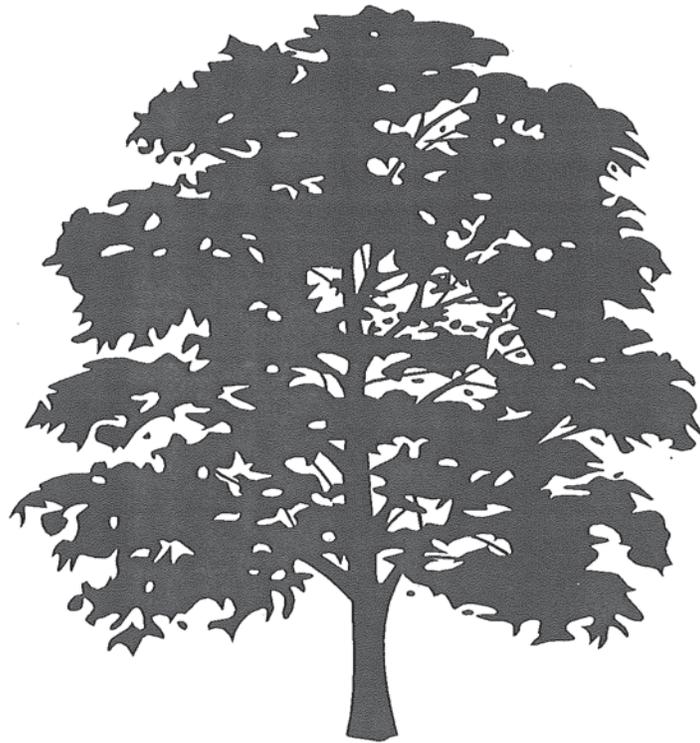


*Tompkins County
Environmental Management Council
1994 Annual Report*



Tompkins County
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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April 14, 1995

Stuart Stein
Chair, Tompkins County Board of Representatives
Tompkins County Courthouse
Ithaca, NY 14850

To the Honorable Stuart Stein:

I am pleased to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the Environmental Management Council's 1994 Annual Report.

During 1994, the EMC continued to provide the public and the County Board of Representatives technical assistance and advice on local environmental issues and policy. Information was provided on the following subjects: State Environmental Quality Act, transportation planning, unique natural areas, indoor air quality, open burning, County forest lands, and environmental long range planning. The only formal resolution passed by the EMC concerned the need for the County to develop a comprehensive land policy to guide the County in its disposition and acquisition of land.

Members of the EMC spent a lot of time researching issues and gathering data in 1994, and we expect to see the fruits of that labor in 1995, when the EMC expects to produce long range environmental planning recommendations, an educational brochure and report on open burning, and a directory of environmental organizations. Additionally, the EMC plans to complete field work on ten unique natural area sites and revamp the UNA database and document layout.

The EMC is looking forward to working closely with the County Board of Representatives on these and other environmental issues in 1995. Drawing on the wide variety of talents among the EMCs members and associate members, we plan to provide the County Board with the best possible environmental advice, so that the Board is able to protect and enhance the natural environment of Tompkins County.

Respectfully submitted,



Ed Cope
Chair, Tompkins County EMC

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council 1994 Annual Report

Organization and Objectives

The EMC is funded primarily by the County Board of Representatives, with a portion of its funding coming from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation through its Local Environmental Assistance Program.

In Tompkins County, the EMC is housed in the County Planning Department. A close working relationship exists between the two organizations, with shared staff and joint office space. Both the EMC and the Planning Department study the environment of the County, and advise the Board of Representatives on issues involving the environment. During 1994, the EMC reported directly to the Health and Environmental Quality Committee of the Board of Representatives.

