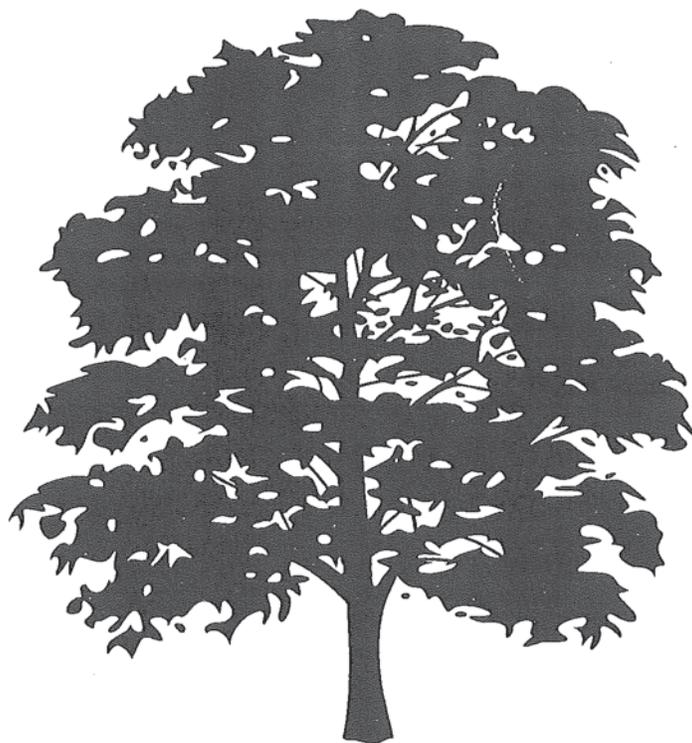


Tompkins County  
Environmental Management Council  
1996 Annual Report



**Tompkins County**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

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February 28, 1997

Barbara Mink  
Chair, Tompkins County Board of Representatives  
Tompkins County Courthouse  
Ithaca, NY 14850

To the Honorable Barbara Mink:

I am pleased to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the Environmental Management Council's 1996 Annual Report.

This past year was filled with awards and festivities for the EMC, with the Council winning two awards, receiving a framed statement of recognition from the County Board, and hosting a 25th anniversary celebration. The EMC also published its *Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County*, considered and analyzed many SEQR documents, and continued its work to revise and clarify the *Inventory of Unique Natural Areas*.

The EMC enjoyed a positive working relationship with the Health and Environmental Quality Committee in 1996, and we now anticipate working closely with the Planning, Development and Education Committee.

Please don't hesitate to call on the EMC if the Board ever comes across an environmental concern or issue that it feels needs to be studied or researched by a group of dedicated and talented citizens. When the EMC was created in 1971, it was charged to advise the County on environmental issues and to study the natural environment of Tompkins County, and those are the roles in which the Council thrives and to which it is best suited. We look forward to providing the public and the Board with high quality technical assistance and advice in the year to come.

Respectfully submitted,

*Ed Cope/KB*

Ed Cope  
Chair, Tompkins County EMC

# Tompkins County Environmental Management Council 1996 Annual Report

## **Organization**

The Tompkins County EMC works closely with the County Planning Department; sharing staff, office space, and equipment. Both of the organizations study the environment of the County, and advise the Board of Representatives on issues involving the environment. Since 1995, the EMC has received 100% of its funding from the County Board of Representatives, and in 1996, the EMC reported directly to the Health and Environmental Quality Committee of the Board of Representatives.

EMC members participate on the Council by attending general meetings and working on task-oriented committees. During 1996, the EMC met in January, February, April, June, August, October, November, and December. In October, the EMC adopted revised bylaws which state that the Council will meet monthly in 1997 and beyond. The reasoning behind this change was to allow the Council to respond to issues in a more timely manner, and to improve group unity and productivity. Six committees were formed in 1996: the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) Committee, the Unique Natural Areas (UNA) Committee, the Environmental Framework Committee, the Environmental Education Committee, the 25th Anniversary Celebration Committee, and the Ad Hoc County Sanitary Code Revisions Committee.

