

Minutes of the EMC General Meeting February 11, 2009

Voting Members Present (13): Kenny Christianson, Neha Khanna, Kariann Mackie-Cunningham, Jim McGarry, Tony Nekut, Steve Nicholson, Amy Risen, Roger Segelken, Jacie Spoon, Gary Stewart, Lucia Tyler, Mark Whitmore, Roger Yonkin

Voting Members Excused (4): Martha Ferger, Dan Lamb, Michael Miles, Marissa Weiss

Voting Members Absent (2): Stan Marcus, Larry Sharpsteen

Non-Voting Members Present (2): Carol Chock, Dooley Kiefer

Guests Present: Spring Buck, Roberta Dixon, Sol Hart, Katherine McComas, Susan Riha, Kristine Shaw, Rich Stedman, Joanne Trutko, David Weinstein

Staff Present: Joan Jurkowich, Kathy Wilsea

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chair Amy Risen at 7:05 p.m.

Privilege of the Floor – There were no guests who wished to speak.

Changes to the Agenda – 2009 Committee lists were distributed. Amy requested that committees update the goals and projects sections.

Adapting to Climate Change – Dr. Susan Riha said she is working with two specific projects that concern climate change: a Nature Conservancy project in the Hudson River Valley and a NYSERDA-funded project with Columbia University. Her intention tonight is to provide a broad overview of mitigation versus adaptation. Since we can't avoid it, what is our commitment? There are three steps to adaptation: identify issue, determine type of information and analytical tools needed to address the issue, and gather climate change information. Information that is available includes New York State temperature trends and precipitation records. Using a color chart, she showed how difficult it is to draw trend lines. Scientists rely on climate projections that are based on general circulation of the atmosphere. Heat moves from the equator to the poles, which is shown by atmosphere and ocean models. General Circulation Models (GCM) are modeled for the grids of the globe and layers surrounding the globe. All climate change predictions are based on this data.

Predictions for our area include increased precipitation, with more of it falling as rain; reduced snow cover; and increased frequency of short term draughts. Models run with greenhouse gas predictions factor in another uncertainty. None of the models vary much until after 2030. Putting finer features into the GCM is referred to as downscaling from GCM, and is very time-consuming and complex. Scientists can predict changes in the median chilling threshold, a calculation of temperatures needed by native plants in order to thrive. By working with the median chilling threshold, growers can choose varieties that are expected to thrive in new conditions. This then impacts habitat and animals. The Hudson River Valley project focuses on salt wetlands. The Nature Conservancy is acquiring land with wetlands, but is concerned about future function and if the land will eventually be under water. One way to teach about the expected impacts of climate change is to use climate analogues – for example, a map of North America that shows New York State moved to regions that have types of climate expected here in the future. In Susan's example, NYS would match the current climate of southern Pennsylvania in 2040, North Carolina in 2090 under a low emission model, and South Carolina in 2090 under a high emission model.

Susan spoke of three adaptation approaches. No regret decisions are changes that would be good to do in any case. Cost-benefit analysis examines fiscal impacts, like installing larger stormwater pipes. Risk analysis works with the probability of critical low flow, its impact on reservoir levels, and draughts. Susan sees effects on lake levels, land use planning, insurance, and decisionmaking for municipalities. It is her understanding that SEQR regulations are under scrutiny for updates. Even the beer industry is nervous, as they expect to be hugely impacted by diseases that affect hops.