In the early part of 1994, the EMC changed its structure to increase its effectiveness as an advisory body to the Board of Representatives. Only one standing committee (the SEQR Committee) was retained, while several task-oriented committees were formed. In order to allow members more time to concentrate on environmental issues, the EMC decided to go from monthly meetings to meeting every other month and the Executive Committee was reduced in size. In order to fill the gap between meetings, a monthly EMC newsletter, the *EMC News*, was created. Its goal is to update all members and interested parties on the activities of the EMC. This newsletter became an important avenue of communication, as committee reports were no longer given at the general meetings. Finally, the category of associate membership was established with great results. Associate members join task groups on an informal basis and have no obligation to attend general meetings. By the end of the year there were 12 associate members actively contributing to committee work.

EMC Resolutions

Besides the resolutions which established the first seven task committees of the new year, the EMC passed only one resolution in 1994, entitled "Recommendation that Tompkins County consider the environmental value of all land proposed for acquisition, use, sale or lease". This resolution was passed in July, 1994, and in August it was brought to the Health and Environmental Quality Committee, which also passed the resolution. Although the full Board of Representatives did not take action on the EMC's resolution, an earlier resolution of the Board had directed the County Planning Department, County Attorney, and the County Administrator to develop recommendations for an overall policy governing the County's acquisition, purchase, lease, or sale of lands. The impetus for the EMC's resolution was the proposed sale of County owned land in the Town of Danby to an individual who intended to harvest the timber on the parcel. The land in question is botanically rich, and lies in one of the County's Unique Natural Areas, pointing out to the EMC the importance of the County including the EMC in environmental reviews prior to the sale or lease of County lands.

Committee Activities

Media Connection

The EMC Media Committee pursued two main goals in 1994: increasing awareness among County residents about the existence and mission of the EMC, and developing public information campaigns on local environmental issues. In the spring of 1994, the Committee worked to recruit new EMC members from a wide variety of backgrounds. Working with the EMC Coordinator, a database was created in the Planning Department and information packets, including cover letters, recruitment posters, and membership information, were sent to all local churches, labor unions,

community associations, schools, and media outlets. The Committee was successful in placing recruitment notices in many local newspapers, and the EMC Chair discussed the EMC and its programs on a local radio talk show.

During the spring, the Committee also worked on the issue of the health effects of backyard burn barrels as its first public education campaign. Backyard burning in cities and villages (and within 1/8 of a mile of their boundaries), as well as in towns with populations greater than 20,000, is already banned by state law due to the health and nuisance factors, however, open burning appears to have increased as solid waste fees rise. The Committee collected information during the summer and fall, and then developed a brochure and a report detailing the health and legal aspects of open burning. The brochure stresses the importance of thinking about how personal actions affect neighbors.

Plans are still being developed for distribution of the brochure to the public, as well as the distribution of more in-depth information packets to interested parties. In the future, the Committee wants to focus its work on face-to-face educational efforts with rural opinion leaders. Members plan on preparing a presentation of the health risks associated with burn barrels for town boards, planning boards, church groups, and civic organizations. The Committee plans on testing this approach first in the Town of Lansing (the Committee Chair's district) so that the presentation can be refined prior to making it available to other municipalities. The Committee may encourage town boards to pass local ordinances against burn barrels in hamlets and neighborhoods as an interim measure. Additional steps, such as holding a public policy forum to discuss a complete ban on burn barrels, will be considered once the Committee has determined the level of support among County residents. This initial educational effort is intended to be the first of many activities that promote self-education on environmental topics. The Committee plans on continuing to work with the media on environmental issues in the future.

Environmental Directory

With the goal of creating a comprehensive environmental directory to be used by County residents and environmental groups, the Environmental Directory Committee developed and mailed a survey requesting information about environmental organizations in the County and region to approximately 260 local environmental organizations, agencies and businesses. Much time was put into developing the mailing list of organizations, as well as the format for the directory. Organizations will be placed in subgroups and an index will assist users in finding the organizations that fit their needs. Topics covered in the directory range from water testing services to hiking and biking trails. In 1995, work will continue on data entry and follow-up. It is expected that the directory will be available to the public in the late spring of 1995, with copies available at public at local schools, municipal offices and libraries.

