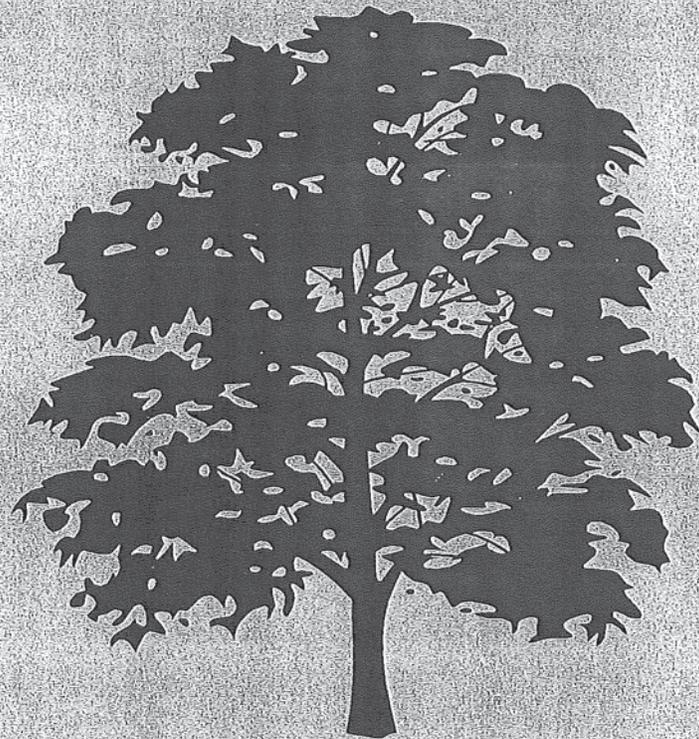


Tompkins County  
Environmental Management Council  
1997 Annual Report



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

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March 17, 1998

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 1997 Annual Report.

Once again, the year was filled with activity by a highly qualified and dedicated Council. Reviewing development proposals, gathering information about unique natural areas, and educating the public on environmental issues continue to dominate the EMC's agenda, interspersed with a few other kinds of activities, such as cleaning up the litter from the lakeshore.

We have made great strides in improving the Unique Natural Areas Inventory, and hope to issue the revised inventory in 1998. We are also looking forward to hosting the New York State Association of EMC's Annual Conference on the Environment in September, 1998. This conference should bring positive publicity and a boost to the economy of Tompkins County.

We are looking forward to working with the new, smaller Planning and Intermunicipal Cooperation Committee this year, after successful communication with the Board in 1997 through its liaison, Stu Stein, and the Planning, Development and Education Committee.

Please call on the EMC to advise the Board on any environmental issue or concern that occurs. Our talented group is able to respond with thoughtful and well researched statements on most issues that might arise. We look forward to informing and educating Tompkins County citizens on environmental issues and providing technical assistance in the year ahead.

Respectfully submitted,



Ed Cope  
Chair, Tompkins County EMC

# Tompkins County Environmental Management Council 1997 Annual Report

## **Organization**

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council is located in the Tompkins County Planning Department, and staff and equipment is shared between the two organizations. The EMC is funded by the County Board of Representatives, and, in 1997, the EMC reported directly to the Board's Planning, Development and Education Committee. Ed Cope served as Chair of the EMC, reporting periodically to the PDE Committee on the EMC's work and goals for the year. At the invitation of PDE Chair, Barbara Blanchard, the chairs of the eight advisory boards that reported to the PDE Committee in 1997 met to get to know each other and discuss areas of common interest.

EMC members participate on the Council by attending general meetings and working on task-oriented committees. During 1997, the EMC met every month. Five committees were formed: the Environmental Review Committee, the Unique Natural Areas Committee, the Education Committee, the Invasive Species Committee, and the Waterfront Planning Committee.

The EMC continued to produce its monthly newsletter, the *EMC News*. It was used to introduce resolutions and official correspondence, make announcements, and update all members and interested parties on the activities of the EMC. Membership was fairly steady in 1997, with two at-large (out of twelve) and three municipal (out of sixteen) seats remaining vacant throughout the year. The EMC had twelve active associate members during the year.

