

EMC Final Minutes
Sept. 11, 4:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

Attendance

Member		SeatP	Member		Seat
Dan Antonioli	P	At-Large	Susan Riley	P	At-Large
Steve Bissen	E	Town of Dryden	Barry Siebe	P	Town of Groton
Christine Collins	P	Town of Ulysses	Elaine Tietjen	P	At-Large
Cait Darfler	P	At-Large	Brad Will	P	At-Large
Edward Dubovi	E	Town of Lansing	Ingrid Zabel	P	Town of Ithaca
Ace Dufresne	P	Student 1	Jack Zinda	P	At-Large
Thomas Hirasuna	E	At-Large	<i>Kathleen Yen</i>	P	<i>Associate</i>
Siobhan Hull	E	City of Ithaca	<i>Brian Wendel</i>	P	<i>Associate</i>
Peter McDonald	E	Town of Danby	<i>Anne Koreman</i>	P	<i>Legislative Liaison</i>
Melissa Millspaugh	P	Town of Enfield	Darby Kiley		Tompkins Co. staff
Steve Nicholson	P	Town of Caroline	Kristin McCarthy	P	Tompkins Co. staff

Guests: John Flemming

Call to Order – Chair Cait Darfler called the meeting to order at 4:02pm.

Agenda Review/Public Comment – No changes to the agenda. No members of the public spoke.

Approval of Minutes – The June and July 2025 draft minutes were approved (motion by Melissa Millspaugh, second by Steve Nicholson) as submitted. Motion carried.

Guest Presentation: Sewage Sludge Spreading on Farmland: How to Protect Our Land and Food from PFAS Chemicals – *Claire Walsh Winsler, Environmental Advocates of New York*

Claire Walsh-Wensler from Environmental Advocates New York presented on protecting land and food from PFAS chemicals in biosolids. She explained that biosolids are the solid waste remaining after sewage treatment, which since 1989 have been processed as fertilizer due to their nitrogen and phosphorus content. However, they may contain dangerous industrial contaminants including PFAS "forever chemicals" that bioaccumulate and have been linked to various cancers and health issues. Claire noted that Maine has banned all land application while Connecticut also has a ban and Massachusetts is considering one, which means New York is increasingly receiving biosolids imports from neighboring states. She shared that around 78% of New York's biosolids go to landfills, 19% are land applied, and less than 10% are incinerated, with no Class B spreading permits currently in Tompkins County. Discussion covered concerns about landfill capacity, the history and regulation of biosolids, emerging technologies like pyrolysis and specialized bacteria, and whether gray water separation could help address contamination. Potential next steps include the EMC passing a resolution requesting the County Legislature implement a temporary moratorium on biosolids land application framed as a public health measure, based on model language from other counties. The resolution could include provisions for investigating public safety concerns and technological solutions during the moratorium period, and the EMC could work with the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board on surveying farmers about current biosolids use practices.

Executive Committee Report – Cait reported on the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions (NYSACC) conference, which will be held October 23-25 in Ulster County, with registration now open and several members planning to attend. Steve N. reported that the EMC donated \$500 from past NYSACC conference earnings toward planting five trees at the Von Engel Preserve in Dryden as a memorial to long-time EMC member Bob Beck. Additionally, Cait gave an overview on the new approach to municipal and committee reports where members share updates via an email thread started a few days before the monthly meeting, allowing for follow-up discussion during meetings rather than spending time just listening to reports.

Strategic Planning Groups Update – Cait shared a spreadsheet organizing the strategic planning work with tabs for group scope and structure as well as tasks and timelines. It was reported that the executive committee will continue handling most engagement-related work but will outsource tasks when needed. The outreach group has been working steadily on the environmental directory and envisioned their work in two aspects: partnerships with other organizations and NGOs, and public education including perhaps a potential pilot program having graduate students present environmental talks at local high schools. Three types of online resources were proposed including the aforementioned directory of environmental organizations, a directory of environmental issues with curated information, and a compilation of member expertise and contacts. The legislative action group's role was described as tracking and prioritizing major issues where the EMC overlaps with other advisory groups and the County Legislature, as well as making research-based recommendations through fact sheets and resolutions. Concerns were raised about the large number of tasks being too ambitious for year one, with suggestions to sort out structure first and better define what each working group does to avoid overlap, confusion, and dilution of effort. It was noted that many items are ongoing processes rather than tasks to complete in a single year. Discussion addressed member bandwidth concerns, with clarification that the EMC previously dissolved committees because expectations were too high and moved to task groups so people could work asynchronously. The concept of associate memberships was discussed as an option for those who want to contribute to specific committees or working groups without attending all EMC meetings. Members were asked to meet once more in their working groups over the next month to flesh out tasks more specifically and consider what they are willing and able to contribute, with the goal of having a structure set up by year end.

Legislative Liaison Update (*as needed*) – Annie reiterated that as her term on the County Legislature ends in December, she would like to see a temporary moratorium on biosolids passed locally before year end if possible; however, she was also confident that new legislators would support it if it extends into early next year. She said she would consult with the County Attorney to learn whether a public hearing is needed and ask questions about enforcement. Annie also noted it is a tough budget year with some environmental items not getting funded in the draft County Administrator's budget, such as new electric vehicles for the County fleet.

Staff Report (*as needed*) – None

Member Announcements – None

Adjournment – Chair Cait Darfler adjourned the meeting at 5:36pm.