



2019 Annual Report

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

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Environmental Management Council Background

The New York Legislature authorized the formation of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation by Chapter 140 of the Laws of 1970. Article 47 of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations adopted in compliance with that law authorizes County Legislatures to form Environmental Management Councils (EMC). The Tompkins County Board of Representatives created the local EMC on May 10, 1971.

Members are appointed by the County Legislature for two-year terms as follows: one each to represent the 16 municipalities of Tompkins County and 12 At-Large seats for interested constituencies such as business, agriculture, labor, public health, etc. The EMC serves as an advisory committee to the Legislature and as discussed in this annual report, the EMC maintains a list of Unique Natural Areas, reviews the SEQR documents for certain proposed projects, conducts public education programs, and comments on projects on a variety of environmental concerns.

You are Invited!

We welcome all visitors. Residents of Tompkins County are invited to attend meetings of the EMC and apply for membership. The EMC meets the second Thursday of each month at 4:00 pm. For more information, check our website tompkinscountyny.gov/emc.

2019 Members

Municipal Members	At-Large Members	Associate Members
Village of Cayuga Heights, Brian Eden (chair)	Laurel Lynch	Susan Allen
Village of Lansing, John Dennis	Susan Riley	Karen Edelstein
Town of Caroline, Steve Nicholson	Genny Shipley	Bill Evans
Town of Danby, Anne Klingensmith	Don Smith	Anna Kelles
Town of Dryden, Steve Bissen	Regi Teasley	Dooley Kiefer
Town of Enfield, Maureen Bolton	Jonathan Zisk	Dan Klein
Town of Groton, Pegi Ficken		Jose Lozano
Town of Ithaca, Vladimir Micic		Osamu Tsuda
Town of Newfield, Michelle Henry		David Weinstein
Town of Ulysses, Cait Darfler (vice chair)		Robert Wesley
City of Ithaca, Tom Shelley (vice chair)		Roger Yonkin

Legislature Liaison: Amanda Champion

Vacant municipal seats: Villages of Dryden, Freeville, Groton and Trumansburg and Town of Lansing

Adopted resolutions

Resolution 01-2019: Urging the Tompkins County Legislature to Support the New York State Assembly and Senate Bills to Establish a Process for the Adoption of an Environmental Bill of Rights.

Resolution 2019-02: Recommending an Amendment to the UNA Inventory Document consisting of Boundary Revisions to 44 UNAs.

Presentations

February: The “Ups” and “Downs” of Cayuga Lake or How I learned to stop worrying and love the changes in Cayuga Lake levels by William Kappel, USGS Hydrogeologist

April: Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability Work Program

May: Rescue of the American Chestnut by William Powell, SUNY-ESF

June: A Community-Owned Internet of Things by Jon Bosak; County Comprehensive Plan Update by Joan Jurkowich

July: A Program to Mitigate Antibiotic Resistance by Ken Jaffe, Center for Agriculture Development and Entrepreneurship

September: Hazards of Lead Ammunition at Shooting Ranges by Gay Nicholson, Sustainable Tompkins

November: Review of Proposed UNA Boundary Revisions

December: Review of draft “evaluation of options for the potential management of county-owned forests report by David Weinstein, UNA Committee

2019 EMC Committee Reports

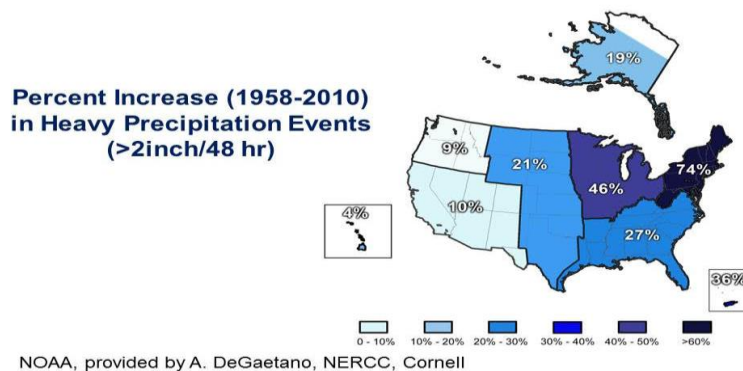
Climate Adaptation

Members: Brian Eden, Pegi Ficken, Michelle Henry, Katherine Herleman, Sara Hess, Tom Shelley, Regi Teasley, Jonathan Zisk

The Climate Adaptation Committee had a year of growth. As a relatively new committee, we have needed some time to find our footing. We have taken up the broad issue of flooding and continue to see this as a priority.

