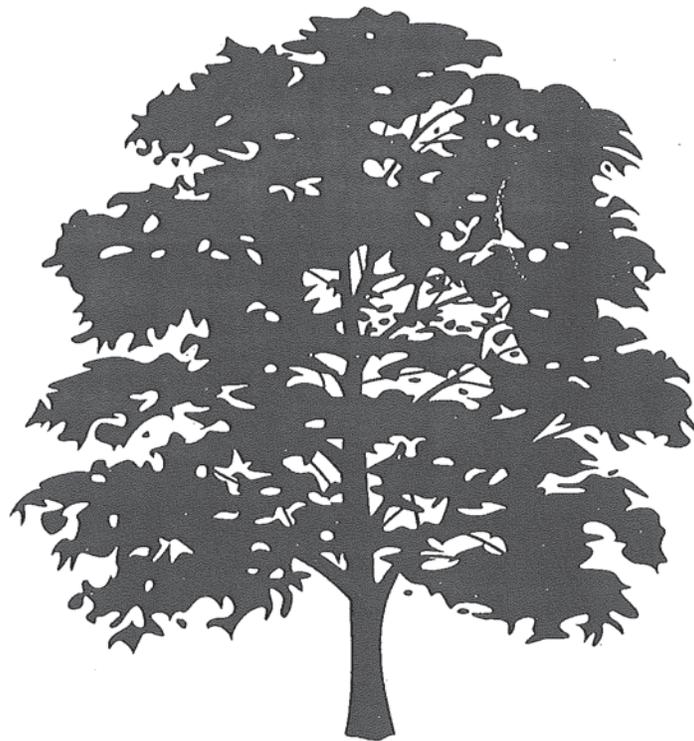


Tompkins County
Environmental Management Council
1998 Annual Report



Tompkins County
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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March 15, 1999

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

To the Honorable Barbara Mink:

I am once again pleased to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the Environmental Management Council's Annual Report for the past year.

The 1998 year was highlighted by discussions about our most important natural resource, Cayuga Lake. The EMC is concerned that all of us in the County take the Lake for granted, without enough effort to control the pollution of its waters. We need to pay more attention to protecting our watershed and we encourage the County to maximize its efforts with groups such as the Water Resources Council and other long-range planning efforts.

A high point of 1998 was the EMC's hosting of the New York State Association of EMC's Annual Conference on the Environment in September. This conference raised awareness of the work of our EMC and County government, both among local residents and attendees from around the State. We were also able to show off some of Tompkins County's great natural features and efforts on the environmental front to officials and residents from other counties.

Much of our time will continue to involve environmental review of issues that we think the County should address. In addition, we urge you to call on the EMC to advise the Board on any environmental issues or concerns on which the Board would like our input. Our group researches such issues well and is in a unique position to inform and educate the citizens of Tompkins County on environmental issues. We look forward to communicating frequently with the Board as a whole and through the Planning, Intergovernmental Relations, and Education Committee in the year ahead.

Respectfully submitted,



Ed Cope
Chair, Tompkins County EMC

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council 1998 Annual Report

Organization and Administration

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council is located in the Tompkins County Planning Department, and staff and equipment are shared between the two organizations. The EMC is funded by the County Board of Representatives, and in 1998, the EMC reported directly to the Board's Planning and Intermunicipal Coordination Committee. Ed Cope served as Chair of the EMC, reporting periodically to the PIC Committee on the EMC's work and goals for the year. Stu Stein from the Board of Representatives served as the liaison between the EMC and PIC Committee.

EMC members participate on the Council by attending monthly general meetings and working on task-oriented committees. Five committees were formed in 1998: the Conference Planning Committee, the Environmental Review Committee, the Unique Natural Areas Committee, the Education Committee, the Invasive Species Committee, and the County Towers Committee. Additionally, the standing Executive Committee met more frequently and was more active than it has been in recent years.

