



2011 ANNUAL REPORT
TOMPKINS COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/emc>

121 East Court Street Ithaca, New York 14850 Phone: (607) 274-5560

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council (EMC) was created in 1971 by a resolution of the County Board of Representatives. The EMC acts as an advisory body to the County Legislature on matters affecting the preservation, development and use of the natural features of the County. The EMC identifies problems, proposes priorities, and coordinates activities in the development and management of our natural resources. It provides a public forum to discuss issues related to the natural environment in Tompkins County.

Staff and equipment are shared between the EMC and the Tompkins County Planning Department. The EMC reports directly to the County Legislature's Planning, Development & Environmental Quality Committee (PDEQ).

Steve Nicholson served as Chair. The Chair reports to PDEQ on the EMC's projects throughout the year and serves as the group's primary spokesperson and liaison to the Legislature. Katie Kelly, Dan Lamb and Gary Stewart served as Vice Chairs.

You're Invited!!

Beginning in January 2012, EMC will hold meetings on the second Thursday of the month from 4 to 6 PM, at 395 Pine Tree Road. Meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. Check dates on our website.

Scott Doyle, of the Tompkins County Planning Department, was the Tompkins County Planning Department staff member who served as Coordinator. He coordinated EMC activities with other governmental advisory boards, County departments, and the Legislature.

EMC members are appointed by the County Legislature to serve two-year terms. Municipal members served as representatives from the towns of Caroline, Danby, Ithaca, and Ulysses; and the villages of Dryden and Cayuga Heights. Municipal representatives provide an important link between county-wide and local issues by giving periodic municipal reports to the Council. EMC also has twelve at-large voting seats. Associate members were appointed to participate on EMC committees. Members have a variety of backgrounds and levels of expertise.

EMC members participate on the Council by attending monthly general meetings, working in task-oriented committees, and serving as liaisons to other organizations. These committees were formed in 2011: Communication, Energy, Environmental Review, Unique Natural Areas. The Gas Drilling Committee remained as a subcommittee of Environmental Review in 2011.



COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Unique Natural Areas Committee

Members: Dan Lamb (Chair), Karen Edelstein, Roger Yonkin

The Tompkins County Unique Natural Areas Inventory represents a longstanding effort to document the notable natural features and habitats within the county. The inventory is intended to aid local officials and property owners in making sound environmental planning decisions.

The Unique Natural Areas Committee had a productive year in 2011. We're especially pleased with our success with regard to updating and streamlining the UNA Inventory Amendment Process. We made this our top priority at the beginning of the year when it became clear that the existing guidelines were an impediment to modernizing and expanding the UNA Inventory. Given the growing interest in the UNA Inventory, from conservationists and homeowners, to municipal planners and realtors, it was the consensus of the committee members that the future and credibility of the UNA Inventory depended on revising the amendment process to make it less costly, time consuming, and cumbersome. The committee remains grateful to the EMC members for spending considerable time reviewing and revising our proposed changes to the amendment process and ultimately approving them with overwhelming support.

Despite the impressive work that has gone into the UNA Inventory, environmental and landscape conditions are dynamic and updates and modifications are required for the document. With the amendment process revised, the committee focused on the need to update and amend the Inventory. In July we presented our work plan to the County Planning Department in the hopes of securing a \$5,000 contract to update existing UNAs. With the strong support of the Planning Department, the committee is now overseeing the work of two consultants whose work includes updating the boundaries of 38 unique natural areas, detailing changes in vegetation, and preparing baseline data for several proposed new UNAs.

In September the committee was successful in securing additional fiscal year 2012 funding to support the contracted work we oversee. These funds will be applied towards preparing maps, digitizing adjustments of new boundaries, analyzing faunal datasets from avian, mammalian and herpetological records, and preparing new baseline data for yet-to-be-proposed UNAs.

In 2012 we look forward to continuing our mission, demystifying the work we do, and sharing our recommendations for new or revised UNAs with the EMC and all interested parties.

Gas Drilling Committee

Members: Martha Ferger (Chair), Lucia Tyler, Brian Eden (starting in August), David Slottje (through July), Eric Banford (through March)

On Feb. 16, 2011 the Committee sent a letter (both e-mail and paper) to Mr. Joseph Martens, congratulating him on his recent appointment as Commissioner of the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation, noting his past actions in support of sound environmental policy. We also expressed dismay at his recent statement that the DEC will not wait to issue permits for high volume hydraulic fracturing (HVHF) until the federal Environmental Protection Agency releases its current study on this process.

