

## Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy

4/22/14

The Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy is intended to provide a coordinated approach to integrating sustainable practices into Tompkins County government operations during the 2014-2019 time period. It represents part of Tompkins County's continuing efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the risks associated with climate change for the health, safety, and well-being of the local and broader global community.

### DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

The following definition of sustainability shaped the objectives and actions laid out in this Strategy:

***Sustainability means equitably meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.***

Sustainably meeting these needs requires preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, conserving resources to ensure their ability to sustain future generations, and striving to simultaneously advance economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity. A decision to advance an economic, environmental or social goal should also seek to enhance the others. This understanding of sustainability will guide efforts within Tompkins County government to align its policies and operations toward community sustainability goals and to encourage sustainability efforts within its broader community.

### TOMPKINS COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS

Tompkins County has been working to advance sustainability for many years. Its formal sustainability commitments include:

- ❖ Joining the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign in 2001 (<http://archive.iclei.org/index.php?id=10829>), to facilitate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by local governments through measurement, commitment, planning, implementing, and monitoring.
- ❖ Signing the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement in 2005 (<http://www.usmayors.org/climateprotection/agreement.htm>), to advance the goals of the Kyoto Protocol through leadership and action by local governments.
- ❖ Joining the Sierra Club's Cool Cities campaign in 2005 (<http://www.coolcities.us/>), to identify ways to reduce emissions and encourage grassroots solutions to global warming.
- ❖ Joining Clean Communities of Central New York in 2008 (<http://www.cc-cny.com/>), to advance the nation's economic, environmental, and energy security by supporting local decisions to adopt practices that contribute to the reduction of petroleum consumption.
- ❖ Adopting the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Climate Smart Communities Pledge in 2009 (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html>), as part of a state-local partnership to balance economic, social, and environmental goals and challenges.

As a result of these commitments, Tompkins County has adopted policies, undertaken improvements to its facilities, taken actions within and between its various departments, and pursued a number of other

efforts related to sustainability. This Strategy is the next step in expanding upon past efforts and focusing future work.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE TOMPKINS COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

The Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy is driven by the overwhelming evidence that human-caused climate change is happening here and now, and by recognition that every organization and individual has a vital role to play in responding to climate change.

In addition to the 97 percent of climate scientists who acknowledge that human-caused climate change is happening, scientific experiments and satellite observations have strongly demonstrated the warming effect of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other heat-trapping gasses (What We Know, American Association for the Advancement of Science, <http://whatwewknow.aaas.org/get-the-facts/>, 2014). The production of these “greenhouse gases” vastly increased over the past century due to human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy, industrial processes, deforestation, and some agricultural practices. These gases trap energy in the atmosphere and cause it to warm. The rapid buildup of greenhouse gases due to human activity are changing the Earth’s climate and pose a threat to human health and welfare, as well as to ecosystems that humans and other species rely upon.

The vision and actions articulated in this Strategy build upon previous sustainability efforts and commitments made by the Tompkins County government, and represent part of the organization’s continuing work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the risks associated with climate change. The local community has recently been experiencing climate-related impacts ranging from ice jams and flooding to increases in invasive species, and more frequent and severe impacts are anticipated based on current scientific research. The costs of inaction are staggering, and the sooner individuals as well as organizations act, the lower the risk and cost will be for ourselves and for future generations. This Sustainability Strategy will help further align the actions and decision-making processes within the Tompkins County government with its commitment to advance sustainability within its realm of influence.

## **PLAN OVERVIEW**

The Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy is broken into eight key categories, each containing an overarching *objective* to specifically state what actions within the category are intended to accomplish. *Actions*, achievable within five years of the Strategy’s adoption, provide steps departments and individual employees can take to achieve the objectives. *Measures of success* are provided as a way to review progress in taking action and meeting the objectives.

Implementation of the Sustainability Strategy will require commitment, accountability, and teamwork from Tompkins County’s employees and their departments. The Tompkins County Sustainability Team will continue to seek members from all County departments and to meet regularly to track progress in taking recommended actions and achieving the Strategy’s objectives. The Sustainability Team will report progress to the Tompkins County Legislature, and it will ensure that information pertaining to these efforts is shared among County employees and the public in order to improve understanding of what

sustainability efforts are happening within County government and share ideas and successes that others may wish to adopt. Tompkins County hopes to foster a culture of sustainability that will permeate not only its operations and workforce, but will encourage and complement the broader community's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the risks associated with climate change.

