



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

121 E. Court Street , Ithaca, NY 14850

<http://tcgov.co/emc>

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

2023 Annual Report

In 2023, the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council (EMC) proudly hosted the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions (NYSACC) annual conference. This successful event was the result of six months of dedicated effort by nine to 15 volunteers, working tirelessly from March until the conference dates of September 20-22, 2023.

The conference was thoughtfully designed with three distinct parts:

- **Part 1: Virtual Talks** – Accessibility was prioritized with focused 10-minute Zoom talks featuring over 50 speakers in three simultaneous tracks. Q&A sessions followed each talk. Recordings are available on the [NYSACC's website](#).
- **Part 2: Field Trips** – Expert-led field trips throughout Tompkins County were a highlight for many attendees. Destinations included Cornell Botanic Gardens, the Honey Bee Embassy, South Hill Cider, the Marshy Garden at the Soil Factory, the Learning Farm, Taughannock Falls State Park, and more.



Conference attendees mingle with residents at the Learning Farm.

- **Part 3: Lakeside Reception** – A zero-waste reception on the shores of Cayuga Lake at Stewart Park provided a relaxed setting to network, honor NYSACC award winners, and hear from keynote speaker NYS Assemblymember Dr. Anna Kelles.

This well-attended conference welcomed over 100 virtual and 60 in-person participants. It has established a successful model for NYSACC's future bi-modal conferences (combining remote and in-person elements).

Additional EMC Activities

2023 Guest Presentations

The EMC continued to facilitate knowledge growth and information sharing in 2023. We were pleased to offer the following presentations at our regular meetings:

- Ithaca Green New Deal Scorecard - Tom Hirasuna, Barbara Luka, Diane Stefani, Paula Welling of Climate Reality Finger Lakes Chapter
- Tompkins Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) 3.0 - Paul Fenn, Local Power
- Connect and Collaborate: TCCPI and the Ithaca 2030 District - Peter Bardaglio, TC Climate Protection Initiative and Ithaca 2030 District
- Legal Aspects of a Circular Economy Business - Joey Diana Gates, EMC member and Dish Truck founder/owner
- Ithaca Farmers Market Site Improvement & Redesign - Monika Roth, IFM board president, and Scott Whitham and Yifei Yan, Whitham Planning & Design
- Tompkins County Food System Plan - Don Barber, Food Policy Council of TC & Katie Hallas, Food System Plan Coordinator.
- Introduction to the Tompkins Pollinator Pathway - Brandon Hoak, Tompkins Pollinator Pathway

2023 Committee Work

EMC members actively participate on at least one committee, each focused on specific goals:

Education and Outreach (E&O) Committee

Members: Melanie Greaver Cordova (chair), Marc Devokaitis, Brandon Hoak, Susan Riley, Brad Will



E&O members tabling at the Ithaca Farmers Market for Earth Day 2023.

- **Connection with Municipal Conservation Groups:** The E&O Committee successfully organized a joint meeting with local conservation boards and conservation advisory councils at Stewart Park. This collaborative event focused on knowledge sharing and planning for the NYSACC conference.
- **Green Scene Newsletter:** The committee continued to produce the Green Scene newsletter, offering bi-weekly updates on environmental events, news, and activities throughout Tompkins County. The team enhanced the format and workflow, ensuring greater accessibility and consistency. Through the Green Scene, the committee also actively monitors DEC environmental notices and wastewater discharge alerts for the county. To subscribe or view past issues, please visit: bit.ly/GreenSceneArchive.
- **Earth Day Tabling:** E&O Committee members engaged with the community by representing Tompkins County EMC at the Ithaca Farmers Market for Earth Day 2023.

- **Inter-County Collaboration:** Building valuable connections, EMC Chair Cait Darfler presented to the St. Lawrence County EMC, sharing insights on the Tompkins County EMC's structure, successes, and challenges.

Unique Natural Areas (UNA) Committee

Members: Steve Nicholson (chair), Steven Bissen, Karen Edelstein, David Weinstein, Robert Wesley, Lindsay Dombroskie, George Adams, Tom Corey, and Jeff Walker

Key Activities

- **UNA Inventory Updates:** Consultants Karen Edelstein and Robert Wesley continued the UNA inventory updating process. They added new wetlands data and provided justification for boundary changes. A total of 69 UNA sites were revised this year.
- **Site Visits:** Robert Wesley conducted site visits to the following UNAs:
 - UNA 13 – Groton Water Supply Fen
 - UNA 64 – Lake Cliff South of Portland Point
 - UNA 112 – Dryden Peat Swamp

Wesley reported his findings to the committee and submitted them to the County Planning & Sustainability Department.