On July 12, 2011 the Committee wrote to DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens pointing out the urgent need for an electronic searchable database of information on spills and other violations from current gas drilling operations in the state. EMC member Karen Edelstein had pointed out to us that such records are currently scattered in several regional offices in poorly indexed paper files. This situation would be completely impractical if/when HVHF is allowed.

Throughout the summer, members of the Committee spent considerable time reading and attending meetings in preparation for writing a response to the DEC's 1700-page revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (rdsGEIS), which was finally released to the public in September with a deadline for responses in mid December. The three of us began meeting weekly instead of monthly, agreeing that we would study the areas of most interest/concern to us indi-

vidually, knowing that no one person or organization could cover it all. A compilation of our written comments was submitted to the EMC membership in early December with an invitation to offer suggestions or to write whole new sections themselves. Several members did offer helpful suggestions, and the final document was approved at EMC's December meeting. It went out over Chairman Steve Nicholson's signature on Dec. 14, although the deadline had by that time been extended into January.

Note: This committee is technically a subcommittee of the Environmental Review Committee.

Environmental Review

Members: Jim McGarry (Chair), Sarah Adams, Dooley Kiefer, Brian Eden

This past year the Environmental Review Committee (ERC), responded to proposals, plans, and environmental impact statements regarding two projects within the county. Typically responses require a site visit and a review of the project plans and drawings. Several projects were not commented upon either because the plan as presented required no comments, or because of family issues constraining the few individuals on the committee.

City of Ithaca Water Plant Project- Dec. 1, 2011

We were very pleased to see a number of issues well planned for, including drainage, storm water management, erosion control, and landscaping. Among the features clearly laid out in the site drawings are appropriately located sediment traps, erosion control blankets for steep slopes, catch basins at collection points, and a landscape planting plan that includes only species indigenous to our region.

City of Ithaca Dredging Project- July 18, 2011

This was a joint statement of the ERC and the entire EMC. We recommended against the selection of a dewatering site, separated from considerations of infrastructure required to use that site. We also questioned the need for dredging the total quantities of sediment being proposed, and the segmentation of the project for environmental review. We proposed an examination of beneficial uses of the dredged materials to create wetland habitat at the south end of the lake.



Energy

Members: Brian Eden (Chair), Eric Banford, Kenny Christianson, Peter Harriott, Dooley Kiefer, Steve Nicholson

Investments in demand-side management programs are the most cost effective means to reduce our reliance on greenhouse gas producing fossil fuels. Since there are several other local organizations that focus on energy conservation and energy efficiency, our Committee has adopted the role of encouraging the development of renewable energy production projects; solar arrays, wind farms, and mini hydro power. Buying local clean energy will create jobs, provide investment opportunities, and strengthen our communities' economy. Establishing successful local renewable energy projects will increase the community awareness that shifting to non fossil fuel alternatives is a near-term option rather than a distant objective.

Committee members assisted in the organization of a local group, Community Wind in My Back Yard, to promote and support local wind farm development. Following the EMC's adoption in 2010 of a resolution, Recommending Tompkins County and Municipalities Sign a Letter of Intent to Purchase Wind Power from the Enfield Energy Wind Project, the Committee prepared a Support Memorandum and made a presentation to the Tompkins County Legislature's Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality (PDEQ) Committee at its February 2011 meeting.

Tompkins County's electricity supply contract with Integrys Energy Services is to expire at the end of 2012. The Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance, an aggregator for many area counties and municipalities including Tompkins, issued bid specifica-



tions in September 2011 and entered into a program agreement with Integrys in November 2011. The Committee requested that the Legislature arrange a meeting with Gordon Boyd, Energy Next, the purchasing agent for MEGA, and Barbara Blanchard, the Executive Director of MEGA. We met with them in August at a PDEQ Committee meeting to urge that the bid specifications require bidders to provide a fully integrated portfolio of energy sources rather than pricing wind and solar separately or offering the supplemental purchase of renewable energy certificates. We promote the direct investment of such funds that might be devoted to the purchase of RECs into the local community to support the development of renewables here.

The Tompkins County Public Library's Photovoltaic System has been producing electricity for more than 10 years. Vegetative growth on the roof each year shades the panels causing them to be less efficient. The Committee has urged the County to institute a regular maintenance schedule to remove this growth. The Committee is a member of the Coalition of Partners for Get Your Green-back Tompkins, a County-wide campaign to inspire local residents and businesses to take tangible steps to save money in the areas of food, energy, transportation, and waste while building community and a resilient future for ALL residents.

The Committee participated in planning for the 2011 Energy Fair "Energy Security Is a Community Project". We also hosted a display table of the Energy Committee's interests and activities.