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will be a leader in the early adoption and promotion of innovative strategies and technologies to promote sustainability, and will communicate the benefits of these sustainability-related activities to its employees and community members.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Launch a Tompkins County sustainability website to communicate sustainability efforts and their benefits to County employees and the public
  - Develop a simple County sustainability activities reporting method/template for departments/buildings so these actions can be tracked and measured by the County Sustainability Team
  - Issue an annual Tompkins County Sustainability Update to the Legislature and broader community in conjunction with Earth Day to inform them about County sustainability efforts and achievements
  - Coordinate communication efforts with the Tompkins County Public Information Office to more effectively inform the community and County employees about Tompkins County government sustainability efforts and accomplishments.
  - Develop display materials to provide information about Tompkins County government sustainability efforts at community events.
- ❖ **Measures of Success:**
  - Adoption of this Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy in 2014
  - County sustainability web pages “go live” in 2014
  - Public report on County sustainability activities issued each April (coordinate with Earth Day as meeting schedules permit)
  - All County employees provided with information about County sustainability efforts (through staff meeting announcements/discussions, e-mails, County Corridor newsletter, etc.)
  - Sustainability information coordinated with Tompkins County Public Information Office communication efforts
  - County sustainability display materials developed and exhibited at community events

## SOCIAL EQUITY

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will develop, implement, and assess all of its operations and programs in order to provide equitable opportunities and outcomes for all community members, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Provide racial-profiling training for the Law Enforcement Division of the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office
  - Track and evaluate the equity of outcomes for economic development and housing initiatives

- Develop and implement an environmental justice assessment process to gauge equity in the transportation and treatment of waste and in the location of waste management facilities
- Research and evaluate options for improving childcare options and workplace flexibility to increase equity in the workplace for Tompkins County employees
- Apply Tompkins County Living Wage Policy and procedures to eligible contracts, advancing economic growth and opportunities for workers

❖ **Measures of Success:**

- Completion of racial-profiling training by all law enforcement officers in the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office
- Launch procedure for tracking the equity of economic development and housing initiatives
- Process established for evaluation of environmental justice as it applies to the transportation and treatment of waste, and the location of waste management facilities
- Complete the evaluation of childcare and workplace flexibility options to increase workplace equity
- Achieve full compliance with the Tompkins County Living Wage Policy

## TRANSPORTATION

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will reduce the mileage driven by employees in single occupancy vehicles for their work commutes, and will reduce the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions by County-owned vehicles.

❖ **Actions:**

- Adopt telecommuting policy for County employees
- Consider establishing satellite offices as a way to reduce driving
- Develop and deploy driver training to promote efficient and safe use of vehicles
- Develop standardized method for departments to submit Green Fleet plans and updates
- Provide access to web and phone conferencing to County employees, decreasing the need to drive for meetings
- Continue to promote TCAT bus pass use among County employees
- Evaluate potential for a County bike share as an alternative to driving County vehicles for shorter trips
- Reestablish Green Fleet (or Fleet Management) committee to research and recommend additional sustainability actions related to transportation
- Continue to evaluate use of biofuels
- Promote carpooling opportunities among County employees

❖ **Measures of Success:**

- Telecommuting policy adopted
- Driver training program developed
- Web and teleconferencing software/hardware installed
- All departments provided with a method/template for submitting green fleet reports, and all department reports submitted in compliance with Green Fleet policy
- Green Fleet (or Fleet Management) committee reestablished and first meeting(s) held
- Decrease in number of employees driving alone to work