As average temperatures continue to rise, rainfall patterns change. For New York state this means more precipitation and an increase in what we now call “rain events” where two or more inches of rain fall in a limited period of time. This has been known by experts for some time but is gradually becoming part of residents’ shared experience and understanding of weather and seasons. What had been a rarity is now becoming more common.

Regardless of Shifts in Total Annual Rain More of It Is Coming in Heavy Downpours



To address flooding risk and lake pollution, we decided to generate an informational brochure for residents and municipalities. We compiled and distilled information in a brochure, which will be widely distributed.

The brochure describes several related activities: rain gardens, bioswales, soil improvement and gardening with native plants and trees. We see this as a fruitful first step providing county residents with the tools to take flood mitigating action on their own in the near term.

As we researched and discussed topics for the brochure, we also worked on the committee itself.

Re-centering: We developed a better working understanding of the committee’s purpose: (1) to track and understand global climate change as it affects our county, and (2) to advise the county legislature and the county residents on how to mitigate and adapt to these changes. Ultimately, by providing timely and useful information and promoting useful actions for county residents, we endeavor to promote resilience.

Learning and gathering information: Committee members shared their own knowledge with one another, undertook further study and research, and identified reliable information sources.

To learn more about flooding and mitigation, committee members also attended talks and presentations by experts and other organizations addressing these issues. For example, we learned about the topography of the county and the types of soils found here. We also learned about how the land use has changed over time, for example, up to 90% of our wetlands are gone and stream buffers have declined. Our lake is increasingly plagued with harmful algal blooms linked to increasing temperatures and increased nutrients (such as fertilizers).

Enhancing Connections and Cooperation: We are forming and enhancing communication with area groups and organizations addressing flooding and related issues; this will help us to share knowledge, remain abreast of events, and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

The climate continues to change in ways expected and unexpected, and our committee is committed to help our county legislature and residents adapt to it.

Education/Outreach

Members: Susan Riley (chair), Cait Darfler, Brian Eden, Tom Shelley

The Outreach working group was created as a special committee to the slate of standing committees at the end of 2017. In 2019, we continued with the positive momentum achieved with our 2018 outreach sessions and met our goal of creating both a spring and fall outreach program to help increase the visibility and relevance of the EMC in Tompkins County.

Both programs in 2019 brought about 70 people to the Tompkins County Public Library on topics relevant to current trends related to the environment. Additionally, the chairs of each of the EMC standing committees provided a brief update on the work of the EMC to attendees.

2019 Spring Forum, “The Green New Deal: Pathway to Ecological Sustainability” included:

- Michael Hoffman, Executive director of the Cornell Institute for Climate Smart Solutions
- Guillermo Metz, Energy Team Leader at the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
- Francis Vanek, Senior Lecturer and Research Associate in Cornell's School of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- David Kay, senior Extension Associate with the Community and Regional Development Institute

2019 Fall Forum, “Development with the Earth in Mind” included:

- Nick Goldsmith, Director of Sustainability for the City and Town of Ithaca
- David West, Senior Planner- Housing, TC Department of Planning and Sustainability
- Lauren Gabuzzi, Transportation Demand Management Program Mgr, Downtown Ithaca Alliance/Go Ithaca
- Brent Katzmann, Associate Broker, Office Manager, Warren Real Estate
- Noah Demarest, Principal Architect with Stream Collaborative
- George Frantz, Associate Professor of the Practice Department of City & Regional Planning, Cornell University

Environmental Review

Members: Brian Eden, (chair), John Dennis, Pegi Ficken, Ken Jaffe, Dooley Kiefer, Tom Shelley, Regi Teasley, Osamu Tsuda, and Jonathan Zisk

The Committee reviewed whether the proposed Cascadilla Creek dredging and the cleaning out of the sediment trap would have a significant adverse environmental impact. The action involves the dredging of Cascadilla Creek between its confluence with Cayuga Inlet to the West and the pedestrian bridge at adjacent to NYS Route 13 to the east. The length of the creek corridor to be impacted is approximately 1,700 feet and between 12-18,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed. The Committee decided no action on our part was warranted.