## **EMC Resolutions and Official Correspondence**

The EMC passed one resolution in 1997, and Chair Ed Cope wrote several official letters on the Council's behalf. The resolution, passed in September, was titled, "Resolution adopting the report on Lake Source Cooling." It affirmed the full Council's support for the work done by the Environmental Review Committee in its review of Cornell's Lake Source Cooling project.

Additionally, the Chair of the EMC was authorized to write letters for the Council on the following issues:

- rural recycling drop-off center
- fuel oil spill in Cayuga Inlet Creek
- state financial support for EMCs and CACs in NYS
- statewide ban on open burning
- Town of Ithaca's Draft Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan

## **Committee Activities**

### **Unique Natural Areas Committee**

The mission of the UNA Committee is to provide information on unique natural areas in Tompkins County to landowners, municipalities, conservation organizations, developers and residents, and to promote the protection of UNAs throughout the County.

The UNA Committee has continued to revise and augment the Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County. Below are highlights of the work that was completed this year on the UNA Inventory revision.

- The following information was added: recreational rivers, critical environmental areas, agricultural districts, recreational opportunities, biological corridors, stream classifications and names, wetland classifications, floodplain classifications, and areas of cultural, scenic and historical significance.
- Each UNA was digitized in the Planning Department's GIS using contours, DEC wetlands, streets, municipal boundaries, and railroads to better define the boundaries of the UNAs.
- A computerized database of soils information was created using data provided by the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service. This database contains a brief description of each soil type, erodibility, agricultural productivity, and whether or not the soil is considered hydric.
- Representatives from the UNA Committee attended a meeting of the Tompkins County Planning Federation to discuss the Unique Natural Areas Inventory. Ideas were solicited about content, layout, and what municipal board and planning board members want from the UNA Inventory. Federation members urged the EMC to make the inventory follow the SEQQR forms as closely as possible, so that it would be easier to complete the required forms.
- The UNA Committee assisted the County Planning Department in creating a database of the protected lands in the County, by providing information on the types of ecological communities found on land that is currently protected. This information will also be used in rating the UNAs.
- Local resource specialists and state inventories were consulted to create a database of fauna for the UNA report. Lists of local birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and amphibians were compiled.

- The introduction to the report is being re-written to make it more concise and easier to understand by lay people.
- Committee members worked with the Planning Department's computer specialist to create the UNA database in a flexible format.

Additionally, the Committee was involved in nominating two new projects in Tompkins County for inclusion on the supplemental list of priority projects of the DEC Region 7 Open Space Advisory Committee. The two projects were approved by the Open Space Advisory Committee and added to the list. They are:

- 1) Beaver Brook Wetlands Complex, located in Dryden and Groton. This project would preserve a group of unique wetlands along Beaver Brook that provide habitat for rare plants. The area is adjacent to the Lime Hollow Nature Center project, which was also put on the list.
- 2) Cayuga Lake Eastern Shore Lake Cliffs and Glen Complex, located in Lansing. This site contains cliffs and glens with rare plants. This project would preserve the cliffs and slopes along the south end of the eastern slope of the Cayuga Lake Valley. The area includes Esty, Twin, and Hidden Glens.

Finally, after years of work by neighbors, biologists, and geologists (including members of the UNA Committee), it was announced in 1997 that over 300 acres of the Malloryville Fen (including three UNAs) will be permanently protected. The Nature Conservancy bought the 109 acre parcel that was slated for mining, and fee simple purchases and purchases of conservation easements make up the rest of the new preserve. A special committee will develop guidelines for future uses of the site.

### *Environmental Review Committee*

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.

Additionally, the committee worked on other land and water issues when it was not reviewing SEQR documents, and the Committee made a commitment this past year to follow-up on items published in the Environmental Notice Bulletin.

Below are the key projects that were reviewed by the Environmental Review Committee in 1997.

- Cornell University's Lake Source Cooling Project proposal (to provide cooling water to Cornell University through a series

of pipelines (and a heat exchanger) by using cool water from the depths of Cayuga Lake, and returning warmed water closer to the Lake's surface) took up much of the Committee's time in 1997. The Committee provided written comments on a preliminary version of the DEIS, the accepted four volume DEIS, the FEIS, and the Army Corps of Engineers' permit.

