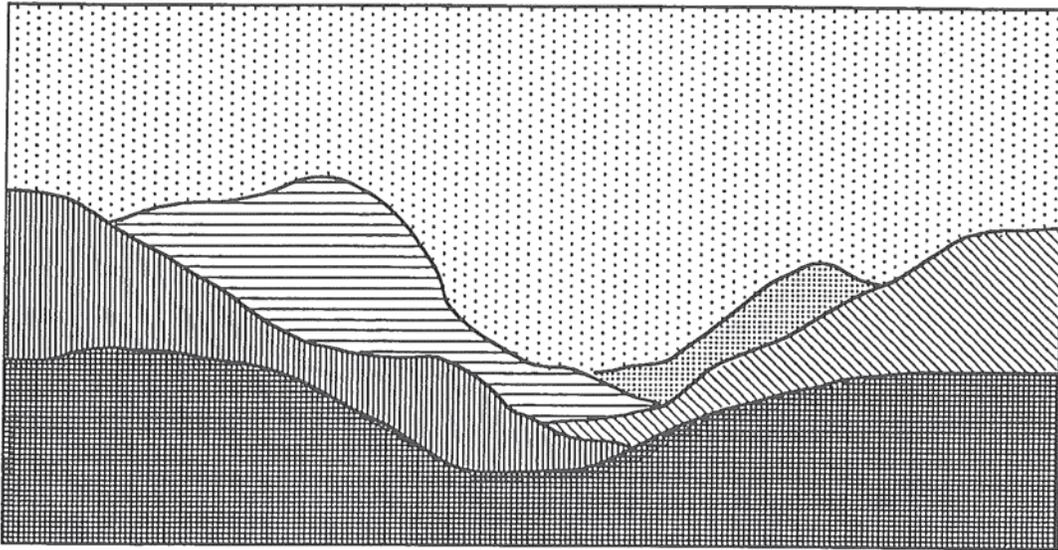


Tompkins County
Environmental Management Council



Annual Report 1991

Biggs Building A, 301 Dates Drive, Ithaca, New York 14850 (607) 274-5360

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March 31, 1992

Robert Watros, Chair
Tompkins County Board of Representatives
Tompkins County Courthouse
Ithaca, New York 14850

Dear Mr. Watros:

It is my pleasure to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the 1991 Annual Report of the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council.

1991 was a productive year for the EMC. In addition to sponsoring a conference on wetlands management and completing studies on County road salt and pesticide usage, the EMC continued to work closely with our elected officials in order to identify, study and respond to various environmental issues. For 20 years we have worked to provide information and technical assistance in the development of environmental policy, and 1991 was a continuation of our past efforts. We have appreciated the opportunity to contribute.

On behalf of the membership of the EMC, I would like to thank the Board of Representatives for their continuing support during 1991. As the need for environmental information and an environmentally-conscious viewpoint continues, I am confident that the EMC will continue to be an important support in working to maintain the integrity of our local environment.

Respectfully Submitted,



Byron Unsworth
Chair, Tompkins County Environmental Management Council
Tompkins County 1991 EMC Members and Staff:

Membership - 1991

Members:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
Roger Farrell	City of Ithaca
Dooley Kiefer	Village of Cayuga Heights
Bard Prentiss	Village of Dryden
Marjory Rinaldo-Lee	Village of Freeville
Vacant	Village of Groton
Lynn Leopold	Village of Lansing
Barbara Page	Village of Trumansburg
Lowell Korb	Town of Caroline
Herbert Engman	Town of Danby
Jay Miller	Town of Dryden
Ashley Miller	Town of Enfield
Lyle Raymond, Jr.	Town of Groton
Richard Fischer	Town of Ithaca
John Howell	Town of Lansing
Donald Brown	Town of Newfield
Roxanne Marino	Town of Ulysses

At-Large Members:

Donald Barber	Marjolein Schat (Youth Member)
Robert Beck	Nicholas Vandam
Ed Cope	David Weinstein
Kurt Jirka	Richard Yager
Laura Kleinman (Youth Member)	Roger Yonkin

Ex-Officio Members:

Nancy Schuler	Board of Representatives Liaison
James Hanson, Jr.	Commissioner of Planning
William Mobbs	Commissioner of Public Works
John Andersson	Rep. for the Commissioner of Health
Monika Crispin	Cooperative Extension
Robert Mulvey	County Attorney

EMC Staff:

Mary Smith, EMC Coordinator
Laurie Lampman, Secretary

1991 Tompkins County Board of Representatives Planning Committee:

Deborah Dietrich, Chair	Nancy Schuler
Frank Proto	Thomas Todd
Mary Call	Stuart Stein

Organization and Objectives

The Environmental Management Council (EMC) together with the Tompkins County Planning Department (TCPD) have primary official responsibility at the County level for studying and providing advice on issues affecting the environment of Tompkins County. Both agencies are under the jurisdiction of the Planning Committee of the County Board of Representatives. The EMC Coordinator is a member of TCPD staff and operates as a liaison between the two agencies. In this way there is a close working relationship between the Planning Department and the EMC.

The EMC is funded by the County Board of Representatives, with a portion of this funding reimbursed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation through their Local Environmental Assistance Program.

The Tompkins County EMC was established by a Resolution of the Board of Representatives on May 10, 1971 and amended December 19, 1991, which recognized that such a Council could aid in the "preservation and improvement of the quality of the natural and man-made environment within the County of Tompkins....(which) is of increasing and vital importance to the health, welfare and economic well-being of the present and future inhabitants of the County."

The objectives of the Council are:

- 1) To identify environmental issues facing the County; to research, deliberate, and recommend action on those issues to County government;
- 2) To assist in the coordination of activities, data, and expertise in matters of environmental concern; and
- 3) To act as a public forum and provide educational materials and information to foster a broader understanding of environmental issues and their possible solutions.

Members of the Council are appointed by the County Board of Representatives for two-year terms. The Council is composed of a representative from each city, village, and town Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) or, if no CAC has been formed, from each unit of local government (16 positions). In addition, at least twelve At-Large members are appointed to ensure broad-based representation. Six non-voting, ex-officio members are appointed as well.

Council Activities in 1991

In 1991 the EMC continued to serve the County and the public by conducting a wide variety of studies, public forums, and project reviews related to the quality of our environment. The following pages summarize major activities completed or in progress in 1991.

Administrative Affairs

20th Year Anniversary

To commemorate our 20 years of service to the County in advising and providing educational assistance on environmental issues to governmental units, the TCEMC embarked on a project to trace its 20-year history. The EMC engaged a graduate student from Cornell University to interview past and present EMC and County Board members to gain insights on Council effectiveness and its relationship with the County Board and to draft a report documenting this information. This document also chronicles the changing atmosphere of environmental protection at the local level and provides a summary of important environmental topics that have evolved over the last 20 years. It is expected that the report will be useful to new EMC members as orientation material, and will be informative to County Board members as well.

Education Committee

In light of the tremendous amount of work accomplished by the Education Committee as a special committee in 1991 (see below), and the fact that education was chosen as a major focus of the Council's work for 1992, Council voted to "promote" the Education Committee to a standing committee. There are now six standing committees of the EMC: Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery, Plant and Animal Life, Air and Water Quality, Administrative Affairs, Land Use and Transportation, and Education.

Resolution Tracking and Officer Responsibilities

Resolution tracking, as a means to effectively follow EMC resolutions through the maze of County politics, was discussed. Resolutions passed by the EMC that require County Board action will be tracked by a member of the EMC who will provide the Council with a progress report. The person tracking the resolution need not be on the Committee of the EMC responsible for introducing the resolution. This system is designed to take some burden off of the Chair of the EMC, who often attended Committee meetings of the County Board to follow up on EMC resolutions. Additionally, more members will have a chance to experience County politics and have increased credibility with the County Board.

Education and Public Outreach

Wetlands Conference

The Education and Plant and Animal Life Committees worked hard for six months in organizing the conference, *Managing Wetlands in the 1990's*, which took place on November 23rd at Cornell University. The conference was organized into sessions on Wetland Functions, Legal Issues in Wetlands Designation and Protection, and Dealing with Wetlands in Practice- A Panel Discussion. Featured speakers included Dr. Barbara Bedford of Cornell University; Patricia Reixinger, Wetland Program Manager for the DEC; and Jon Kusler, Association of Wetland Managers. Over 100 attendees from local government, farming, and environmental groups throughout New York participated in the day-long conference. The presentations by the excellent speakers and the level of information

shared received high marks by the attendees. The lively discussion and the diverse group of participants at the conference are indications of success in promoting a better understanding of the interrelated biological and legal issues which characterize wetlands.