Nineteen hundred ninety-eight was the fifth year of production of the EMC's 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. At the end of the year, the EMC Coordinator, Katherine Borgella, started a new job within the County Planning Department and a search commenced for a new Environmental Planner/EMC Coordinator.

Membership was fairly steady in 1998, with both of the at-large youth seats, and four of the municipal seats (out of sixteen), remaining vacant throughout the year. The EMC had nine active associate members during the year. In the fall, several longtime EMC members resigned from the EMC, due to personal time constraints, and switched to associate member status so they could still participate on EMC committee work.

In the fall of 1997, at the request of the Board, the EMC adopted a formal procedure and criteria for recommending appointments to the EMC. During the year, the Executive Committee worked on revising the procedure, which was initially put together rather hastily to meet the appointment deadline. The EMC adopted a revised procedure in January, 1999, which is based on identifying gaps in needed skills and knowledge on the Council, and recruiting to fill those gaps.

Another administrative item that was added to the EMC's

activities in January, 1998, was the first ever "Annual Review of Bylaws, Enabling Resolutions, and Code of Ethics." This review was started as a way to remind members of the powers and duties of the EMC, and expectations the EMC has of its members.

As part of the PIC Committee's effort to look at four of its advisory boards to see if there are any changes or improvements that could be made to make them more effective, the PIC Committee formed the PIC/EMC Working Group to study the workings of the EMC. Beginning in the fall of 1998, the Working Group reviewed the EMC's bylaws, enabling legislation, and other County's EMC structures, staffing and budgets. The group also reviewed how the EMC and the Board communicate, and how EMC municipal representatives communicate with their municipal boards. The Working Group is expected to make recommendations to the PIC Committee in early 1999.

EMC Resolutions and Official Correspondence

The EMC passed two resolutions in 1998, and Chair Ed Cope wrote one official letter on the Council's behalf.

The first resolution was passed in June, and was titled, "Resolution recommending Board of Representatives not to concur with the Lake Source Cooling Environmental Impact Statement." It urged the Board not to issue a findings statement concurring with the facts and conclusions contained in the EIS, and, specifically, not to find that concerns over water quality and biological monitoring were adequately addressed through the terms of the State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit.

The second resolution was passed in November, and was titled, "Resolution requesting delay of the auction of the Six Hundred Road Bridge." It requested that the Board delay for six months a decision on whether or not to auction a bridge that provided access to the unique natural area, Slaterville Wildflower Preserve and Upper 600 Ravine.

Committee Activities

Conference Planning Committee

In the fall of 1997, planning began for the Tompkins County EMC to host the 27th annual environmental conference sponsored by the NYS Association of EMCs and the NYS Association of Conservation Commissions. One hundred and fifty-seven people attended the 1998 Conference on the Environment, which was held from September 11-13 at the Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center. A conference coordinator, Sandra Stein, was hired to plan and organize the conference,

along with Katie Borgella and Lisa Scales, an intern from Ithaca College. Eleven field trips, ten workshops, and two guest speakers made up the weekend's events, with topics ranging from "Cool Meetings on Hot Topics" to "Unlocking the GIS Toolbox" to "Composting: From Food Scraps to Flowers." The theme of the conference was "Our Environment, Our Responsibility," and the goal was to host a conference that would help enhance the skills of citizens working to protect their natural surroundings. Happily, the weather cooperated, events went as smoothly as possible, and the conference was rated very highly by participants. Additionally, due to the outstanding generosity of local businesses, the conference raised much needed funds for the two sponsoring organizations to continue their work in support of environmental programs in New York State.

Unique Natural Areas Committee

The stated 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 again spent the majority of its time working on the task of rewriting the Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County. Committee members started to experience burnout from working on this huge revision for so many years. The revision is expected to be published in the spring of 1999, and will include these changes:

- Completely revised and improved UNA boundaries, based on far better maps through the Planning Department's Geographic Information System.
- New information on 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.
- Soils information, based on data provided by the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service, which contains a brief description of each soil type, erodibility, agricultural productivity, and whether or not the soil is considered hydric.
- A more concise and easier to understand introduction, that explains why these areas are unique and how to protect these valuable resources.