In August, a special meeting of the EMC was called to discuss the EMC's comments on the Cornell Lake Source Cooling DEIS. Concerns discussed included: other alternatives not addressed in the DEIS, monitoring of the environmental impacts, criteria and timetable for shut down if adverse conditions arise, and ongoing questions about the environmental effects of piggings operations, phosphorus output and lake water warming.

In September, the Council passed a resolution adopting the work of the Environmental Review Committee on this review. Additionally, an ad-hoc committee was formed to publicize the project and the EMC's concerns. Several Committee members gave interviews to the radio and TV, wrote articles about the project, and appeared on local cable access talk shows to discuss the project.

- The Committee reviewed the EAF from the Ithaca United Soccer Club, which wanted to lease airport land to build soccer fields. The EMC asked that the potential negative impacts (from chemical run-off from parking lot, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers) to the wetlands, pond and wildlife be considered. Human health concerns were also cited as an issue, due to the three disposal sites in the area.

- The committee sent a follow-up letter to the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and to the City of Ithaca Common Council, on the EMC's concerns about the State's Final Master Plan and EIS Findings Statement for Treman Marina.

- No major impacts were noted after review of Cornell University/State University Construction Fund's proposed classroom and laboratory addition to Martha Van Rensselaer Hall.

- No major impacts were noted after review of a DEC permit application for a flood repair project on Virgil Creek in Dryden. The gravel bar to be removed in the project was the result of recent flooding, and the plan to rip-rap 180 feet of the bank was to control erosion.

- The Committee commented on both the DEIS and the FEIS for the RMS Gravel Mine proposal in the Town of Dryden.

- The Committee commented on the DEIS for the Trumansburg Post Office.

- The Committee commented on a gravel operation in the Town of Groton

- The Committee commented on a request by Cornell for a variance from Clean Air Act standards at its heating facility.
- The Committee supported specific priority sites and, in general, supported the goal of increasing the small projects fund in the Draft NYS Open Space Conservation Plan.

### ***Education Committee***

In 1997, the Education Committee worked closely with other education-oriented groups in the County to develop and hold joint workshops and educational events. In May, Committee members assisted the County Planning Federation with its forum on drainage and flooding issues, entitled "Municipal Planning and Project Development Review: A Discussion of the Implications for Flooding, Drainage, Streams, and Lakes," which looked at planning for whole watersheds and how site developments impact drainage and flooding.

Several Committee members served on the County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board's Education Committee, which worked on publicity and public relations for agricultural producers in the County.

In September, Committee members worked with Cooperative Extension and the Cayuga Nature Center to host a public forum on water issues in the County.

This past year, the EMC produced a high-quality brochure containing general information about the EMC, its work, and its membership. It will be used for recruiting new members and as a quick tool to explain the purpose, goals, and organization of the EMC.

The Education Committee was also involved in publicizing the EMC's concerns about Cornell's proposed Lake Source Cooling project. Committee members worked closely with the Environmental Review committee and wrote articles and press releases about the project.

Finally, initial discussions began on creating a web site for the EMC. The Committee hopes to have an active, informative and interesting web site up and running in 1998.

### ***Invasive Species Ad Hoc Committee***

When it came to the Council's attention that some County and State organizations were selling several plant species that are considered invasive, this ad hoc committee was formed to study and make recommendations on invasive plants in the County.

Committee members worked with the State to develop a state-wide invasive species list, and, in 1998, the Committee plans to mesh the state, federal and local plant lists to create an invasive species list for Tompkins County. The Tompkins County invasive species list will most likely be different from the NY

State list, which includes species that have not proven to be invasive in this area. This may be because of different climates throughout the state, with some species not able to succeed in the wild here, or because the species have not been used extensively in landscaping in this area yet. The Committee expects this list will need to be updated and augmented as the behavior of suspect plants is observed over time. Once the County list is completed, the Committee plans to discuss the information with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, the DEC, and other organizations that sell plants, own natural areas, and review development proposals in the County.

In an effort to educate the public on invasive species in 1997, Committee members lead several workshops on invasive plant species and on invasive aquatic species in the County..

