

Tompkins County Energy Strategy

August 2019

Introduction

When the 2020 Energy Strategy was first prepared in 2010, it identified ten local actions that when taken together with other local, state and federal actions would lead the community to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at least 20 percent by 2020, the first increment along the path to achieving the community GHG emissions goal of an 80 percent reduction from 2008 levels by 2050.

In 2010, a Community GHG Emissions and Energy Use Inventory was conducted that showed a 21 percent reduction from 2008 levels by 2014, using traditionally accepted GHG emissions accounting methods. Additionally, the County prepared an Energy Roadmap in 2016 that outlined scenarios to achieve our GHG emissions goals by 2050 by implementing actions in four critical “buckets”:

1. Improving energy efficiency in buildings, lighting and appliances.
2. Moving from grid-supplied electricity generated outside of Tompkins County to local renewable generation.
3. Moving from natural gas to heat pumps and biomass heating.
4. Moving from gasoline-powered to electric cars and light trucks and reducing the number of miles driven.

Recent reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have changed the equation and climate scientists are now calling for faster progress than the originally envisioned methodical approach to achieving an 80 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2050. There is a need and desire among many for big and bold action.

The Strategy

The intent of this Energy Strategy is to provide vision and leadership to move both County government operations and the overall community toward achieving net-zero emissions¹. The County can provide leadership internally through decisions it makes in allocating funding to achieve GHG emissions goals. The County can also provide leadership to the broader community by tracking data, identifying issues, applying for funding, and convening stakeholders to support the community achieving its GHG emissions goals.

1. Internal Focus: Tompkins County will lead by example in its own operations

- a) The County will undertake an inventory and analysis of its facilities and fleet to determine a financially sound path to net-zero emissions. A high-level analysis is occurring now as part of the County’s capital planning and those numbers will inform whether the County can responsibly commit to net-zero or other more aggressive GHG emissions goal by 2030, 2040 or 2050. The County will strive for the largest reduction in the shortest timeframe possible while remaining financially solvent.
- b) The County will work with its employees to reduce GHG emissions from employee commutes. This will include opportunities to participate in a transportation demand management program

¹ Net-zero means that GHG emissions are reduced 100%, to zero, although some emissions can be allowed if balanced by negative emissions achieved through actions such as drawing carbon from the air and tree-planting.

such as the one offered by the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, as well as other programs and incentives to encourage carpooling, taking transit, and commuting via electric vehicles.

- c) The County will periodically update its Government Operations GHG Emissions and Energy Use Inventory to inform progress and assist in decision-making.

2. External Focus: Tompkins County will lead by supporting and facilitating community work to reduce fossil fuel dependency and reduce GHG emissions

- a) The County will periodically update the Community GHG Emissions and Energy Use Inventory to inform progress and assist in decision-making.
- b) The County will support targeted programs, such as continuing and strengthening the Business Energy Advisors Program, which helps businesses and non-profits reduce GHG emissions from their buildings.
- c) The County will periodically host an “Energy Summit” to convene the community and align efforts. The Summit will include a focus on the four buckets of critical actions identified in the Energy Roadmap and summarized in this introduction.
- d) The County will periodically prepare a “State of Energy” report that summarizes community energy activities and identifies opportunities, challenges and gaps to be filled, and whether information is being communicated effectively in the community.
- e) The County will periodically host stakeholder group meetings around specific topics to discuss opportunities, challenges and gaps.*
- f) The County will prepare reports and pursue funding to address the opportunities, challenges and gaps identified, including developing pilot programs and conducting feasibility studies that would result in reduced emissions.*

**Examples of topics that could be the focus of discussion and action in the next five years:*

- Convene partners that have, or are considering installing, publicly accessible EV charging stations to identify issues and make recommendations for future actions and needs.
- Work with municipal officials and other interested parties to develop a training on siting and evaluating renewable energy and storage projects.
- Work with municipal officials and others to identify and share elements of and modifications to the Ithaca Green Building Code for application in other towns and villages in Tompkins County.
- Convene partners to evaluate impacts on community members who could be disproportionately or negatively impacted by policies and programs associated with this energy transition.
- Coordinate opportunities for municipal officials to discuss best practices for greening municipal facilities and share the results of the County’s work to become carbon neutral.
- Work with municipal officials and others to create model regulations that require all new construction to include EV charging station infrastructure.
- Assist in tracking and advocating for sound state and federal energy and climate policies.
- Convene municipal partners and others to review current offerings for renewable energy procurement, including Community Choice Aggregation programs and other opportunities.