



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

121 E. Court Street , Ithaca, NY 14850

<http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/emc>



OFFICERS

Tom Shelley, Chair
City of Ithaca

Cait Darfler, Vice Chair
Town of Ulysses

Steve Nicholson, Vice Chair
Town of Caroline

Regi Teasley, Vice Chair
At-Large

VOTING MEMBERS

Andra Benson, Town of Lansing

Steve Bissen, Town of Dryden

Maureen Bolton, Town of Enfield

John Dennis, Village of Lansing

Pegi Ficken, Town of Groton

Michelle Henry, Town of Newfield

Katherine Herleman, At-Large

Vladimir Micic, Town of Ithaca

Susan Riley, At-Large

Ron Szymanski, Village of Freeville

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

Dan Klein

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Susan Allen

Amanda Champion

Karen Edelstein

Bill Evans

Anna Kelles

Dooley Kiefer

Jose Lozano

Osamu Tsuda

David Weinstein

Robert Wesley

Roger Yonkin

2020 Membership Roster

You're 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.

www.tompkins-co.org/emc.



Environmental Management Council

A Message From the Chair

The EMC passed two **resolutions** in 2020:

**RESOLUTION NO.
2020-01:**

Recommending that the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council approves the submission of the Unique Natural Areas Committee's report on the evaluation of options for the potential management of the Tompkins County-owned Forest Lands to the Tompkins County Legislature's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality (Committee).

**RESOLUTION NO.
2020-02:**

Resolution 02-2020 urging the U.S. Congress to enact the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R.763)

The year 2020 promised to be a year of clearer vision. And we may have been given just that in the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in immense challenges including illness, death, and the closing down of most of the American economy and society along with most of the rest of the world. We have glimpsed what may lie ahead: global heating coupled with environmental destruction that jeopardizes our future and creates hazards yet unseen. But we can be grateful for warnings — if we heed them.

At the same time, we in Tompkins County learned that we can make rapid changes even without federal leadership and our residents can cooperate in the face of fear of the unknown and overt efforts by some to sow division and hatred. Despite the challenges, County government, including Health Department staff and other “essential workers,” remained on track and met the moment. Since the Covid-19 pandemic is not over, and we will surely face more crises — sometimes simultaneously — in the future, Tompkins County's transparent and organized response to this pandemic bodes well.

For our part, the EMC paused our meetings when New York State government closed all but essential business and services in March 2020. Finding our footing took some time, but the EMC's supporting County staff quickly learned additional skills to facilitate the transition. Despite difficulties, two of our committees, Climate Adaptation and Zero Waste, continued to meet virtually and to pursue their goals and projects, and the third (Unique Natural Areas) communicated by email as needed. In addition, our Education and Outreach Committee organized a powerful virtual panel discussion on environmental justice and the disproportionate impact pollution and its detrimental effects have on low-income communities and people of color, and the EMC “Community Roundup” e-newsletter was launched to highlight environmentally focused news and events pertinent to Tompkins County.

It was a year of considerable retooling and learning for all of us. Our staff support and liaison, Kristin McCarthy and Darby Kiley, and EMC members pulled together and made progress on our environmental work.

Regi Teasley, 2021 Chair

Outreach & Communications Committee

MEMBERS: SUSAN RILEY (CHAIR), ANDRA BENSON, CAIT DARFLER, TOM SHELLEY

In October 2020, the committee hosted a virtual panel focusing on environmental justice and the disproportionate impact pollution and its detrimental effects have on low-income communities and communities of color.

Richard Rivera from Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources of Tompkins County started off the evening's discussion by sharing his on-the-ground perspective and experiences working with displaced individuals living in the local homeless encampment commonly known as "The Jungle." Rebecca Evans, campus sustainability coordinator at Ithaca College, and community activist Anne Rhodes rounded out the conversation speaking to the history of environmental justice and how its dynamics continue to play out beyond our local borders — especially as a public health issue — in communities everywhere.

