

## **Minutes of the EMC General Meeting September 10, 2008**

**Present:** Kenny Christianson, Herb Engman, Martha Ferger, Neha Khanna, Dan Lamb, Kariann Mackie-Cunningham, Steve Nicholson, Amy Risen, Roger Segelken, Larry Sharpsteen, Anni Skoler, Jacie Spoon, Lucia Tyler, Marissa Weiss, Mark Whitmore, Roger Yonkin  
**Excused:** Glynn Bebee, Carol Chock, Stan Marcus, Michael Miles, Ashley Miller, Gary Stewart  
**Absent:** Cliff Babson, John Dennis, Lara Kimber, Hank Spencer  
**Associates:** Joyce Gerbasi, Peter Harriott, Dooley Kiefer  
**Guests:** Spring Buck, Jim McGarry  
**Staff:** Katie Borgella, Leslie Schill, Kathy Wilsea

**Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order by Chair Steve Nicholson at 7:08 p.m.

**Privilege of the Floor** – Jim McGarry said he is a new resident of the Ithaca area and will apply for a seat on EMC.

**Changes to the Agenda** -- There were no changes to the agenda.

**The Draft Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Element of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan**– Katie Borgella and Leslie Schill were present from the Tompkins County Planning Department. Katie provided background. Community members reported the effects of increasing energy costs in their lives at the outreach meetings held for drafting this element. EMC members Glynn Bebee, Kenny Christianson and Dooley Kiefer served with some members of the Planning Advisory Board on the steering committee for EGGE. Focus groups and interviews were conducted in the spring, and a public meeting was held in June. Now that the document has been drafted, four public meetings are planned for the fall. Katie or Leslie will visit EMC again in October to seek EMC recommendation for adoption of the element by the Tompkins County Legislature.

In our community, energy use falls into these categories: 42% transportation, 25% residential, 25% commercial and 8% industrial. General goals are (1) reducing the amount of energy we use, which is the quickest and cheapest way to reduce demand; (2) increasing efficiency; (3) transitioning to renewable energy sources, since we will still need energy in the future; and (4) reducing emissions and protecting/enhancing resources that address emissions. The draft element has eight policies to guide government decisionmaking. In order to become an action item, a point needs commitment of a partner agency to begin implementation within five years.

Comments from members: Green businesses (recycling, used clothing sales, etc.) are not mentioned. The NYS energy code already addresses some requirements for new construction, and is phasing in stricter codes. NYSERDA has a loan program for upgrades, and we shouldn't create another layer of local bureaucracy that is redundant. Others felt a local loan program would be beneficial for citizens, and quicker for them to access. When asked about LEED silver certification, Leslie said it is a good initial step, and certification added less than 5% to the costs for Ithaca College's new building. Some higher levels are only feasible with federal grants. Tracking progress for emissions controls has been done by use of the ICLEI model, and that would continue. Energy audits could pinpoint some easy fixes. They are becoming more sophisticated (now costing over \$500),

and experienced workers are needed. This could be a green business to encourage locally. Citizens need to realize investment in work recommended in energy audits has payback. A worker training program could be implemented, and citizens instructed on how to implement the recommendations. Cornell dorms are inefficient – frequently overheated so residents leave windows open. Some people don't want strangers working in their homes, or don't want any changes to their homes. Short average tenure here of six years, when average payback is 20 years, discourages owners from investing in building improvements. Focus groups suggested revolving loans to fill gaps. If improvements were tied to comfort, suggestions might get better reactions. Some would prefer property tax relief in exchange for improvements. We need to add how to influence our state and federal legislators to work on a larger scale, a mechanism to advise other levels that we want them to pursue the same policies. Cornell has been headed in the direction of controlling traffic by encouraging bus, shuttle, and bike traffic while instituting parking fees as a deterrent to driving to campus. That success is something that can be built upon. How do we weigh greenhouse gas emissions against everything we need to do? Katie said it is easy to be paralyzed by choices; everything is much more complicated than it seems. The focus groups spoke of the need for a fleet policy for the County. Members spoke of the need for interim goals – milestones – as most of us can't relate to progress by 2050 because we will be too old to care. Creating a regional connection for restaurant owners in order to recycle used cooking oil was suggested. Investigate the methane program that was started, then dropped at CU. CowPower is now working with farmers. NYSERDA tracks the total number of solar panels in the County. Develop a template for goals and baseline information for use by small municipalities so improvements can spread. Right now fuel efficiency is not workable for highway equipment. Neighborhood compost bins were suggested. Sustainable Tompkins teaches citizens in small groups about home energy efficiency by working at one member's home. Tompkins County is already a leader in the nation for sustainability issues, and this is a great way to continue.

The action items will be initiated by partner agencies. Cooperative Extension, the Transportation Council and some others have given preliminary indications of willingness to lead. There will be further contacts before the element goes to the County Legislature. A partner agency needs to have a track record of effectiveness.