The EMC continued to produce its monthly newsletter, the *EMC News*. It was used to introduce resolutions, make announcements, and update all members and interested parties on the activities of the EMC. Membership was fairly steady in 1996, with one at-large (out of 12) and five municipal (out of 16) seats remaining vacant throughout the year. Additionally, nine associate members were active on the EMC.

## **EMC Resolutions**

The EMC passed five resolutions in 1996. The first resolution, passed in January, was titled, "Resolution opposing major cuts of staff at the Department of Environmental Conservation Division of Regulatory Services." This resolution opposed a large and disproportionate reduction in the staff of the Division of Regulatory Services, because such a reduction would "seriously undermine effective implementation of SEQRA and curtail the other services that office provides to local governments." The Board of Representatives supported this resolution by passing BOR Resolution No. 14, "Opposing major cuts of staff at the Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Regulatory Services." The proposed staff cuts wound up

being delayed until May, 1996, when 28% of regulatory services and 50% of legal affairs staff were given three weeks notice.

In February, the EMC passed a "Resolution recommending reopening of public hearings on the issue of need for a NYSEG proposal to connect the Seneca Lake Natural Gas Storage Facility through Tompkins County to the Binghamton area." The Board of Representatives again supported the EMC Resolution by passing a similar resolution of its own (BOR Resolution No. 48). Ultimately, the NYS Public Service Commission ruled that the issue of need had been addressed adequately by NYSEG, and construction of the pipeline began in the fall of 1996.

The third resolution, passed in April, was in support of an award application for the EMC to publicize and discuss the EMC's *Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County* with groups throughout the County. Unfortunately, the EMC did not receive the award.

The fourth resolution passed by the EMC dealt with the proposed incinerator at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine. The August resolution was entitled, "Recommending that Cornell University suspend the permitting process for siting an incinerator at the College of Veterinary Medicine until proper public participation into the environmental analysis can be obtained." The result of extensive public concern was that Cornell formed an advisory committee to study the waste disposal options. The EMC Chair represents the EMC on that committee, which began meeting in the fall of 1996.

The final resolution passed by the EMC was a "Resolution requesting that the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation extend the review period for the Allan H. Treman State Marine Park final master plan and environmental impact statement." Based on this resolution, State Parks extended the review period by two weeks, in order to make a complete review period of thirty days. The EMC submitted extensive comments and received a letter of response from the Commissioner of State Parks. At the end of the year, the EMC decided to send a follow-up letter to the City of Ithaca's Common Council, and to State Parks. The main issues of concern to the EMC were the preservation of Hog Hole, the proposed relocation of the marina entrance road, the proposed additional bulkhead with 40 new slips, and the City's continued ownership of the so-called Festival Lands.

## ***Committee Activities***

### ***Unique Natural Areas Committee***

The mission of the Unique Natural Areas Committee is to provide information on UNAs in Tompkins County to land-owners, municipalities, conservation organizations, developers, and residents, and to promote the protection of UNAs in the County.

In 1996, the Committee continued its efforts (begun in 1994) to revise the *Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County*. The goals of the revision are to: 1) make the report format more useful to municipalities, 2) update the data base to give it more detail and make it more user-friendly, and 3) expand the information contained in the report to make it more comprehensive. This past year the Committee made significant steps in achieving these goals.

Through many discussions between UNA Committee members and County Planning Department staff, a new data base was selected and, in early 1997, work was begun to create its format. Changes and corrections will continue to be made to the data base, and efforts will continue to make the data more consistent.

A student intern was hired in the fall of 1996 to go through the data base in a systematic way, field by field, to check for accuracy and completeness. The following was accomplished:

- Data were revised to reflect the standardized fields for the UNA data base created last year for cover types, reasons for selecting sites for evaluation, and community types.
- Information on soil types was checked for completeness and additional information was added to a data base.
- Information from the DEC wetland survey on plant communities, plants, animals, geological features and wetland status was gleaned from the 1989 DEC wetland study and entered into a data base.
- Information on animals and geological features were compiled from several sources and entered into a data base.
- Working with the DEC, the intern reviewed the status of protected wetlands and streams to make sure that information is comprehensive and up-to-date.