Comments were submitted to the City of Ithaca and the NYSDEC on the proposed Ithaca Dredging Project. The Committee recommended an alternative proposal that would result in less energy consumption and the emission of fewer greenhouse gases.

The Committee successfully lobbied the NYS Public Service Commission to update their Environmental Disclosure Label. The Label provides information to consumers for all utilities operating in NYS on the types of fuels used to generate electricity, air emissions resulting from generating electricity, and a comparison of those emissions to a state-wide average. This information enables consumers to select an electric supplier based on environmental quality and resource diversity. The more current data has been compiled and distributed by the utilities to their customers.

Communication

Members: Spring Buck (Chair), Katie Kelly, Kristine Shaw, Gary Stewart

The Communication Committee organized the Transportation Initiative of the Year (TIY) Award. The EMC's TIY Award recognizes programs and organizations that make a difference for the environment, and serve as a needed, progressive component of Tompkins County's transportation portfolio. In December, the award was presented to Way2Go, a Cornell Cooperative Extension county-wide transportation education program. Way2Go is made possible by Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and other federal funding awarded through the County of Department of Social Services. For details on Way2Go visit <http://ccetompkins.org/community/way2go>. Way2Go collaborates with local municipal departments, business groups, schools, and transportation users and providers to help professionals, employers, local schools, and other community educators and organizers promote sustainable transportation access, options and behaviors.

The committee also teamed with Tompkins County Solid Waste on a public education event during the Ithaca Festival in June. This was held at the Public Library and was aimed at providing information on the new Mix It Up single-stream recycling guidelines that took effect in 2011.

TOMPKINS COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL 2011 MEMBERS

AT-LARGE: SARAH ADAMS, SPRING BUCK, CLEMENT CHOW, KENNETH CHRISTIANSON, KATIE KELLY, DAN LAMB, JIM MCGARRY, DAVID SLOTTJE, GARY STEWART, ROGER YONKIN

MUNICIPAL: ERIC BANFORD (TOWN OF DANBY), MARTHA FERGER (VILLAGE OF DRYDEN), STEVE NICHOLSON (TOWN OF CAROLINE), BRIAN EDEN (VILLAGE OF CAYUGA HEIGHTS), KRISTINE SHAW (TOWN OF ITHACA), LUCIA TYLER (TOWN OF ULYSSES)

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: KAREN EDELSTEIN, JOYCE GERBASI, PETER HARRIOTT, DOOLEY KIEFER

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

February: **Changes Afoot at Solid Waste** – Guests from Tompkins County Solid Waste Division visited to inform us about the changes being implemented for single-stream recycling. Guests were Kat McCarthy, who does recycling education, and Stephanie Egan, who does communications and coordinates events.

March: **Cornell's Climate Action Plan and Sustainability Initiatives: Updates, Next Steps and Seeking Inputs** – EMC welcomed Bert Bland and Ed Wilson, who were present from Cornell's Facilities Services Division.

April: **The Ithaca College Sustainability Plan** – Marian Brown, Special Assistant to the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, joined us to talk about campus initiatives. *Also in April:* **Downtown Sustainability Center** – Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning and Community Sustainability, brought EMC up-to-date on this initiative.

June and July: **Reorganization Discussion** was led by the Executive Committee (see Resolution, below).

September: **Hydrilla Verticillata and the Cayuga Inlet** – Guests Holly Menninger (NY Invasive Species Research Institute at Cornell), Roxy Johnston (City of Ithaca Drinking Water Plant), and Craig Schutt (Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District) provided information on this invasive plant.

October: **Learn How to Get Your GreenBack-Tompkins** – EMC members Steve Nicholson and Brian Eden shared information on this program, which is piloted by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

November: **Comments to DEC on the Gas Drilling dSGEIS** – The comments were discussed prior to being submitted to DEC. Discussion was led by Martha Ferger, subcommittee chair. The final comments are available on the EMC website, from the "Committees" link.

December: **Report on Dredging Event 12/1** – EMC member Brian Eden arranged to have a Cornell horticulture class report on their semester of work learning about dredging in general and Cayuga Inlet in particular. The event was held at Tompkins County Public Library and was well attended. The class report is available on the EMC website under "current issues": <http://www.tompkins-co.org/emc/issues.htm>

RESOLUTION

"Reorganization of Membership Seats on the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council" passed at the September meeting. Discussion began at the June EMC meeting, and members of the Executive

Committee interacted with County Legislators on the Planning, Development & Environmental Quality Committee to try to bring it to the County Legislature. This effort to replace municipal seats with members drawn from districts of the County Legislature was not supported by legislators. EMC remains organized with a seat for each municipality plus twelve at-large seats.