Long Range Planning

The Long Range Plan Committee was established in the beginning of 1994 to develop a recommendation for the environmental component of the Tompkins County Long Range Plan (also known as Tompkins County Outlook). The Committee has met, on average, once every three weeks since then and will present its initial recommendations to the full EMC in April, 1995.

A short-term accomplishment was the completion of a response to the *2015 Long Range Transportation Plan* of the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council. A letter from the director of the Transportation Council indicated that the Committee's input was useful and appreciated.

It was recognized early on that the environmental long range plan would not be completed in a year's time and that it must be considered a "work in progress" for some time to come. It was also recognized that the completion of the plan will require the involvement of the staff of the Tompkins County Planning Department and/or other professional personnel who can concentrate effort for a sustained period of time. However, the

committee has been able to produce several important elements of a comprehensive environmental plan:

- Tompkins County Environmental Vision Statement
- Quality of Life Statement
- Environmental Recommendations
- Position Papers:
 - Natural Resource Inventory Outline
 - Biological Corridors Plan, with Draft Map
 - Open Space Protection Tools
 - Options for Transportation
 - Public Participation in Environmental Decisions

After review by the full EMC and EMC staff, the committee report will be presented to the County Planning Department and the Tompkins County Board of Representatives for their adoption and inclusion in the overall Tompkins County Outlook. Work on the natural resource inventory and implementation of the recommendations will take many years to fully complete.

State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR)

The review of SEQR documents remains a key job of the EMC. Often, construction activities are proposed that will cross town borders or strongly influence a municipality other than the one directly experiencing the development. In these cases, as well as many others, the EMC fills an essential role in voicing any and all environmental concerns. The goal of the EMC is to identify and promote the least environmentally damaging option of any necessary development. The Council brings a wide variety of perspectives to bear on its reviews of projects. Through this perspective, the Council tries to enlighten the community members and managing officials as to the possibilities for producing environmentally sound development.

In 1994, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) worked on amending the SEORA regulations, and conducted a formal public review of the proposed changes. Quoting from the DEC's summary of the changes, "The major revisions that seek to streamline the regulations are the amendments to the scoping process (617.7) and the addition of a number of items to

the list of actions not subject to SEQR (formerly Type II actions) (617.13). The scoping amendments are aimed at providing more thorough guidance on what should be in a scope and providing incentives to undertake scoping. The intent is to have shorter EIS's that focus on the relevant and significant adverse environmental impacts. The more up front analysis of any proposed project and its potential impacts, the better the quality and efficiency of the EIS process. ..Other streamlining amendments include the following: changes in the critical environmental area (CEA) designation and review requirements to focus more attention on the review of impacts on a CEA rather than the current procedural compliance requirements (617.4, 617.11, 617.12); application of the conditioned negative declaration process to Type I actions (617.6) and extensive revisions to the EIS format (617.4(e)) which allow more flexibility in the format of an EIS and provide that if an item is not applicable or significant it should not appear in the EIS."

In response to these proposed revisions, the SEQR Committee studied the changes, gathered comments from other EMC members, and sent comments to the DEC on both the scoping document and the draft generic environmental impact statement.

Other efforts over the past year included:

- The Committee first urged the lead agency to complete an environmental impact statement on the proposed Mann Library Expansion on the Cornell Campus, and then commented on the draft environmental impact statement (dEIS) once it was completed. This action includes expanding and renovating Mann Library, relocating a loading dock, and building a new horatorium. The addition to Mann Library encroaches on the slope of old trees leading down to Beebe Lake; therefore, shading and storm runoff were the major concerns expressed by the SEQR Committee.
- The Committee reviewed parts of the State Energy Plan to see whether certain environmentally sound ideas and proposals were included.