**Let's Cut Down All the Trees in Tompkins County** – Roger Yonkin spoke of the changes he has seen in Tompkins County since he arrived in the early 1950s. Many trees have been allowed to grow up, which has affected the areas of meadowland that used to support songbirds, butterflies and other insects. Areas along the train tracks and on Connecticut Hill were bare because they were burned off, and there was more range mowing. He would like to see some cutting. Some plants other than trees can create better carbon sinks. Herb Engman said the City has been reducing their mowing. The natural cemetery in Newfield tried to get mowing by Fish & Wildlife Service, but was denied for being outside their catchment area. Lucia Tyler said if they don't mow their property they have problems with invasives and poison ivy. Mark Whitmore said the national forests can be managed for wildlife. It's hard to find contiguous acres for an ecosystem. If they want to encourage grassland species, they need to mow. This is an important conservation issue. Martha Ferger commented that many homes have huge yards planted in grass, but it is mowed too low to remain habitat and the lawnmowers create pollution.

**Municipal Reports** –Town of Lansing: Larry Sharpsteen said their biggest project is the committee that is reviewing the draft comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance. Their goal is January 2009, which is very ambitious. They are realizing the current ordinance is pretty good, and may just need some cleaning up. Town of Newfield: Kiwi Mackie-Cunningham reported that the Upper Susquehanna Coalition will build an educational sign in the new park. The town board passed a moratorium on building alternative energy so they will have time to do research. They are seeking more participants for the water sampling group. Cayuga Heights: Roger Segelken said a Syracuse firm has been contracted to help the wastewater treatment plant control phosphorus levels. The village is the gateway to Cornell's north campus, and they are seeing a lot of single occupancy vehicles travel through. Steve Nicholson said roadside flares contain phosphorus, and wondered if that goes into the lake during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July flare event. Jacie Spoon asked for information on the village's target phosphorus level. Town of Enfield: Mike Miles was excused tonight so he could attend a town board meeting. Copies of his written report were distributed.

**Approval of Minutes** -- The minutes of July 9, 2008 were accepted with two changes. Final minutes are available on the EMC webpage: [www.tompkins-co.org/emc](http://www.tompkins-co.org/emc).

**Chair's Report** – Steve Nicholson reminded members that the NYS Association of EMCs is sponsoring the Conference on the Environment in October, and early signup deadline is 9/25. NYSAEMCs will give a rebate to carpoolers of \$50. EMC has some travel money budgeted. A community forum on gas drilling will be held later this week at the Women's Community Building. Steve has had requests from county legislators for EMC research on gas drilling issues. Dan Lamb said DEC is making efforts to change the draft EIS on the proposed changes to the drilling permit system. There will be public hearings and opportunities to comment. Existing contracts between gas companies and citizens for permission to explore are separate from the DEC permit process that the companies need to adhere to. ERC agreed to research the issue, and other members volunteered to help. Dan said there is a Marcellus Shale link on the DEC website. Steve said the 2008 open house of homes and businesses that use alternative energy will be held 10/4 and 10/5. Sustainable Tompkins is hosting a public meeting 9/16 on the roles of spirituality and self care

**Staff Report** – Kathy Wilsea reported that Larry Sallinger has resigned from the Town of Ithaca seat. Kathy attended PDEQ meetings in July and August. PDEQ members want advisory board attendance policies enforced. While they do not want to impose term limits, they would like more consideration given to new applicants – more of a take turns approach.

**Member Items** – Peter Harriott asked about methods of calculating the relationship between energy use and reduction of emissions. The Library kiosk uses a ratio of one pound CO2 reduction for each kilowatt of reduction in power usage. If the use of solar panels means they are not purchasing power from natural gas-powered plants, then 1 ½ pounds of CO2 would be more accurate. If there were careful calculations of unused nuclear and hydro power, we could show better progress toward goals. Steve Nicholson said there are several models, including use of a state average or the nearest power plant. Mark Whitmore reported the presence of the hemlock beetle in Tompkins County. Foresters are trying to find out how extensive infestation is. He encouraged members to use binoculars and look for furry white dots where the branches meet the tree in the top third of the trunk. The Emerald Ash Borer has now been detected in Virginia, Missouri, Wisconsin, northern Michigan, Montreal and Ottawa. He urged members to respect firewood laws. Neha Khanna reported that she and some friends recently shared a bottle of South American wine that had a “carbon neutral” label. She referred to mention in the July minutes of PDEQ's interest in having advisory boards enforce attendance regulations. She pointed out to members that they should consider associate membership if they are unable to attend meetings. Kenny Christianson said the Energy Committee will meet 9/23. Jacie Spoon said the Village of Groton has received information from DEC on the phosphorus levels they must meet for wastewater treatment. This has become a \$3 million project for the Village. She has volunteered to become the Tompkins County representative to Central NY Research Conservation & Development.

**Adjournment** – Steve Nicholson adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Wilsea, Secretary  
Tompkins County Planning Department

Approved by Council on October 8, 2008