As part of the 1998 Conference on the Environment, the UNA Committee worked on a presentation about how to create an inventory of unique natural areas. The Committee also advised the County Board on the quality of the natural resources on several properties acquired by the County through tax foreclosure.

Environmental Review Committee

Reviewing development proposals under the SEQRL law re-

mains a key job of the EMC. The goal of these reviews is to raise environmental issues and concerns about a proposed project, and to identify and promote the least environmentally damaging option of any necessary development. The Committee makes a concerted effort to review projects listed in the official DEC publication, the *Environmental Notice Bulletin*. Below are the key projects that were reviewed by the Environmental Review Committee in 1998:

- The Committee spent much of its time in 1998 analyzing and discussing **Cornell University's Lake Source Cooling Project**, which will provide cooling to Cornell's buildings by using cool water from the depths of Cayuga Lake and returning warmed water closer to the Lake's surface. Although the Committee did not prepare any formal letters of comment on the project during 1998, members were deeply involved in the many discussions at EMC meetings and in outreach and education efforts to the public. Committee members consistently reminded the EMC of the Committee's main concerns about the project.
- The Committee sent a letter to the Solid Waste Division of Public Works on the draft RFP for the **Tompkins County Household Hazardous Waste Management Facility Proposal**. While the letter was overall very supportive, several points were raised to help fine-tune the proposal.
- The Committee sent a letter of comment to the DEC on documents developed for **Cornell University's Radiation Disposal Site**. Issues raised in the letter included concern over ground water inflow into surface water streams in the drainage basin, the need to continue to monitor paradioxane near the Lake, and the need to study the deep bedrock where levels of paradioxane were measured.
- A letter was sent to the City of Ithaca concerning the draft scoping document for the **Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the Southwest Area Land Use Plan**. Suggestions included requiring the document to address a more diverse list of alternatives than proposed, and performing a coordinated review to determine the potential cumulative or synergistic effects of the proposed developments on Inlet Island, the West End, and the former Southwest Park.
- The Committee sent a letter to the DEC regarding a draft State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System for the renewal and modification of Cornell University's current authorization to **Discharge Non-contact Cooling Water into Cascadilla Creek**. The Committee felt that the modification to the existing permit was too extensive, and that a separate application should be made for a permit to discharge secondary petroleum stormwater from the site.
- The Committee sent a letter to the Town of Ithaca regarding the proposed demolition of **Pleasant Grove Apartments**. The main concerns were inappropriate segmentation of a project, and requiring recycling usable building materials from a project of that magnitude.

Education Committee

The Education Committee worked closely with the Environmental Review Committee in presenting the EMC's concerns about Lake Source Cooling to the public. The Committees collaborated on an article submitted to Central New York Environmental magazine on the topic.

After months of work and planning by the Education Committee, the EMC established its own web page in the fall of 1998. Work continues on filling the page with useful information on the EMC, its newsletters and publications. One interesting item that is slowly being completed is a searchable version of the Tompkins County Environmental Directory, which has proved to be great community resource since it was issued in 1996. The URL is <http://owasco.co.tompkins.ny.us/emc/>.

Invasive Species Committee

In April, 1998, Committee member F. Robert Wesley published the list of Invasive Plants of Tompkins County, New York. The Committee expects this list will need to be updated and augmented as the behavior of suspect plants is observed over time. In 1999, the Committee plans to work on educating local businesses and organizations that sell plants, own natural areas, and review development proposals in the County. Committee members also organized and led a field trip and workshop on invasive species at the 1998 Conference on the Environment.

County Towers Committee

In the fall of 1998, the EMC formed a new committee to work on issues related to the County's proposed emergency communications towers. Due to actions by the FCC and other factors, the County is studying revamping its current public safety radio network, which is used by entities such as the Sheriff's Department, local police and fire departments, and EMS providers. The committee is working with County emergency planning personnel and the Board's Public Safety Committee to study the situation and address issues such as co-location, tower siting and visual and environmental impacts of new towers.