A recording of the evening can be viewed on the County's YouTube channel:

https://youtu.be/3w1LA_jTjms

In 2020, the committee began to pilot a way to keep a finger on the pulse of various environmental groups in our community with the creation of an EMC email to receive multiple newsletters and listserv messages.

Bi-weekly this repository email is reviewed to highlight pertinent news and events. Additionally, numerous Facebook pages and websites are reviewed for other items or events of import. Roughly 50 groups are tracked throughout Tompkins County, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Environmental Notice Bulletin is also reviewed.

Sent to all EMC members and anyone else with interest, the Community Roundup has been useful for EMC members to have a better idea of environmental news and events in Tompkins County. While not exhaustive, the calendar of events provides a helpful snapshot of happenings of interest around town.

In 2021, the EMC will continue to workshop and discuss ideas for better communication between municipalities, government entities, and community groups. Members will also explore ways to shift our models of engagement so that we are reaching a wider and more diverse group of community members.

Unique Natural Areas



MEMBERS: STEVE NICHOLSON (CHAIR), STEVE BISSEN, KAREN EDELSTEIN, DAVID WEINSTEIN, AND ROBERT WESLEY.

The committee did not meet in person or on Zoom in 2020.

We did email about the following issues:

1. An annual review of parcels subject to foreclosure to determine the existence and significance of natural, cultural, and historic resources on the property, any significant concerns regarding zoning and local/regional strategic land use plans, and any significant economic or fiscal impacts.

There were eight parcels on this year's list of foreclosure parcels that include, or border, Unique Natural Areas (UNAs). The committee had no significant concerns.

The 20-acre property at 1920 Slaterville Road in the Town of Dryden, the former Crispell's property, has been bought and is being renovated by Incodema. The boundary includes a stream and UNA-157 Cooks Corners Gully. No future development encroaching the UNA is anticipated.

2. The committee also considered the Dryden Lake Dam removal proposed by NYS DEC.

The DEC is considering the removal of the dam and the elimination of Dryden Lake in the form it has existed for over 200 years. We agreed with the recommendation by the Town of Dryden Conservation Board that the Dryden Town Board take all necessary action to ensure the preservation of a dam and the body of water known as Dryden Lake, maintaining its current contribution to the recreational and ecological benefits provided to the Dryden community.

Climate Adaptation Committee



MEMBERS: REGI TEASLEY (CHAIR), DEB CARACO, JOHN DENNIS, PEGI FICKEN, ANDREW FOSTER, MICHELLE HENRY, KATHERINE HERLEMAN, TOM SHELLEY

The committee worked on three main activities in 2020:

- distributing a Rain Garden brochure,
- generating a Flood Preparation brochure, and
- providing input on the 2021 Tompkins County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Rain Garden Brochure

Accomplishment: The [Rain Garden brochure](#), completed in 2019, informs residents about how their actions affect flooding, wildlife habitat, and lake water quality. Despite the closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee [distributed nearly 600 brochures](#) to various sites in the county.

Goal for 2021: We will continue to distribute this brochure widely throughout the county.

Flood Preparation Brochure

Accomplishment: In anticipation of flooding, residents can take meaningful actions to assess, properly store, and properly dispose of toxic household waste. The committee developed a brochure that addresses risk in flood prone parts of one's house or garage and advises how to take action.

Goal for 2021: We will develop a tailored three-pronged public outreach campaign (using print materials, in-person or virtual presentations, and digital media) to educate residents about what to do before, during, and after a flood. We will coordinate with TC Department of Recycling and Materials Management on this project.

2021 Tompkins County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Accomplishment: The committee met with Scott Doyle, associate planner, coordinating the county's update, to discuss how best we could assist in bringing community input into this plan.

Goal for 2021: We will continue to work with Scott Doyle on this project. We will reach out to residents to listen to their concerns and to inform them of flooding risk. We will also submit feedback during the public comment period for the plan.