### ***Waterfront Planning Ad Hoc Committee***

In April, an ad hoc committee was formed to review the *Tompkins County Waterfront Plan Final Report* and make a recommendation to the EMC on any action that should be taken. The purpose of the Committee was to: 1) review documents (such as the meeting notes from the environmental discussion groups, the three public meetings held while the Waterfront Plan was being developed, and the EMC's Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning) to identify environmental areas that need to be addressed in this next planning stage, 2) suggest how to incorporate environmental protection into the upcoming revitalization plan, and 3) identify any projects proposed in the waterfront plan that raise strong environmental concerns.

In 1997, the Committee reviewed the complete Plan, researched the status of each of the projects listed in the Plan, and reviewed and commented on the draft Request for Qualifications for consultants on the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). Ed Cope agreed to serve as the EMC's representative on the Review subcommittee of the Waterfront Study Group for the LWRP.

### ***Salt Point Clean up***

On October 11, 1997, EMC members picked-up debris from the land on the north side of Salmon Creek, across from the Lansing Town Park. In two hours the crew collected about 20 bags of trash and another two bags of recyclable containers. The trash bags were donated by the DEC office in Cortland, the Lansing Highway Department allowed the EMC to dump the trash in their dumpsters and recycling bins, the Cornell Plantations loaned their work gloves, the Lansing Lions loaned their litter pickers, and Ithaca Bakery generously donated fresh bagels to the effort.

### ***Rural Recycling Centers***

In response to the County's plans to close the rural recycling drop-off centers on March 31, 1997, the EMC studied the issue and authorized Chair Ed Cope to write a letter from the EMC recommending that the County work with municipalities to try to keep the drop-off centers open, because municipalities have good motives in promoting recycling and because the rural centers have had successful programs in the past. After March 31, the rural centers closed, except in the Towns of Lansing and Groton. Groton's decision was made easier by the County continuing to allow the Town to use the County-owned land on which the center is located.

### ***Waste Management Project at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine***

In both 1992 and 1996, the EMC submitted extensive comments on a proposal to incinerate waste at the College of Veterinary Medicine. In 1996, the Chair of the EMC volunteered to serve as the EMC liaison to a special advisory committee to Cornell on this issue. Ed Cope continued to serve on that committee in 1997, and often updated the EMC on the progress being made on the issue. The main accomplishments of the advisory committee in 1997 were to: 1) establish the rules of operation and the role and power of the committee, 2) develop a waste minimization plan for the Vet School, 3) determine the relationship between Cornell and the State University Construction Fund on this issue, 4) identify the components of the Veterinary College's waste stream, 5) come up with the criteria by which to judge the various disposal options, and 6) identify, study and analyze the various disposal options available.

### ***Fuel Oil Spills***

Two fuel oil spills occurred in area waters in the fall of 1997. On November 3, 4,000 - 6,000 gallons of oil were spilled after a Conrail train derailed in West Danby. The oil spilled directly into Cayuga Inlet Creek, and local biologists estimate that it will take a decade for the stream to recover biologically. On December 3, 200 - 1,000 gallons of oil were released into Fall Creek, above Cornell University's drinking water intake. That spill resulted from fuel overflowing from a tank at Saunders Concrete Co. on Pinckney Road in Etna.

The November spill caused extensive damage to the fish and invertebrates in the immediate area of the spill, and for several kilometers downstream. The Chair of the EMC wrote a letter to the members of the County Board informing them of the biological damage, and asking them to contact the DEC to let the staff know of the County's strong desire to see the stream restored to its pre-spill condition. In January, 1998, the Chair of the County Board wrote a letter asking the DEC to give its complete attention to the disaster to ensure that all steps are taken to return the stream to its pre-spill condition.

### ***Finger Lakes National Forest***

Early in the year, the US Forest Service began the revision of the 10-year forest management plan for the Finger Lakes National Forest. Several EMC members attended some of the public meetings and updated the Council on the status of discussions.

### ***NYS Associations of Environmental Management Councils***

At the request of the President of the NYSAEMCs, Chair Ed Cope sent out eighteen letters to State Senators, Assembly Members, the Governor and DEC representatives, asking that \$600,000 be allocated in the State budget to partially support the activities of EMCs and CACs throughout the state. The EMC received nine responses, ranging from strong support to reasons why the budget can't be increased to cover the cost of financially supporting EMCs and CACs.