In the discussion period, she said she also participates in an effort to get NYS to develop a master water plan – under what circumstances, where, how would NYS be willing to send fresh water? Agriculture weeds will migrate. Impervious surfaces need to be reconsidered and runoff prevented or reused. People will be displaced, and this is a big problem for New York City. Foundations there need to go lower and be stronger, and salt water may get into the groundwater and drinking water. Impact of

storms is not clear, but there may be more hurricanes and they may strike further north than they do currently. Sea walls could be built to keep ocean water out of the Hudson River. Since New York City has priority for use of their own reservoirs, secondary users could be cut and not receive water. Regions affected by mosquito-borne diseases will expand. Her focus is on water issues, but precipitation will affect population, fuels, and food. She feels greenhouse gas emission control and water efficiency are achievable, due to the range of engineering options. It will affect hydropower, and is already an issue in California because they are getting less snow pack. In theory, we should get more weather fronts moving through due to more wind. Wet days will be wetter, and dry days dryer. Regionally, there will be more lake effect snow. Steve Nicholson asked if we can achieve adaptation if half the citizenry doesn't believe in mitigation. Susan said some people have to think about this day to day. Jim McGarry said articles he has read indicate the level of the Great Lakes will go down because of increased evaporation.

Seeking Carbon Neutrality at Cornell – Introductions were made by Dave Weinstein. The team is seeking community input and expects a survey to go out in the next month. Katherine McComas said it is important to find out how to engage the community in decisions on the environment. This team is collecting data, not making policy. Rich Stedman said this is not a referendum on what Cornell should do. This is about gathering information to understand predictors of support or opposition. It is expected to go to 1,000 to 2,000 Tompkins County residents as a mail survey, with anonymous responses. Depending upon the returns, there may be telephone followup. They hope EMC members will make others aware of the project and encourage their acquaintances to participate if they receive surveys. The team is willing to return to EMC in the fall and share survey results.

Election of Vice Chairs – For the Nominating Committee, Jacie Spoon reported Gary Stewart, Roger Yonkin and Mark Whitmore are willing to serve as vice chairs. Slate moved by Jacie, seconded by Roger and passed by unanimous voice vote. The first task of the new Executive Committee will be to select applicants for appointment to vacant EMC seats.

Municipal Report – Town of Caroline: Steve Nicholson reported the Town is purchasing a modular building to set up next to the existing Town Hall. It will have a 10 kw solar energy system. NYSERDA will fund about three-quarters of the system. Last year Energy Independent Caroline distributed compact fluorescent lightbulbs and hand made shopping bags. Leftovers were donated to the Caroline food pantry recently. EIC is having discussions with NYSEG about replacing sodium and mercury streetlight bulbs with newer technology. New bulbs would be installed over a two-year period and last ten years. EIC is focusing on a site for development of wind technology for the town residents, and members toured the Rancich proposed site and data gathering towers. The Coddington Trail Initiative extension from the South Hill Recreationway has been dropped after several residents objected strongly to the proposal.

Approval of Minutes -- The minutes of December 10, 2008 were accepted without change. The minutes of January 14, 2009 were amended to attach the goals list developed at the meeting, and accepted by show of hands. Final minutes are available on the EMC webpage: www.tompkins-co.org/emc.

Staff Report – Kathy Wilsea distributed committee lists and schedules of quarterly reports for municipal members. She reported there has been good response to the recruiting efforts to fill vacant seats, and expects new appointees to be able to vote in April. She requested reports from Education, Energy, and Unique Natural Areas committee chairs for the 2008 EMC Annual Report. PDEQ members for 2009 are Pam Mackesey (chair), Will Burbank, Carol Chock, Martha Robertson, and Frank Proto. First meeting will be 2/18, and subsequent meetings will be on the same dates as EMC.

Legislature Liaison's Report – Carol Chock reported that the County is submitting information to New York State for the expected federal stimulus package. Projects include energy efficiency and renewable energy projects for all timeframes. She said it is a challenge to interact as a liaison between advisory boards and the County Legislature, and said EMC members are always welcome to speak to the Legislature under Privilege of the Floor.

Member Items – Mark Whitmore reported that Hemlock wooly adelgid is in our area and passed around an infected branch in a sealed bag. This sample was gathered at Cayuga Inlet. He urged members to watch for it and, if they find it, to tell Mark or contact DEC. Jacie Spoon announced the Website Committee seeks links for the EMC in the News portion of our website. Members who were mentioned in the press in 2008 or this year should send her a web link.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary
Tompkins County Planning Department

Approved by Council on March 11, 2009