PFOA is commonly found in the blood of representative cross-sections of people in the US. It is also found in dust in homes and in food and water. It is of increasing concern in NYS. A major contamination of PFOA exists at the closed Seneca Army Depot. Tom Parsons the Ithaca Fire Chief reported that the Ithaca Fire Department has never used large amounts of AAAF-Alcohol resistant foam (the type of foams that had high concentrations of PFOA and PFOS) at the training center due to its costs. Information about the Department's foam use and inventory was reported to the DEC when they surveyed the fire training facilities back in 2013. Class A and Class B Foams relied upon by the IFD today do not contain PFOA/PFOS.

The Committee continued to support the adoption of an appropriate Environmental Stewardship Plan by the Lansing Rod & Gun Club for the siting of shooting activities a suitable distance from Salmon Creek and the adjacent wetlands. There is concern that the residual lead pellets discharged at the site for the past 60 years pose an environmental hazard. The ultimate resolution of the issue left many neighbors and local ecologists dissatisfied.

The Committee participated in a presentation to the County Legislature's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee encouraging the County Legislature to Lead with the Development of Net Zero Energy Buildings for County Facilities. Such buildings produce as much energy during the year as they use. (Note that the 2021 Budget reflects the County's support for this proposal).

The Committee and the EMC membership discussed passing a Resolution in support of the Environmental Bill of Rights (A.2064/S2072)). Given that the NYS Legislature passed the bill while we were discussing how to best promote it locally, efforts to encourage the municipalities and the County to pass supportive resolutions can be deferred. Since it is a proposal for a constitutional amendment, it will need to pass the NYS Legislature again during its next session. Then it will be placed on the election ballot to be approved by voters.

The Committee continued to support the request that an EIS be conducted on Cargill's Shaft #4 construction project. The litigation is currently before the NYS Appellate Division 3rd Department. The primary legal issue under review is: Did the Supreme Court err in finding that it was not necessary for the lead agency to take a hard look at the cumulative, short-term and long-term effects of the construction of Shaft No. 4 on Cayuga Lake?

An environmental review of the proposed NYSDOT facility to be located adjacent to the Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport was conducted by the Committee. We advocated that the siting be slightly adjusted to avoid the impacts of noise and light pollution on the nearby neighbors as well

as adopting an energy system that was consistent with Executive Order 88 (Build Smart NY). A geothermal energy system would provide a high Coefficient of Performance for heating both the offices and the garage; at least 3-5 times as efficient as propane. When the doors are opened frequently in the winter, a supplemental heating unit could be added to address peak load needs.

Some other notes of interest. NYS Legislation was adopted to prevent the construction of a mega solid waste incinerator in Romulus. The Federal Government approved the shipment of LNG by rail. This is of concern locally as the rail line that extends through the LNG manufacturing facility in Wyalusing PA also connects to the Ithaca RR line that passes through the City of Ithaca. The environmental impacts of the proposed Freese Road bridge replacement of a one-lane with a two-lane bridge in the hamlet of Varna continue to be of concern. Although the Cayuga Power Plant was recently closed, efforts to require additional environmental remediation of the Coal Combustion Residuals Landfill still require the Committee's attention.

Continued support for NYS legislation to reform SEQR to establish a generalized harm standard for legal standing is required. Without such a standard, large projects that substantially increase greenhouse gas emissions are not capable of being litigated because no individual may be able to assert that they are harmed more than the public at large. The potential impacts of 5-G networks have been insufficiently studied. Compared to today, there would be an almost unbelievable increase in the possible data volume by a factor of 100. The NYSEG/RGE Rate Case remains in negotiation. The outcome will have a major impact on the reliability and resiliency of the electric grid. Transitioning to a policy of beneficial electrification and heat pumps requires public confidence in reduced outages and the reliability that gas currently provides. The construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) encourage infill that reduces the size of living units and decreases transportation distance for those who may move from the suburbs into the City. Although, if planned appropriately, ADUs are environmentally beneficial, the issue has become highly controversial in the City.

Unique Natural Areas

Members: Steve Nicholson (Chair), Steven Bissen, Karen Edelstein, Brian Eden, Dooley Kiefer, Michelle Henry, David Weinstein, and Robert Wesley.