In the spring, the Tompkins County EMC was approached by the NYSAEMC to see if the Council was interested in hosting next fall's New York State Conference on the Environment. After discussing the work program for 1998 and conference ideas, the EMC agreed to host the conference. In the late fall, a Conference Planning Committee was formed to begin planning the event, which typically brings 100 - 150 people to the area.

### ***Open Burning***

Although the EMC did not directly work on the issue of open burning in 1997, its previous work continued to generate interest. Several people requested copies of the EMC's educational materials, and asked for support on a statewide ban on open burning. In the spring, the New York Public Interest Research Group asked the EMC for an official memorandum of support for a bill that was reported out of the Senate's Environmental Conservation Committee, to add to its memorandums on file from the American Lung Association, Citizens' Environmental Coalition, Browning-Ferris Industries, Inc., NYS Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials, Sierra Club, NYPIRG, Farm Bureau, the League of Women Voters, and Environmental Advocates. In May, the EMC voted to send such a memorandum of support.

### ***Appointments to the EMC***

On December 31, 1997, the terms of all At-Large and Municipal members of the EMC expired. Therefore, in the fall, the coordinator publicized the upcoming vacancies in the local press, and the Executive Committee developed a coordinated procedure to fill appointments to the EMC. The Executive Committee made recommendations to the Planning, Development and Education Committee on all at-large applicants following newly developed procedures for appointments and criteria for recommending appointments. In 1998, the Executive Committee plans on developing a more detailed grid of

skills/knowledge, contact organizations, demographics, etc., to guide appointment recommendations.

### ***Cellular Transmission Towers***

In the fall, the EMC was approached by an associate member and several members of a citizens' group interested in regional planning for siting of cellular transmission towers and co-use of existing structures. The EMC Coordinator attended a seminar on cellular technology, and distributed several model ordinances to municipal EMC members to share with their municipal boards.

### ***Colonial Cleaners***

EMC members attended public meetings having to do with the proposed Interim Remedial Measure Decision Document and the results of the Remedial Investigation for the Colonial Cleaners Inactive Hazardous Waste Site in Lansing. Tests have shown that the main pollutant in the groundwater is tetrachloroethene, which is a common dry cleaning solvent and that the groundwater plume has moved from Route 34 towards the lake. The remediation was set to begin in September, 1997.

### ***EMC Liaisons***

Several County boards and committees requested that the EMC appoint liaisons to serve on various committees. In addition to the liaison work described in other sections of this report, the following people served as liaisons in 1997: Don Barber served on the County Water Quality Steering Committee, Bob Roe served on the County Flood Mitigation Oversight Committee, Lynn Leopold agreed to serve on the Study Committee for the Article 8 Sanitary Code Revision, and Carolyn Long served on the Household Hazardous Waste Management Advisory Group. During the year, these liaisons updated the EMC on the work of all of those committees.

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

There were four special presentations made to the EMC at its meetings in 1997.

- In March, Peter Trowbridge, from Trowbridge and Wolf Landscape Architects, and Jim Hanson, Commissioner of Planning, presented the Tompkins County Waterfront Plan to the EMC. They showed slides of various aspects of the plan, explained the public participation process, and distributed copies of the executive summary of the plan. The five goals that emerged from the public for enhancing the waterfront were: 1) increase public access and improve waterfront parks, 2) improve boating facilities and operations, 3) encourage appropriate economic development, including tourism, 4) improve linkages between waterfront destination, existing residential neighborhoods and business districts, and 5) conserve and interpret waterfront natural and cultural resources. In response

to the presentation, the EMC decided to form an ad hoc committee to review the Plan's complete final report and make a recommendation to the EMC on any action that should be taken.

- Beth Baldwin, from Cornell's Water Resources Institute, gave a presentation on the Environmental Community Assistance Consortium, which is a consortium consisting of representatives from three universities: the Maxwell School and College of Engineering and Computer Science of Syracuse University; the NYS Water Resources Institute at Cornell; and the Darrin Fresh Water Institute at RPI. The four purposes of the program are to train and assist local communities; access institutional expertise and resources at member universities; outreach and educate; and support government agencies through research and internships. There are three main program areas: water resource development, economic development, and capacity building at the local level. Although the funding details and details for costs of services are still being worked out, it appears that the Consortium plans to work with municipalities to make applications to get money to fund projects, and then recoup their costs through the successful grant applications.