Executive Committee

In acknowledgment that the Chair of the EMC has been asked to serve on a growing number of committees in the past three years, and that more of the decisions and work needed to be shared among the elected Vice Chairs, the Executive Committee became much more active in 1998. The Committee worked on the nominating process for appointing new EMC members, reviewed requests from the public to make presentations to the full EMC, discussed the EMC's role in the Lake Source Cooling review, and came up with ideas of how to improve communication between EMC members and the different municipalities around the County.

Other Activities

Lake Source Cooling Project

In December, 1997, after an in-depth review, the EMC's Envi-

ronmental Review Committee wrote a letter of comment to the DEC on the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Cornell's proposed Lake Source Cooling Project (LSC). In January, in an effort to bring the EMC's continuing concerns about this project to the attention of the public, a subcommittee was formed to publicize the EMC's main concerns: the need for independent review, the need for independent monitoring, the need for a backup plan in case of unforeseen impacts on the Lake, and cumulative impacts of using this technology on Cayuga Lake and other water bodies in the country. Interested EMC members met with Cornell project staff and one of its scientific advisors in March to see if any of the concerns that were raised by the subcommittee could be resolved or better explained. The group identified several possible methods to address some of the concerns through improved communication between Cornell and the EMC and the public. The Chair of the EMC wrote a letter to Cornell after the meeting, summarizing the issues raised at the meeting.

In April, the County became an involved agency under the State Environmental Quality Review Act because of the involvement of the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency in arranging bonding for the project. It was therefore necessary for the County to adopt a Findings Statement on the project. The EMC passed a resolution in June, urging the Board not to issue a findings statement concurring with the facts and conclusions contained in the EIS, and, specifically, not to find that concerns over water quality and biological monitoring were adequately addressed through the terms of the State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. The Board subsequently approved the Findings Statement and authorized the IDA to bond the project.

As a result of intense discussions between the EMC Chair, the Board's liaison to the EMC, and Cornell staff, a special Cornell Lake Source Cooling Data Sharing Group was established to involve the County and Town of Ithaca in the short- and long-term review and monitoring of the LSC project. The EMC will have a seat on the LSC Data Sharing Group, along with the County Board, the County Water Resources Council, and the Town of Ithaca Board. Additionally, Cornell agreed to appear at regular EMC meetings in the future, at least annually, for a general information exchange.

After much of the activity died down, the EMC spent some time analyzing how it performed regarding the LSC issue and identified areas on which it could improve in the future. Some ideas for improvement that came out of that discussion were to: get into an ongoing dialogue with project designers in the early phases of a project, as it is being developed and studied; bring the EMC's concerns out to the municipalities and ask them to pass resolutions in support of the EMC's position; and work with the press more directly, through meetings with reporters and editors, to establish a better working relationship when these hot topics arise.

Special Meetings and Presentations to the EMC

In addition to those listed above, there were ten special presentations made to the EMC in 1998:

- At the request of the Board's PIC Committee, the EMC invited Joe Cambridge, a local resident and avid fly-fisher, to the EMC's February meeting to present his proposal to the DEC to try **catch-and-release fishing** on an experimental three year basis on some of the southern Cayuga Lake tributaries. He said he was motivated to push his proposal forward by the two fuel oil spills in 1997 (in Cayuga Inlet Creek and Fall Creek), as he was concerned about preserving the fish populations in the area. An ad-hoc committee was formed to study the proposal, and in March the EMC authorized Ed Cope to verbally report to the PIC Committee. The ad-hoc committee did not specifically recommend any fishing regulations changes, but encouraged the DEC to let the stream rest after the spills, and to come up with a plan that looks at the entire ecology of the streams and to do what is best for the native species and general health of the area's streams.
- In March, there was a special meeting for interested EMC members to hear a presentation by Cornell staff working on the **Radiation Disposal Site** remediation and monitoring program. This information helped the Environmental Review Committee prepare its letter of comments to the DEC. As a result of this meeting, the EMC was added to the distribution list for monthly progress reports on both the Radiation and Chemical Disposal Sites.
- Fernando de Aragon, Director of the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, spoke to the group in April about the **Northeast Subarea Transportation Study**, which is focusing on transportation issues in a specific geographical area in the County. He reported that a citizen and technical working group is meeting monthly to identify problems and develop alternatives to address those problems. He asked the EMC to help in identifying problem areas and to participate in the quarterly public meetings held on the issue, as well as at the monthly working group meetings. The EMC emphasized the need to protect the natural areas in the study area.
- Jim White, former Chair of the EMC and member of the recently formed **Cayuga Lake Watershed Network**, spoke to the EMC at its July meeting about the Network organization and goals. He said that Cayuga Lake is the only one of the eleven Finger Lakes that doesn't have a watershed plan, and that the lack of a plan meant that it was harder to get funding for projects under the NYS Environmental Bond Act. He encouraged everyone to join the group and to attend a Lake Festival in August.
- At the July meeting, Linda Spielman, from the Cayuga Nature Center, informed the EMC about a program that the Nature Center and Rune Hill Earth Awareness Center brought to Tompkins County, called **Keeping Track**. It is a program that

trains community members to use wildlife tracking skills to gather scientifically sound information on area sensitive species in order to help officials and the public make informed land use decisions. The EMC supported the idea of citizen science programs contributing greatly to inventorying natural areas in the County. EMC member Kara Hagedorn became one of the eighteen volunteers in the program. She keeps the EMC updated on the group's training and plans for tracking in Tompkins County.

- In October, JoAnn Cornish and Jeannie Lee, both from City of Ithaca's Planning Department, spoke to the Council about the Generic Environmental Impact Statement being prepared for the **Southwest Area Land Use Plan**. They reported that the final scoping document was approved by Common Council in August and that consultants had been hired to prepare the document. They stressed that the big issues that will be studied are traffic, the old City dump, visual analysis, stormwater management, and impacts on community character.
- In October, Katie Borgella, reported on efforts by the County Planning Department and the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council to encourage **trail development in the County**. She asked for feedback from the EMC on the strategy. She reported on a strategy to: 1) host a half-day seminar on trail development for municipal board and planning board members and highway superintendents, 2) offer technical assistance, such as mapping, planning and grant writing, to municipalities, 3) identify ready-to-build trails and work to advance their development, and 4) develop a countywide trails map that will provide a vision of trails in the County and identify potential linkages between municipalities. The EMC expressed support for the strategy.
- In November, Donna Connery and Liz Cameron, program managers at Cornell, presented information on the remediation status of the **Radiation Disposal Site and the Chemical Disposal Site** located near the airport. They reviewed the regulatory process and long-range plan for both sites. Additionally, two EMC members (Dooley Kiefer and David Weinstein) toured the sites with project staff in July, and discussed the status of the remediation and monitoring efforts at the sites.
- In November, Jacquie Bow and Katie Borgella, both from the County Planning Department, asked for the EMC's input on the layout and contents of a **Natural Resources Inventory** that is proposed to be published in 1999. EMC members had several suggestions on data to include in the document, and said they were happy that the NRI would soon be available to help with planning in the County.
- In November, Kara Hagedorn, Chair of the Town of Ithaca's Conservation Board and EMC member, reviewed the status of the unique natural area, **South Hill Swamp**, with the Council. She reported that the Conservation Board is working on designating the Swamp as a conservation district, and that the UNA boundary has been modified based on more detailed studies.

She said that there are potential threats to the Swamp, as the Town wants to develop a community park in the vicinity, and a landowner is proposing a subdivision that would abut the rare plant communities. The EMC said they would follow these issues closely.