Additionally, UNA Committee members began collecting information on birds, which will be included in the revised UNA Inventory. The Committee is working with the Cayuga Bird Club to collect more information on birds in the UNAs, and to devise a way to evaluate the importance of local birding sites.

Beyond direct UNA Inventory work, the UNA Committee also (at the request of the EMC) reviewed the effects of several proposed projects on UNAs in the County. Committee members provided written evaluation and testimony to developers and public agencies concerning proposed projects in the vicin-

ity of the Danby Fir Tree Swamp, Negundo Woods, Headwaters Swamp, Woodwardia Woods, Woodwardia Bog, and Mud Creek Swamp.

### ***Environmental Education Committee***

The Environmental Education Committee spent most of its time this past year communicating EMC business and initiatives to the public through media outlets. Below is a list of the Committee's activities in 1996:

- Media releases were prepared and distributed for: recruiting for EMC openings, announcing the Environmental Directory, announcing the Environmental Framework and associated public meetings and the fall Environmental Forum.
- A series of radio public service announcements related to burn barrel issues were recorded and played (in cooperation with Cayuga Nature Center and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County).
- A draft of a general information brochure about the EMC was prepared and edited by two EMC interns. The committee plans to complete the brochure in 1997.
- Committee members coordinated a public forum (in cooperation with Cayuga Nature Center and Cornell Cooperative Extension) to introduce and discuss the EMC's *Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County*. Members of the Framework committee presented information and discussed the issues with approximately 30 citizens.
- Under the supervision of the Committee, an EMC intern completed an application for the New York State Governor's Award for Pollution Prevention for the EMC's work on trying to reduce emissions from the open burning of household solid waste through education. Unfortunately, the EMC did not receive this award.

One other note on the work of the Environmental Education Committee is that the open burning materials that the EMC prepared in 1995, were adapted and widely distributed by (at least) three organizations: the NYS Legislative Commission on Solid Waste Management adapted the EMC's brochure, the Town of Enfield's newsletter had an article based on the information in the brochure, and Cayuga County's newsletter stated that they had 4 colored flyers and a brochure available to the public on open burning.

### ***Environmental Framework Committee***

After a year of group discussions about the *Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County*, the EMC formally adopted the report in February, 1996. In May, after further discussions and a presentation by the Committee to the County Board of Representatives, the Board voted to accept the

report (BOR Resolution No. 135). Once the report was adopted and accepted, the Committee undertook the task of bringing the report to the general public and specific interest groups in the County.

The Framework was widely distributed to municipalities and numerous organizations and agencies in Tompkins County. The Committee asked EMC municipal representatives to present the information in the Framework to their town and village boards, and suggested discussing with the boards the role of the EMC in the County, the reasoning the EMC used in developing the report, and some of the highlights of the report. Finally, members were urged to invite board members and the attendees to read all or part of the report and give the EMC feedback on what kinds of information or support they would find useful, and to extend an offer from the EMC to come back at a later time - after they've had more time to look over the report - to discuss it, either at a board meeting, or a separate public meeting, or whatever kind of meeting they'd prefer. During the summer, many presentations were made to municipal boards and various groups on the contents of the Framework.

Two important ideas that came out of some of these discussions have not yet been acted upon. One is to conduct a survey of County departments and other relevant organizations to determine the status of environment-related activities discussed in the Framework, and the other is to explore the relation of the Framework to other County long-range planning activities.

In October, members of the Committee presented information about the Framework at a Public Forum on the Environmental Framework, which was jointly sponsored by the EMC, the Cayuga Nature Center, and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Discussion among the approximately 30 attendees at the Forum was lively, but friendly. Participants identified several follow-up sessions that they would like to attend: water quality issues, biological corridor creation, and where development should take place in the County.