The Committee thought that the plan needed much strengthening if any progress is to be made on decreasing energy consumption and dependence on environmentally deleterious energy sources. The plan is a large document, with major sections on Findings and Recommendations. The recommendations section was written in a sufficiently general way as to make it unclear what exactly was included as a recommendation. The Chair of the EMC sent in a letter of comment, but the SEQR committee did not.

- The Committee provided input to the County on certain aspects of the dEIS (accepted version) for the construction of a Wal-Mart store on Route 13 in the City of Ithaca. The SEQR Committee was asked to review and comment on the document by a Special Committee on Wal-Mart of the County Board of Representatives. With help from other EMC members, the Committee responded with a detailed memo outlining aspects of the dEIS that they believed were incomplete. The work of the EMC was acknowledged by the local media and the Chair of the Special Committee as being thorough and well done.

- The Committee reviewed documents related to a proposed 33 acre surface unconsolidated gravel mine adjacent to the Malloryville Bog. This site is on West Malloryville Road, approximately 2000 feet south of Peruville Road in the Town of Dryden and is adjacent to the Malloryville Bog, an area of unique ecological characteristics and hydrology. Because the site is upgrade from the bog, there is a real concern that the mining activity could alter the hydrology, and therefore the nature of the bog, permanently. The Committee sent a letter to the DEC expressing their concern regarding the project.

- The Committee reviewed the environmental assessment form prepared by Tompkins County Public Works for a bridge replacement on Blackman Hill Road over the West branch of Owego Creek with a bridge that is longer and wider. The Committee saw no significant potential impacts associated with the project.

- The Committee began to examine possible modifications to the list of activities considered to be Type I actions in the County.

- The Committee reviewed and commented on the Peregrine Hollow Cluster Development final EIS, located in the Town of Dryden.

- The Committee reviewed and commented on the environmental assessment form prepared for the Sunrise Acres Apartment development in the Town of Caroline.

- The Committee reviewed and commented on the Village of Trumansburg Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade.

Unique Natural Areas (UNAs)

Though the County contains many wonderful natural environments, we are constantly faced with choices between development and preservation of open space, farmland, and natural areas. These choices can best be made when information on the value of each resource is widely available. In 1990, the EMC produced an 800 page document entitled, *Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County*. This inventory lists nearly 200 places of special environmental quality within the County, and it is the responsibility of the UNA Committee to monitor the state of those areas and work on methods of protecting them.

Use of the *Inventory* over the past several years has identified a number of errors and inadequacies in the present document, traceable to the limited time and resources available during the period when the document was developed. Since the *Inventory* is receiving a good deal of use in planning processes around the County, it is critical that its correctness and comprehensiveness be ensured. The Committee has formulated a plan to make the necessary updates and corrections to the document and the database. The UNA Committee has been working with the database manager in the County Planning Department to make changes in the database, which is being updated so that all the information on soils and plant species within the

database is correct and available to the user. An EMC intern has been working to correct past mistakes in the database, as well.

Another important part of the updating effort is the field work associated with surveying several sites identified as "Future Sites" in the 1990 *Inventory*. These sites were identified, but not surveyed due to time and money constraints. In addition, a number of wetlands were included in the *Inventory* simply because they were designated as state wetlands, and not necessarily because they have unique qualities. The Committee decided to reexamine several of these wetland sites in order to determine the merits of including them in the UNA report. The Health and Environmental Quality Committee and the Board of Representatives authorized the EMC to hire two local botanists to perform the field work on these sites. In the fall/winter of 1994, the Committee worked with the consultants to select the 10 sites to be reviewed as a part of this update. The consultants will review background information on these sites, conduct field visits, and evaluate the environmental sensitivity and status of each of the sites. The Committee will work to obtain permission for the consultants to enter the land, and assist with the data collection and data entry.