- **239 Reviews:** As requested by Tompkins County, the committee reviewed various 239 land-use proposals. These reviews assess the potential impact of foreclosures or new development projects on natural, cultural, and historic resources. The committee also evaluates concerns regarding zoning, land use plans, and economic/fiscal consequences.

Reviewed Projects

- **East Shore Circle Subdivision:** No Comment
- **Learning Farm Site Plan Review:** Construction and land modifications appear to be located well away from the UNA. Extensive hydrologic modeling suggests minimal impact on runoff into the UNA stream.
- **66 North Street Single Family Home:** The project is acceptable as long as the structure maintains a 100-foot stream buffer and utilizes public sewer. The proposed usage is compatible with the site, which has access to public water and sewer. While the committee generally prefers permanent foundations for housing, this proposed use of the site appears suitable.
- **42 Esty Drive:** No comment

Bell Station Preserve Field Trip

The UNA Committee co-hosted a field trip to the Bell Station Preserve (UNA-195 Nut Ridge) as part of the NYSACC Annual Conference on the Environment. Approximately 30 attendees explored this 480-acre UNA with guidance from the Finger Lakes Land Trust. Robert Wesley provided botanical expertise, highlighting the preserve's large and protected population of twin leaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), an ephemeral spring wildflower listed as threatened in New York State.



Climate Adaptation Committee

Members: Regi Teasley (chair), George Adams, Christine Collins, Tom Corey, Thomas Hirasuna, David Wolfe, Ingrid Zabel

The Climate Adaptation Committee met monthly throughout 2023 to address the growing impacts of climate change on Tompkins County residents. The committee's work focused on preparing residents with accurate information and empowering them to take steps to address the risks they face.

Key Activities:

- **Information Gathering and Synthesis:** Members diligently researched, compiled, and archived information on the impacts of climate change, with a focus on the primary local threats of flooding and excessive heat. Sources included state and national agencies, emergency preparedness organizations, and the Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response.

- **Public Education Materials:** For Earth Day 2023, the committee created and distributed flyers on flooding preparedness and response. These were shared at the Ithaca Farmers Market and a Southside Community Center event. Additionally, members developed both English and Spanish versions of an excessive heat preparedness flyer, distributing it through the Latino Civic Association.
- **Community Presentations:** Throughout the year, committee members led presentations, workshops, and classes:
 - **Lifelong Senior Center:** A two-part class exploring flooding and excessive heat preparedness.
 - **First Presbyterian Church and Unitarian Universalist Church Adult Education:** The talks focused specifically on flooding risks and preparedness.

These presentations were well-received and sparked important discussions within the community. Key questions and concerns raised by participants highlighted the need for:

- **Accessible Emergency Information:** A centralized webpage for storm updates, evacuation routes, and shelter locations.
- **Transportation Planning:** Addressing the needs of residents without vehicles during flooding events.
- **Rural Considerations:** Tailored preparedness plans for rural residents, potentially focusing on transportation and resource access.

2023 EMC Members

The EMC was sad to learn of the passing of long-time EMCer Pegi Flicker. Pegi served diligently since 2012 and gave the EMC valuable insights on happenings in the Town of Groton and small scale farming. We send our condolences to her family and friends.

Leadership

Cait Darfler, Village of Trumansburg
Chair

Steve Nicholson, Town of Caroline
Vice Chair

Susan Riley, At-large
Vice Chair

Regi Teasley, At-large
Vice Chair

Legislative Liaison

Anne Koreman

Voting Representatives

George Adams, Town of Danby

Steve Bissen, Town of Dryden

Christine Collins, Town of Ulysses

Tom Corey, Village of Dryden

Marc Devokaitis, At-large

Pegi Ficken, Town of Groton

Brandon Hoak, At-large

Rick Neville, Village of Groton

Peter Penniman/Stephanie Redmond, Town of Enfield

Larry Sallinger, At-large

Lisa Strayer, At-large

Ron Szymanski, Village of Freeville

Jeff Walker, Village of Cayuga Heights

Brad Will, At-large

David Wolfe, Town of Lansing

Ingrid Zabel, Town of Ithaca

Associates (non-voting)

Karen Edelstein

Thomas Hirasuna

David Weinstein

Robert Wesley

A Little Background

Environmental Management Councils are voluntary advisory boards appointed by their County governments throughout New York. EMCs were established under Article 47 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law passed in 1970.

The Tompkins County EMC was one of the first EMCs in the state, established by Resolution No. 103 of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives in 1971. The EMC was added to the County's Charter in 2003.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cait Darfler, Chair, Tompkins County Environmental Management Council