State of the Environment Report

In 1991 the EMC decided to go public with their current projects and plans for the upcoming year. To get the word out, an 8 page newsletter was produced that featured reports from each of the six EMC committees. The newsletter is one way in which the EMC plans to fulfill its mission of providing information to the public on environmental issues. Plans are ongoing to develop another State of the Environment Report, to be released next fall.

Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery

The EMC has followed the evolution of the County's solid waste management program closely and has played an important role in its development and implementation. With the establishment of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (which originated from an EMC recommendation), the Resource Recovery and Waste Disposal Committee has scaled down its level of work, but continues to be a vital source of advice to the Solid Waste Division and the County Board. For example, closure plans for the Landstrom Landfill were submitted to the EMC for comment. Resolutions were passed by the EMC urging the County Board to adopt a coordinated review process for the closure of the landfill, and that the landfill be closed on December 31, 1991.

DR-7 Natural Resources Management Plan

The EMC-sponsored vegetation survey for the proposed DR-7 landfill site has been completed and incorporated into a report on management of the natural resources at the DR-7 site. In addition to mitigating the environmental impacts of the landfill, the Plan strives to protect citizens from as many negative impacts of the landfill as possible, to provide educational and passive recreational use of buffer areas, and to restore the active site to a neighborhood resource when the landfill is closed. Indeed, the Natural Resources Management Plan could serve well as a model for landfill development across the State and beyond.

To be effective, the Plan must be implemented in conjunction with planning and construction phases of the landfill. Thus a Request for Proposals is currently being drafted for the hiring of a specialist to coordinate implementation of the several phases of the management plan.

During the landfill planning phase a management plan for the non-operational portions of the site will be developed in order to promote a high level of species and habitat diversity. Potential trail networks and passive recreational uses for the buffer area will be defined, and additional baseline data to supplement existing flora and fauna inventory will be collected. During the construction phase of the landfill, a general survey of the area on a regular basis will be performed to assess any damage to species of special concern and to ensure that buffer areas are not affected during construction of the landfill. During operation of the landfill, a survey of flora and fauna will be conducted to identify injury attributable to landfill activities which could be avoided through alteration of operation techniques.

Land Use and Transportation

Airport Hydrogeologic and Flora/Fauna Survey

As a result of long-standing concern regarding planned expansion of the County airport runway and terminal, the EMC prepared a proposal for a hydrogeologic and flora/fauna study for the entire airport property. The Council feels that this baseline environmental data is needed in order to evaluate possible environmental impacts of these projects. The studies were estimated by the Council to cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000. The Airport Development Committee of the County Board passed a resolution calling for a flora/fauna study on the terminal and runway properties.

County Road Salt Report

Upon request from the Public Works Committee of the County Board, the Land Use and Transportation Committee embarked upon a review of the current road salt policy of the County Highway Department. The policy as stated is "To use the least amount of salt possible on roads with snow and ice to provide for safe driving conditions." Research was done on the use of alternatives to salt, as well as other methods and priorities used for winter driving conditions in municipalities across the country. The EMC concluded that County's road salt policy was in need of revision and recommended that the County: (a) devise a prioritization and classification system based on traffic volume and emergency access, and (b) adopt a minimum salt policy incorporating maximum plow use with sand and cinders and the use of calcium magnesium acetate on a trial basis in a limited area.

The report has been presented to the Public Works Committee of the County Board and sent to Town Highway Supervisors in the County. The Land Use and Transportation Committee is now investigating the possibility of generating a uniform salt use policy among municipalities.

Tompkins Coalition for Bicycle Transportation

The EMC continues to send a representative from the Land Use and Transportation Committee to the meetings of the Tompkins Coalition for Bicycle Transportation. One of the goals of the group is to provide a forum for communication and intermunicipal cooperation regarding the various bicycle planning projects proposed or underway in the County. The EMC was invited to participate because it is preparing a report for the County Board on ways to the County can encourage bicycling as transportation.