Besides working to update the *Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County*, the Committee continued its work to produce a guidebook to assist users of the *Inventory*. The Committee collaborated with Karen Fox, a graduate student at Cornell, in researching and completing a section of the guidebook that deals with available alternatives for the protection of UNAs. The document, entitled "Methods of Balancing Development with the Protection of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County, New York", is currently available at the County Planning Department for public review. Remaining work on the guidebook includes: outlining the proper establishment of a buffer area around UNAs and proposing mechanisms for identifying the risks which various activities can pose to the health of unique areas.

Finally, at the request of the Health and Environmental Quality Committee, the UNA Committee Chair visited the County-owned forests in Newfield and Caroline to determine: 1) whether the County forest management plan was being followed, 2) whether good management practices were being adhered to, 3) whether County forests remained healthy, and 4) whether alterations to the bid specifications for the proposed timber harvest in Newfield should be modified. Comments and concerns were transmitted by letter to the County Planning Department and the Health and Environmental Quality Committee. The conclusion was that the County forestry consultant is, in general, doing a good job in managing the timber harvests in such a way as to leave little long-lasting impact on future health and productivity of these sites. However, the one exception to this statement is the failure to implement erosion control on a small but steep section of the Caroline forest during the recent clear-cut there. The County forest consultant recognizes this failure and said that he will prevent similar problems from occurring in future cutting operations.

Ad Hoc Indoor Air Quality

Representative Charles Evans, Chair of the Health and Environmental Quality Committee, asked the EMC to look at the relationship between the indoor air quality at the Biggs A building and the health effects that some of the workers claim to have suffered. This ad hoc committee was formed to respond to that request, and after reviewing Rep. Evans' file on this issue, the Committee concluded that there was not enough information to comment on the specific claims made by the workers. The Committee sent a letter to Rep. Evans offering to meet with the Health and Environmental Quality Committee or the full Board to discuss sick building syndrome in general, as one of the Committee members is a physician who specializes in environmental health. Additionally, the Committee forwarded its collection of library materials, and suggestions for useful documents on the subject, to the County Engineering Division and the County Occupational Health and Safety Officer.

1994 EMC Membership Roster

EMC Members

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Brent Alspach | At-Large, youth |
| Bob Beck | At-Large |
| Ron Beloin | Town of Enfield |
| Susan Brock | At-Large |
| Ed Cope | At-Large |
| Candace Cornell | Town of Ithaca |
| Herb Engman | At-Large |
| Bruce Johnson | Village of Freeville |
| Lynn Leopold | Village of Lansing |
| Jeff McDonald | Village of Trumansburg |
| Peter McDonald | City of Ithaca |
| Patricia Meinhardt | Village of Cayuga Heights |
| Gay Nicholson | Town of Lansing |
| Tom O'Brien | Village of Groton |
| Nancy Ostman | At-Large |
| Elizabeth Owens-Roe | Town of Danby |
| Peter Penniman | At-Large |
| Kevin Petrik | At-Large, youth |
| John Schwartz | At-Large |
| Dennis Swaney | Town of Dryden |
| Nick Vandam | Town of Caroline |
| David Weinstein | At-Large |
| Robert Wesley | At-Large |

Ex-Officio Members

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| John Andersson | Commissioner of Health Liaison |
| Paul Bonaparte-Krogh | Cooperative Extension Agent |
| James Hanson | Commissioner of Planning |
| Dooley Kiefer | Co. Board of Representatives Liaison |
| William Mobbs | Commissioner of Public Works |
| Henry Thiesen | County Attorney |

Associate Members

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Don Barber | David Boyd |
| Roxanne Marino | Richard Yager |
| Lee Kass | Kevin Bernier |
| Noel Gurwick | Kate Kelley-Mackenzie |
| Katie Knapp | Geri Tierney |
| Cinthia Loker | Don Brown |

EMC Staff

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Katherine White | EMC Coordinator |
| Karen Simpson | EMC Secretary |

Health & Environ. Quality Comm

| | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Charles Evans, Chair | Dooley Kiefer |
| Nancy Schuler | Frank Proto |
| George Totman | |