At the invitation of the Steuben County EMC, the Chair of the Framework Committee attended their August meeting to share with them the Tompkins County EMC's experiences dealing with open space issues and development of the Unique Natural Areas Inventory.

In addition, the Framework Committee began working jointly with the County Planning Department to begin data collection for a County Natural Resource Inventory, as recommended in the Framework. During the summer and fall, two interns began conducting interviews (primarily with professors and staff at Cornell) and compiling a data base of information sources on natural resources in Tompkins County. Committee members assisted in directing the work of the interns.

## *SEQR Committee*

In 1996, the SEQR committee was a small, two-person standing committee which assisted the EMC by first deciding whether the Council had the expertise or time to address an issue, and second recruiting the appropriate people from the Council to work on that issue. Reviewing development proposals under the SEQR law remains a key job of the EMC. The goal of these reviews is to identify and promote the least environmentally damaging option of any necessary development. The EMC plays a particularly important role in reviewing documents for projects which cross town borders or strongly influence a municipality other than the one that is directly experiencing the development.

In March, the EMC assisted the County Planning Federation in its work to host a training session on the SEQR Act and its implementation. The focus of the training was to educate planning boards and the public on the newly issued revisions to the SEQR regulations.

Projects that were reviewed by the SEQR Committee in 1996 included:

- Cornell Lake Source Cooling Project—the Committee reviewed the “Interim Report: Results of the 1995 Investigation,” the Full EAF, and the draft scope for the EIS for this large pipeline into and out of Cayuga Lake and up to Cornell University. The Committee found that the scope was thorough and well done, but asked that: 1) plans be developed for containment or mitigation of possible leaks of the internal circulating water because of the presence of anticorrosive agents in the water, 2) that the local effects of phosphorus loading on the southern end of Cayuga Lake be addressed, and 3) that plans be developed for the possibility of encountering contaminated material in the terrestrial part of the pipeline. The Committee will continue to provide comment on this project as it progresses through the SEQR process.
- Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine Incinerator—in 1992, the EMC submitted extensive comments on a partially completed EAF for this project, and in 1996, the EMC became concerned that the scope of the project seemed to have changed and that the level of public involvement in the SEQR process had been inadequate. The SEQR Committee reviewed information on the proposed incinerator and wrote several letters to Cornell on the subject. The Chair of the EMC is now serving as the EMC liaison to a special advisory committee to Cornell on this issue.
- Inlet Island Cass Park Lands Conversion—the Committee reviewed this proposal to remove 6.63 acres from park status to be replaced by 74 acres in Ithaca Falls, 6-mile Creek and Cayuga Inlet. The Committee did not comment on this project, as it found no significant impacts associated with the proposal.
- Tompkins County Human Services Building—the Commit-

tee reviewed the full EAF and found it well done. Minor comments were submitted on the assessment of traffic and parking needs, and the Committee encouraged the County, as lead agency, to evaluate long-term savings (environmentally and economically) of alternative energy sources and devices.

- Buttermilk Valley Estates Subdivision—the Committee submitted comments on this project, located above Buttermilk Falls in the Town of Ithaca. Comments included concerns about pollutants entering Buttermilk Falls Park through various means, the need to provide a buffer area for the Park, and the importance of efficient energy design in the development.
- Allen H. Treman State Marine Park—EMC members who reviewed past documents on this project reviewed the Final Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Park issued this year. Comments made by the EMC were outlined in the “resolutions” section of this annual report.
- Other projects that were reviewed by the Committee in 1996, were Saddlewood Farms (in the Town of Ithaca), and The Woods (in Cornell Heights Historic District).