County Land Policy Implementation

Since the first version of the land policy was adopted by the Board in 1996, it has been fine-tuned and revised extensively. During the 1998 evaluation of tax parcels acquired through tax foreclosure, three parcels were identified as potentially having significant natural features that should be protected. Since no direction on how to proceed with such parcels was given in the land policy at that time, several EMC members (Ed Cope, Chair, Stu Stein, Board liaison, Katie Borgella, EMC Coordinator, and Gay Nicholson, Finger Lakes Land Trust Director/EMC member) met with the County Finance Director and Planning Commissioner to develop a process for dealing with future foreclosure lands that lie in important natural areas of the County. Their recommendations were eventually included in a revision of the land policy which was adopted by the Board in the fall. As part of the new process, two Unique Natural Areas Committee members and members of the Finger Lakes Land Trust visited the three sites during the summer and fall, evaluated their significant natural features, and made recommendations to the County on disposition of the parcels.

NYS Assoc. of Environ. Management Councils

In the fall of 1997, Katie Borgella was elected to the NYSAEMC Board of Directors. She represented the Tompkins County EMC at quarterly meetings and learned about statewide environmental initiatives.

EMC Liaisons

The EMC has liaisons that serve on many committees in the County. In addition to the liaison work described in other sections of this report, the following people served as liaisons in 1998:

- Since 1996, Ed Cope has served as the EMC's liaison to the **Cornell Community Waste Management Advisory Committee**. This is an advisory committee on waste management issues at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine. He updated the EMC frequently on the status of the advisory committee's work. In June the committee prepared its final recommendations, and in July the College of Veterinary Medicine announced that it will implement a combination of alternative methods to incineration for disposal of its animal carcasses, bedding and waste. There were high hopes among committee members that these processes will pave the way for other such innovative ventures across the country. The Committee will continue to be involved in monitoring Cornell's progress in implementing the recommended disposal methods.
- Kristin Rowles served on the newly formed **Water Resources Council**, which advises the Board on matters affecting

the preservation, enhancement, and use of water resources in the County. She reported periodically to the EMC on the work of the Water Resources Council, as it formed its long-range goals and work program and began to learn about important water resources issues in the County.

- Carolyn Long served on the **Household Hazardous Waste Management Advisory Group**, which reviewed the draft Request for Proposals for the HHWM Facility and later reviewed the proposals themselves. She brought copies of materials, such as the RFP, to the EMC for its review and input, and kept the EMC up-to-date on the project's progress.
- Bob Roe served on the **County's Flood Mitigation Committee**, which made recommendations to the County Board on projects to fund through a Countywide flood and erosion control program.
- In October, 1998, Ron Beloin was appointed to serve as the EMC's representative to the **Cornell Lake Source Cooling Data Sharing Group**. That group has not met yet, but will begin meeting in 1999.
- Ed Cope represented the EMC on the **Oversight Committee of the Cayuga Lake Waterfront Revitalization Plan**. He kept the Council informed about the consultant selection process and the planning process being used.
- Bob Roe represented the EMC on the **NYS Fish and Wildlife Citizen Task Force on Deer Management** in this region. He interviewed many EMC members and other residents about perceived deer herd populations and impact in the area, in order to help the task force make recommendations on deer herd size in the management unit.

1998 EMC Membership Roster

EMC Members

Bob Beck
Ron Beloin
John Confer
Ed Cope
Donna Jean Darling
Barbara Ebert
Herb Engman
Joyce Gerbasi
Kara Hagedorn
Janet Hawkes
Bruce Johnson
Jeff Jones
Lynn Leopold
Carolyn Long
Patricia Meinhardt
Gay Nicholson
Nancy Ostman
Robert Roe
Larry Sharpsteen
Dick Taylor
David Weinstein
F. Robert Wesley

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

Ex-Officio Members

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

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

Associate Members

Grace Allen
Susan Brock
Scott Doyle
Ella Elman
Dooley Kiefer

Andrew Levy
Kristin Rowles
Jonathan Sinker
Nick Vandam

EMC Staff

Katherine Borgella EMC Coordinator
Dariele Drake EMC Secretary

Planning & Inermunicipal Coord. Comm.

Michael Lane, Chair Daniel Winch
Barbara Blanchard Stuart Stein
George Totman