A primary goal of the report is to establish a review process for highway projects that will take bicycle safety into consideration. As it is recognized that limited funds will be available to make highway improvements to improve bicycling safety, the EMC proposes to select a network of county roads that are known to be of importance to local bicycle commuters and ask that these roads be given top priority by the highway department for maintenance practices that will increase safety for bicyclists.

The report will also include suggestions for county bike routes, which would connect with proposed bike routes on the Cornell campus, the Town of Ithaca, and others to form an integrated bicycling network throughout the County. The report is expected to be released in the summer of 1992.

County Pesticide Policy

At the request of the Public Works Committee of the Board, the Land Use and Transportation Committee completed a draft County Pesticide Policy. Concern that pesticides were being applied at higher levels than necessary and that water quality might be negatively impacted prompted review of the policy. Included in the report was the recommendation to the County that land owners be allowed to mow areas of their property subject to County pesticide use as alternative to pesticide application. This report is under review by the Council and will be presented to the County Board in the Spring of 1992.

Plant and Animal Life

Unique Natural Areas

With the completion of the Unique Natural Areas inventory for Tompkins County, the Plant and Animal Life Committee is compiling information on protection options available to landowners who wish to preserve the unique qualities of their property. The Committee has presented these options to area municipalities, two of whom have incorporated the Unique Natural Areas in their revised Comprehensive Plans. Next, the Committee plans to identify all landowners of parcels within Unique Natural Areas to send them data sheets of that site along with information on protection options available to them.

Wetlands Conference

The Plant and Animal Life Committee spent a major portion of their time on activities relating to the Wetlands Conference which was held on November 23, 1991 (see page 4).

Air and Water Quality

Proposed Changes to County Sanitary Code

The Tompkins County Department of Health is reviewing the County Sanitary Code in response to changes in the State Department of Health Sanitary Code. These codes effect the siting and design of on-site septic systems within Tompkins County. Since enforcing revisions made to the New York State code in 1990, many of the County's regulations are not in compliance. The EMC reviewed the proposed changes to the County Sanitary Code which will bring it into compliance with the new State Code. The Air and Water Quality Committee decided to study these changes as they impact the lot size needed for septic systems, water usage requirements for different septic systems, and nutrient loading of septic systems.

NYSEG Clean Coal Technology Program

The Air and Water Quality Committee reviewed New York State Electric and Gas' (NYSEG) Clean Coal Technology proposal for Milliken Station. NYSEG has been awarded funding from the Department of Energy for the project. While the Council endorses the proposal and agrees that the net environmental impact as a result of this project will be positive, there are a few environmental impacts that may warrant further attention, such as increased truck traffic by approximately 36 trips per day (and the possibility of using rail transport instead), and visual impacts of a higher stack and more frequently visible plume.

Energy

As a result of interest in energy issues on the part of several EMC members, an ad-hoc Energy Committee was formed in August of 1991. This committee went to work quickly, setting up meetings with the County's Director of Buildings and Grounds to investigate possibilities for energy conservation in County buildings. The committee discovered that an energy audit had already been performed on County buildings by NYSEG. The cost of updating lighting systems for each of the County buildings is estimated at \$10,000 - \$12,000, with a payback period of 1.5 years. The Energy Committee sent a letter to the Public Works Committee of the County Board, urging that these energy-saving measures be implemented.

Accomplishments in 1991

Resolutions presented by the TCEMC:

- Recommending that the County perform an Environmental Impact Study for the Entire Airport Property (April 23, 1991)
- Urging the Adoption of a Coordinated Review Process for the Closure of the Hillview Landfill (June 25, 1991)
- Urging the Closure of the Hillview Landfill on December 31, 1991 (June 25, 1991)
- Creating the Education Committee of the EMC as a Standing Committee (December 10, 1991)

Reports:

- The First Twenty Years: A History of the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council (December 1991)
- A Report to the Board of Representatives on the County Road Salt Policy (November 1991)

Workshops/Presentations:

- Managing Wetlands in the 1990's (November 23, 1991)