## FACILITIES AND GROUNDS

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will implement processes and practices in the design and management of its facilities and grounds that minimize energy and water usage, protect the environment, and reduce the production of greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Research options for incorporating smart (real time) metering for energy use and generation
  - Continue implementing Green Building Policy (01-47) for all new construction and major renovations of County-owned buildings (meeting at least the equivalent of LEED silver standards)
  - Incorporate water billing records into building dashboard and benchmark all County buildings' indoor water use
  - Incorporate Solid Waste and Airport into building energy use dashboard
  - Track facility efficiency upgrades and make information publicly available
  - Perform a plug load audit to determine priorities for upgrading equipment to more energy-efficient models
  - Complete efficiencies upgrade of plumbing fixtures
  - Generate renewable energy on County property, purchasing renewable energy or renewable energy credits to meet any remaining shortfalls in order to meet all County electricity needs
    - Evaluate potential of small scale hydro power and off-site solar PV for supplying County facilities with electricity
    - Evaluate potential for installing additional solar PV systems on County properties
  - Continue to reduce use of fossil fuel for thermal energy in County buildings by improving building envelopes, increasing the efficiency of HVAC systems, and exploring alternative energy options
  - Evaluate landscapes on County property for more practical and sustainable maintenance practices (e.g. expand use of no-mow grass, locally produced compost, etc.)
- ❖ **Measures of Success:**
  - Number, and square footage, of County buildings built or renovated to LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards in compliance with Green Building policy
  - Water efficiency upgrades for County buildings completed
  - Multi-year plan for energy efficiency upgrades completed
  - Continuing decline in GHG emissions and energy use by County facilities
  - Increase in reliance on alternative and renewable energy sources for County facilities
  - Decrease in water and energy usage at County facilities
  - Water usage incorporated into building dashboard
  - Plan developed for integrating smart metering into County facilities
  - Plug load audit completed and resulting information shared with relevant departments
  - 100% of electrical energy from renewable energy sources

## PURCHASING

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will pursue purchasing practices that provide a positive impact on the environment, economy, and community, purchasing from businesses providing environmentally and socially responsible products.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Reassemble Green Purchasing Sub-Committee to evaluate how well the program has been working and areas to improve
  - Encourage each department to either have their purchasing representative, sustainability team member, and waste reduction representative work together, or have one individual assigned some or all of these roles as appropriate for each individual department, to ensure the County closes the loop on sustainability activities
  - Create brief training module on Environmentally Preferred Procurement (EPP) for all individuals holding County credit cards
  - Evaluate opportunities for e-commerce, leasing programs, and innovative technologies and equipment that achieve environmental benefits
  - Assist departments in implementing the provisions of the Waste Reduction and Resource Management Policy
  - Encourage purchase/use of Energy Star products when available by departments as well as contractors and vendors (Energy Star vending machines, appliances, electronic components, etc.)
  - Educate purchasers about the ability to obtain information about environmentally friendly products on purchasing sites such as Staples Link
  - Recommend minimum recycled content for and FSC certification of paper products for frequent purchases (paper, pens, toilet paper, etc.)
  - Provide sample green specifications for employees to use when procuring services and products (e.g. recycled content, compostable products, providing recycling and food scraps collection at catered events, refraining from purchasing bottled water, etc.)
  - Develop electronic bid system to reduce paper generated by Purchasing Department activities
- ❖ **Measures of Success:**
  - Green Purchasing Sub-Committee meeting held in 2014
  - 100% participation by County credit card holders in EPP training and in working with their departmental sustainability team member and waste reduction contact
  - Full compliance with the Waste Reduction and Resource Management Policy
  - County-wide green purchasing practices implemented
  - Electronic bid system implemented for Purchasing Department

## SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will reduce the amount of waste produced by County operations and maximize opportunities for reuse, recycling, and food scraps recycling.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Identify a waste reduction representative for each department, who will be contacted by Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division (TCSWMD) to:
    - determine the status of original recommendations from the waste assessment;
    - identify new opportunities for diversion;
    - identify next steps towards implementation
  - Phase in food scraps recycling at all County facilities
    - TCSW will work with each department to implement food scraps recycling and to follow up on their original waste assessment
  - Develop training regarding the 4 Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, and rebuy) for new and current employees
  - Annually remind staff of recycling and composting guidelines during staff meetings
  - Provide easily accessible, highly visible, clearly labeled recycling bins at County facilities used by the public, and update existing containers with single stream recycling information
    - Circulate 4R tips to all staff, as shared through the monthly ReBusiness Partners newsletter
  - Provide wireless internet in County meeting and conference rooms to reduce the need for printed meeting materials
- ❖ **Measures of Success:**
  - Amount of waste diverted from landfills
  - Recycling easily accessible to all employees and public visitors in County facilities
  - Food scraps recycling provided in all County facilities, based on the time schedule set by TCSWMD's program plans
  - Recycling and food scraps recycling implemented at all events hosted on County properties
  - Full employee participation in training/orientation to waste reduction (food scraps recycling, recycling, reuse)
  - Follow-up conducted by TCSWMD with all department waste reduction representatives in conjunction with implementation of food scraps recycling program
  - Wireless internet installation completed in all County meeting and conference rooms