### ***25th Anniversary Celebration Committee***

1996 marked the 25th anniversary of the Tompkins County EMC. In order to celebrate this auspicious occasion, the EMC threw a party. Invitations were sent to all current and past EMC members (who had addresses that the Committee could find), all municipal board members, and the press. The Committee put together several displays of the EMC's activities and accomplishments over the past 25 years, and even dug out some old photos and many half-forgotten awards. The party itself was held on November 14, in the Unitarian Church in Ithaca. Around 50 people attended the celebration, and everyone was pleased to have the opportunity to share EMC stories, renew old connections, make new connections, and admire the displays of the many EMC accomplishments. Those who shared their thoughts about the EMC's history included Stu Stein, Nancy Schuler, Dooley Kiefer, Bev Livesay, Ed Cope, Herb Engman, Don Barber, Barney Unsworth, Benta King, Roger Rector, Jim Skaley, Dan Hoffman, Judy Rossiter, and Richard Fischer, who was honored for his outstanding service of 20 years on the EMC—the longest term ever served on the Council. Many people vowed to get together again someday to continue the discussions.

### ***Ad Hoc Co. Sanitary Code Revisions Committee***

This group was formed specifically to study and comment on the proposed revisions to Article I and VI of the Tompkins County Sanitary Code. The Committee presented the following issues to the Board of Health: 1) concern about reducing the depth to bedrock requirements in the code to 2', since the USEPA recommends 2-4', and 2) concern about the wide flexibility in the waivers that can be granted and the strictness

of standards, and 3) concern that, while there are appeals procedures in place for a builder that has a waiver denied, there are no such appeals procedures for a neighbor that is concerned over a waiver that is granted on nearby property.

### ***Awards***

1996 was a year of awards and recognition for the Tompkins County EMC, in that it was formally recognized by the New York State Association of EMCs and the County Legislature for its accomplishments in producing the *Tompkins County Environmental Directory 1996*, and the *Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County*. The EMC's Environmental Directory received first place (education/media category) in the NYSAEMC's statewide competition, and the Framework placed second, in the project/plan category. As a result of these awards, the County Board of Representatives presented the EMC with a framed formal recognition commending the EMC for its achievements, and recognizing the EMC for the honors it received.

### ***Advice on County Land Transactions***

This past year was the first year that the new County Land Policy (BOR Resolution No. 317) was implemented. The Land Policy states that, prior to the County voluntarily selling or leasing any real property, the Planning Department shall determine the existence and significance of natural, cultural and/or historic features on the property and identify significant concerns regarding zoning and local/regional strategic land-use plans. It goes on to state that the Planning Department shall “request the assistance of advisory boards, as necessary.”

At the request of the Planning Department, the EMC provided information and recommendations on four parcels that the County was considering selling. The first was a narrow piece of land in the City of Ithaca on Elmira Road, on the site that the Wal-Mart department store chain had proposed for one of its stores. The EMC recommended that, in order to protect the natural qualities of the site, the County should retain ownership of the portion of the parcel in the FW-1 zone, and the portion of the parcel zoned as B-5 should be sold. However, the EMC further recommended that any sale should be on the condition that one or two easements be created across the consolidated lands to provide trail access between the levee and the newly constructed bridge abutments on Elmira Road, and to the FW-1 portion of the parcel from Elmira Road.

The second and third parcels considered by the EMC were considered jointly, as they abut one another in the Town of Ithaca in the vicinity of Five Mile Drive and Negundo Woods. The EMC recommended that the County sell both parcels, but with restrictions to “limit development to low impact, light recreational uses that have as their primary intent to preserve the natural features of the area.”

The fourth parcel that was reviewed by the Council was a parcel in the Town of Spencer, Tioga County. The County was considering purchasing the Hillview landfill property and selling a portion of it (the part with the transfer station on it) to the Town of Spencer for their use to store road salt. The EMC recommended that the following issues be better clarified prior to any sale or purchase of the land in question: doors on the transfer station, DEC regulations regarding salt storage, and any past agreements between the County and the Town of Danby regarding the transfer station.

Finally, as a result of the above reviews, the EMC wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Board of Representatives stating that members were grateful for the opportunity to participate in the land reviews, but also expressed frustration at being given so little time to review and advise on proposed land transactions. The EMC requested that they be given 60 days to review information in the future, and that the County Board work with the EMC to develop a workable implementation procedure for the land policy.