Zero Waste Committee

MEMBERS: TOM SHELLEY (CHAIR), GEORGE ADAMS, EMILY ADAMS, SUSAN ALLEN, MAUREEN BOLTON, AMANDA CHAMPION, JOEY GATES, VANESSA GREENLEE, JOSE LOZANO, MAGGIE MOWRER

The committee's activity was somewhat hampered earlier in the year due to COVID-19, but resumed in the summer when the group began to meet regularly via Zoom.

Perhaps prompted by increasing community awareness about discarded single-use disposable waste during the pandemic, several new student and community members from the [Zero Waste Ithaca](#) group started to show up to the meetings regularly.

In 2020, the committee worked on the following initiatives:

1. Distribution of reusable bags and fliers.
2. Support for a county resolution banning single-use food service items in county facilities.
3. Research on textile recycling.
4. Installation of water filling stations by student members from Ithaca College.
5. Collaboration with Vanessa Greenlee, director of Cornell Alliance for Science, on a podcast production that promotes waste reduction.

Topics and educational programs to be developed in 2021 include:

- Public education and support for various initiatives to ban single-use packaging and other materials in New York State
- Research, outreach, and support for fabrics recycling initiatives

- Support for upcoming state-wide ban on food donation & food scraps recycling law and outreach regarding food waste in landfills
- Support for local, state, and federal legislation such as the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act of 2021
- Research on the mandatory state-wide composting program in Vermont as well as in other northern cities in California, such as Berkeley, for instructions and inspirations for implementing a similar program in Tompkins County
- Research on the possibility of the NYS Climate Smart Communities to serve as a connective tissue of local hubs for waste reduction in coordination with ReUse Center
- Research Zero Waste Cities/Municipalities around the world to serve as models for Tompkins County, educate public regarding creative zero waste "life hacks," and work together with the County, municipalities, and higher education partners to enact waste reduction initiatives.

2020 Guest Presentations



- January 9 – **Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility Projects** – Jose Lozano, Associate Member
- February 13 – **Freese Road Bridge Update**
– David Weinstein, Associate Member
- March 12 – **Cornell Earth Source Heat Project**
– Rick Burgess, Cornell University
- May 14 – **Carbon Dividend and Energy Innovation Act**
– Miranda Phillips and Nancy Jacobson, Citizens Climate Lobby
- June 11 – **Using Museum Collections to Understand the Impacts of Climate Change and Extinction**
– Corrie Moreau, Dept. of Entomology at Cornell
- July 9 – **Regenerative Agriculture**
– Bradford Smith, Three Story Farm
- September 10 – **Status of Cayuga Lake** – Hilary Lambert, Cayuga Lake Watershed Network
- November 12 – **Community Choice Aggregation** – Terry Carroll, Cornell Cooperative Extension-Tompkins County, and Irene Weiser, TC Climate and Sustainable Energy Board, Town of Caroline, and Fossil Free Tompkins

The EMC's monthly meetings provide a forum for a variety of guest speakers to present on regional topics concerning the environment.



Environmental Management Council

Organization and Administration

From the County Planning and Sustainability Department, Associate Planner Darby Kiley serves as the EMC staff coordinator.

Kristin McCarthy, also with the Planning and Sustainability Department, provides administrative support. In addition, the County appoints a legislative liaison.

Guests are often invited to give special reports and presentations on environmental topics.

A brief history of the EMC

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. 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. In addition it maintains a list of 196 Unique Natural Areas. The Council reviews the SEQR documents for proposed projects in New York State and Tompkins County municipalities. We conduct public education programs on a variety of environmental concerns open burning, invasive species, Cayuga Inlet dredge materials, deer nuisances, safe medical waste disposal, bee colony collapse disorder, coal ash leachate contamination of Cayuga Lake, fugitive plastic bag impacts, high volume hydraulic fracturing for methane, and pesticide use reduction policies.



TOMPKINS COUNTY PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY DEPARTMENT

121 E. Court Street
Ithaca, NY 14850
607.274.5560

<https://tompkinscountyny.gov/emc>