

TOMPKINS COUNTY WATER RESOURCES COUNCIL

Sept. 18, 2023 Via Zoom

Final Minutes

Attendance

Member		Seat	Member		Seat
Annie Bastoni	P	At-Large	Brian Rahm	P	Environment
Shawn Bossard	P	Agriculture	Stephanie Redmond	P	At-Large
Cynthia Brock	P	Municipal	Steve Riddle	A	Water Purveyor
Liz Cameron	P	Co. Environmental Health	Linda Wagenet	E	At-Large
Susan Currie	P	County Government	David Wolfe	P	Environmental Management Council
Jenna DeRario	P	Cooperative Extension	Douglas Barnes	P	<i>Associate</i>
Kristen Hychka	P	Municipal Government	Roxy Johnston	E	<i>Associate</i>
Darby Kiley	P	County Planning & Sustain.	Lynn Leopold	P	<i>Associate</i>
Patrick King	E	Business & Industry	Rebecca Minas	P	<i>Associate</i>
Liz Kreitinger	P	Watershed Organization	Elaine Quaroni	P	<i>Associate</i>
Jon Negley	E	Soil & Water Cons. District	Grascen Shidemantle	P	<i>Associate</i>
Holly Payne	P	At-Large	Tom Vawter	E	<i>Associate</i>
Frank Proto	P	At-Large			

Guests: John Dennis, Liz Thomas, Anne Koreman

Call to Order/Agenda Review – Chair Cynthia Brock called the meeting to order at 4:16pm. No changes were made to the agenda. It was shared that interviews are underway for a new watershed manager for the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization.

Privilege of the Floor – None

Presentation: Grant opportunities used to help homeowners replace aging and failing septic systems

– Doug Barnes, TC Whole Health, Environmental Health Division

Doug gave a presentation on onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) and County programs to help homeowners replace septic systems. He noted that 25% of homes in Tompkins County use OWTS, which can fail due to misuse or age. The cost of repairs and/or system replacements can range from \$15,000 to \$30,000 or more. Tompkins County has received grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation to help offset the costs of OWTS replacements. The Septic System Replacement Fund has helped to offset the costs for 24 projects, and the grants have been used to fully fund the partial or complete replacement of 37 OWTS systems. The average payout has been about \$18,000. Doug’s talk and the subsequent discussion covered numerous topics, including homeowner education, identification of new funding sources, importance of OWTS maintenance and inspection, County efforts to procure more OWTS to cover more homes, collaborations with other County and local governments, and more. Attendees asked questions about absentee homeowners, space limitations, and the cost of testing for E. coli. Doug explained that absentee homeowners can be a barrier to participation in the program, but the County is working to find ways to reach them. He also noted that space can be a barrier, as the leach field must be a certain distance from the lake. The group discussed how to make the OWTS program more accessible and equitable and agreed to continue exploring these issues.

Action: Approval of draft minutes – June 2023 meeting minutes were approved (moved by Frank Proto, seconded by Annie Bastoni) as submitted.

Presentation/Action: Consider resolution on a moratorium on mining in Cayuga Salt Mine –John Dennis and Stephanie Redmond, Cayuga Lake Environmental Action Now

John Dennis spoke to the group about his understanding of the potential environmental impacts of salt mining on the water quality of Cayuga Lake. He started by providing background information on his organization, Cayuga Lake Environmental Action Now (CLEAN), including its founding and the various topics it addresses. CLEAN is advocating for closure of the Cargill salt mine subject to an environmental impact statement and the implementation of a careful closure plan. His presentation and the Q&A discussion covered numerous topics. These included history of permitted mining areas; geological anomalies of the lake; aquifer subsidence; closures of other salt mines; miner safety; potential sale of mine by its owner, Cargill; testing for levels of salt in the lake; impacts of natural brine delivery and road salt applications; economic impacts such as job loss if mine closes; and more. John requested that the WRC consider passing a resolution, which was included in the meeting agenda packet, to implement a moratorium on mining in the Cayuga salt mine and issue a more restrictive SPDES permit for the mine. Members discussed the Article 78 suit filed several years ago in relation to Cargill's expansion of the Shaft 4 mine and DEC decisions related to it. It was shared that the County Legislature passed a resolution recommending that an EIS be performed as part of the shaft expansion. Members determined it was a complicated issue and more time was needed for research before rendering a decision on the proposed resolution. Darby suggested sending out a Doodle poll to members interested in forming an ad hoc subcommittee to dive into the topic further. Subcommittee will also reach out to individuals with expertise to join them.

Committee Reports

None

Chair and Staff Reports

No chair's report, though Cynthia shared news of a pyrolysis-focused event planned for October at the Soil Factory. Darby reminded everyone of the upcoming NYS Conference of the Environment (Sept. 20-22).

Member Announcements

None

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 6:04pm.