### ***Special Meetings/Presentations***

There were three special presentations made to the EMC at its meetings in 1996.

Representatives of the Tompkins County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board reviewed the results of their research and the tentative recommendations made in the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. They discussed benefits of protecting agriculture in Tompkins County, barriers to farming viability in the County, and options to strengthen local agriculture. Most of the discussion centered around the following possible options: land use planning and zoning that protects viable farmland and recognizes property rights of farmers; voluntary land retention programs (e.g. Purchase of Development Rights and conservation easements); equitable assessment in taxation, and changes in the way property taxes are used for education; agriculture economic development; adopting local right-to-farm legislation; advocating against overly restrictive regulations for farmers; and urging the County Legislature to issue a statement of support for farming in the County.

The second presentation was given by Joan Bokaer, of EcoVillage, who presented the basic principals of EcoCities by showing slides of cities and development trends from around the world. She would like to promote and develop the EcoCity concept in Ithaca and Tompkins County, and delivered the information to the EMC in an effort to educate and discuss the key issues involved. She said that she sees the next steps in developing these ideas into reality as: building density in the City, finding the transit lines and encouraging development along those lines, removing parking in the City, rewriting the tax structure to tax people who choose to live outside of the City, establishing bicycle and pedestrian-only streets, re-establishing a trolley system, and better defining the edge of the City.

The third presentation was made by representatives of Cornell University, on the proposed Cornell Veterinary School incinerator. The presenters told the EMC about the scope of the project, and discussed the composition of Cornell's waste stream in detail. Much of the discussion centered around types of regulated medical waste, and how the SEQR process was followed. Ruth Mahr, president of the Forest Home Improvement Association and a member of Citizens Concerned about the Medical Waste Incinerator, was also present at the meeting. She clarified the major concerns of the citizens groups: 1) the incineration of Regulated Medical Waste that includes the burning of plastics, and the subsequent release of dioxins and heavy metals as by-products, and 2) the aesthetics of the project. This was a long meeting, and a lot of information and ideas were exchanged.

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## 1996 EMC Membership Roster

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### *EMC Members*

Bob Beck	At-Large
Ron Beloin	At-Large
Elizabeth Brauner	Town of Groton
Susan Brock	At-Large
Jules Burgevin	Village of Trumansburg
Melissa Carey	At-Large, Youth
Ed Cope	At-Large, Chair of EMC
Barbara Ebert	City of Ithaca
Herb Engman	At-Large
Joyce Gerbasi	Town of Dryden
Janet Hawkes	Town of Ulysses
Bruce Johnson	Village of Freeville
Lynn Leopold	Village of Lansing
Patricia Meinhardt	Village of Cayuga Heights
Gay Nicholson	At-Large
Nancy Ostman	At-Large
Larry Sharpsteen	Town of Lansing
Nick Vandam	Town of Caroline
Chris Vonderweidt	At-Large, Youth
David Weinstein	At-Large
Robert Wesley	At-Large
Phil Zarriello	Town of Ithaca

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### *Ex-Officio Members*

Sharon Anderson	Cooperative Extension Agent
Dawn Czajka	Commissioner of Health Liaison
James Hanson	Commissioner of Planning
Dooley Kiefer	Co. Board of Representatives Liaison
William Mobbs	Commissioner of Public Works
Henry Thiesen	County Attorney

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### *Associate Members*

Don Barber	Carolyn Long
David Boyd	Joah Sapphire
Candace Cornell	Paul Stevenson
Noel Gurwick	Geri Tierney
Kate Kelley-Mackenzie	

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### *EMC Staff*

Katherine Borgella	EMC Coordinator
Dariele Drake	EMC Secretary

### *Health & Environ. Quality Comm*

Charles Evans, Chair	Nancy Schuler
Susanne Davis	Daniel Winch
Dooley Kiefer	