- Sharon Anderson, EMC member and environmental educator for the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension, presented information on a new national educational program called Home\*A\*Syst, which is short for Home Assessment System. Home\*A\*Syst is a voluntary program designed to assist homeowners, renters and property owners in assessing their own property to see what they can do to prevent contamination and to improve their health and the health of the environment. A guidebook leads people through a private and confidential property evaluation and evaluation of their own habits and risks posed by their actions. The hope is that people will identify a few things that they can do better and that they will use the book's suggestions to make changes in their homes or their actions. Tompkins County is one of the pilot counties in New York.

- John Merriman, from the division of environmental permits in the DEC office in Cortland, attended an EMC meeting to inform the EMC about the DEC's stream permitting program. People need a permit to disturb a protected stream, with "disturbance" meaning physical disturbance with machinery, and "protected stream" meaning a stream that is classified as level C(t-(trout)) or higher (A or B). This program does not apply to streams that do not meet that level of classification. The Cortland office handles stream permits for all nine counties in DEC's Region 7, and the DEC forwards copies of all permit applications to the Army Corps of Engineers office in Buffalo, which has responsibility for enforcement of many federal stream-related laws. One or two DEC employees review the project proposals, public comments are incorporated into the file, and a determination is made whether to issue a permit.

Nearly all of the permits have timing restrictions placed on them, with no work allowed on trout spawning waters from May 15 - October 1, and no work allowed for warm-water fish spawning waters from March 15 - July 15. Due to lack of staff, the DEC does not analyze impacts of small projects on areas downstream. Budget cuts over the last two years have caused a 30% reduction in staff in his division alone. As a result, there is very little follow-up on permits once they are issued. The only way that DEC finds out about violations is through citizens calling them with complaints. He encouraged the EMC to continue to closely follow the permits being issued in the County, and to notify him if there are concerns about a project.

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## 1997 EMC Membership Roster

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### *EMC Members*

Bob Beck  
Ron Beloin  
Elizabeth Brauner  
Jules Burgevin  
Melissa Carey  
Ed Cope  
Donna Darling  
Barbara Ebert  
Herb Engman  
Joyce Gerbasi  
Janet Hawkes  
Bruce Johnson  
Lynn Leopold  
Patricia Meinhardt  
Gay Nicholson  
Nancy Ostman  
Robert Roe  
Larry Sharpsteen  
Nick Vandam  
Chris Vonderweidt  
David Weinstein  
F. Robert Wesley  
Phil Zarriello

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At-Large  
At-Large  
Town of Groton  
Village of Trumansburg  
At-Large, Youth  
At-Large, Chair of EMC  
Town of Newfield  
City of Ithaca  
At-Large  
Town of Dryden  
Town of Ulysses  
Village of Freeville  
Village of Lansing  
Village of Cayuga Heights  
At-Large  
At-Large  
Town of Danby  
Town of Lansing  
Town of Caroline  
At-Large, Youth  
At-Large  
At-Large  
Town of Ithaca

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### *Ex-Officio Members*

Sharon Anderson  
James Hanson  
Stephen Maybee  
William Mobbs  
Stuart Stein  
Henry Thiesen

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Cooperative Extension Agent  
Commissioner of Planning  
Commissioner of Health Liaison  
Commissioner of Public Works  
Co. Board of Representatives Liaison  
County Attorney

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### *Associate Members*

Grace Allen  
Don Barber  
Susan Brock  
David Boyd  
Candace Cornell  
Ella Elman

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Noel Gurwick  
Kate Kelley-Mackenzie  
Dooley Kiefer  
Carolyn Long  
Jonathan Sinker  
Paul Stevenson

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### *EMC Staff*

Katherine Borgella    EMC Coordinator  
Dariele Drake        EMC Secretary

### *Planning, Devel. and Educ. Committee*

Barbara Blanchard, Chair    Dooley Kiefer  
Michael Lane                Stuart Stein  
George Totman