Robert Wesley and Karen Edelstein continued to serve as paid consultants with generous funding provided by Tompkins County and support from the Department of Planning and Sustainability to assist with our UNA Update efforts.

Activity of the UNA Committee in 2019 included:

- Sponsored two public presentations at the Tompkins County Public Library (TCPL) on County-Owned Forest Management options.
- Updated boundaries to 44 UNA's, the final batch of revisions that began in 2012.

Management of the Tompkins County-owned Forests

At the request of County Legislators, the Unique Natural Areas Committee volunteered to prepare a report on the County-owned forest lands.

Our member, David Weinstein, produce an extensive 100-page report, "Evaluation of Options for the Potential Management of the Tompkins County-Owned Forests."

The County forests comprise 543 acres on 34 parcels in Newfield and Caroline, acquired by the County decades ago as part of a State-wide program to "reforest" abandoned farmland. Over the course of 2019, the UNA Committee conducted a literature search, spoke with several local forestry experts, conducted a public meeting on June 12 at the TCPL to discuss the scope of a draft report, and produced a draft report. The UNA Committee solicited public comment through a press-release and at a December 18, 2019 public meeting.

The goal of this report is to provide the members of the Legislature a more complete understanding of the existing science regarding the management of forests like those owned by the County, along with a more complete picture of how the County-owned forests fit into the greater picture of forest condition and dynamics in central New York. A Resolution to approve submission of this report to the Tompkins County Legislature's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality (PEEQ) Committee passed in January 2020.

UNA Boundary Revisions

We completed the revisions to all 195 UNAs. We began this process in 2012, and this year concluded the final batch of 44. These boundary changes decrease the acreage of these UNA's from 3526 acres to 3350 acres, a net decrease of 5%. This batch included 24 unnamed Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) mapped wetlands, which we have now named.

Resolution-2019-1: Recommending an Amendment to the UNA Inventory Document consisting of Boundary Revisions to 44 UNAs was passed by the EMC in November.

Property owners will receive postcards from the County Planning Department alerting them to these new boundary changes. All Municipalities will soon receive the final updated maps and a CD detailing all of these revisions.

Waste Reduction

Members: Susan Allen, Maureen Bolton, Amanda Champion, Cait Darfler, Pegi Ficken, Michelle Henry, Anne Klingensmith, Jose Lozano, Tom Shelley

The Waste Reduction Committee's completed its first full year in 2019. Several student and community members participated over the course of the year.

The Committee's focus has been public education regarding the single-use, thin-film plastic bag ban going in to effect in March 1, 2020, in support of the efforts of the County's Recycling and Materials Management to implement the new law. To this end we developed a two-sided, trifold brochure on the bag ban and the reduction of consumer single-use plastics in general, a one-page flier on the bag ban, and tabling events including the Apple Festival and Newfield Old Home Days.

The Waste Reduction Committee received \$1,000 in funding from the County Legislature used to 700 reusable bags to be distributed to low and middle-income households in Tompkins County, primarily through organizations serving these county residents and at tabling events. Distribution sites include town and village halls, Finger Lakes Library System branches, food banks, Ithaca Free Clinic and similar institutions. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Wegmans also donated several hundred bags for the distribution program. The one-page educational flier is also being distributed with the free bags.

Other activities included the sponsorship of a showing of the film “Plastic Oceans” at Cinemapolis, a discussion on ending the use of single-use coffee cups at Gimme Coffee, review of the study of microplastics in Cayuga Lake, and review of the new projects being developed by the local waste water treatment plant.

A new focus being developed is a ban on Styrofoam food service items—coffee cups, clam shells for take-out food, plates, etc. We hope to develop and promote local legislation later this year supporting a ban on Styrofoam. Other areas of interest are food waste reduction and recycling and fabric waste reduction, and we hope to develop programs in these areas over time. We also began planning a public educational event on waste reduction to be held sometime in the future.

Topics and educational programs to be developed in the coming year include:

- Continued public education around the plastic bag ban,
- Support for a pending state-wide ban on single use Styrofoam food service and packaging items,
- Research on mattress recycling, possibly to support a proposed state-wide program,
- Research on getting more reusable water bottle filling stations around the County, and
- Research on a possible County-wide ban on several plastic food service, single-use items under one piece of legislation.

The Committee's extended goals:

- Plastic use reduction, specifically plastic packaging of all kinds,
- Food waste reduction and recycling.