## PROTECTION OF COUNTY LANDS

- ❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will protect and manage County-owned lands to protect their natural resources and minimize negative impacts to the natural ecosystem while meeting the functional purposes of the site.
- ❖ **Actions:**
  - Investigate possibility of generating solar energy on the site of closed landfills
  - Create a long-range conservation funding strategy to support land acquisition, purchase conservation easements, and manage and monitor conserved land resources

- Work with County Attorney to determine if prospective purchasers of foreclosed properties in Tompkins County can be provided with information about the presence of Agricultural Districts, natural features focus areas, scenic resources, stream buffers, and Unique Natural Areas
- Create a sustainability inventory, supporting the Tompkins County Land Transactions Policy, to evaluate the potential for (1) renewable energy, (2) use of innovative sustainability best practices, (3) recreational trails, and (4) stream buffers on vacant County-owned lands recommended for sale and establish conditions for RFPs, easements, and sale agreements
- Develop sustainable land management plans/policies for County-owned properties
- Research the retention of mineral rights pertaining to natural gas extraction for lands held or sold by Tompkins County

❖ **Measures of Success:**

- Solar energy potential of closed landfills assessed
- Foreclosure property information updated with natural resource information (online and/or in print for prospective buyers)
- Sustainability inventory developed of vacant County-owned lands recommended for sale.
- Sustainability considerations incorporated into land management plans and programs for County-owned properties

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

❖ **Objective:** Tompkins County will create a zero-waste culture embraced by staff and community members that fosters employee health and well-being, educates and engages employees in sustainability, harnesses employee creativity, and rewards employee achievement of sustainability goals.

❖ **Actions:**

- Provide an overview of County sustainability goals and initiatives for new employees
- Incorporate environmental stewardship and sustainable practices as part of County employee evaluations
- Approach colleges for assistance in developing short videos to educate viewers about sustainability efforts
- Create an electronic suggestion box on County sustainability website and incorporate highlights on the website and/or in e-mail communications to County staff
- Explore options for improving employee health such as:
  - Workplace Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), including possible incentives
  - County organization bike share
  - Healthier vending machine food and beverages
- Each building/department:
  - Ensure all employees receive sustainability training and updates
  - Share news and updates on sustainability efforts with all employees, including those lacking e-mail/computer access
  - Recognize outstanding efforts by staff to advance sustainability in their offices
  - Identify volunteer “sustainability stewards” to promote initiatives, actions, and education



❖ **Measures of Success:**

- All County employees participate in sustainability-related training or updates at least once annually and are aware of County goals and efforts
- Sustainability stewards identified for every department
- Measurable behavior changes (increased recycling/food scraps recycling, more efficient driving, less frequent use of vehicles for County meetings, etc.)
- Leading departments/individuals recognized for leadership and innovation in improving sustainability of County operations
- Ideas for sustainability strategies generated throughout the workforce, not only by those serving on the Sustainability Team

## APPENDICES/LINKED DOCUMENTS

- ❖ Adopted sustainability-related Tompkins County policies
  - 06-15 Waste Reduction and Resource Management Policy (2007): <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/policy/06-15.pdf> - adopts procedures to reduce waste and to increase reuse, recycling, composting, and environmentally preferable purchasing programs; states additional goal of educating employees
  - 06-09 Facilities Management and Workplace Environment Policy (adopted 1993, modified 2009): <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/policy/06-15.pdf> - addressing topics such as energy reduction, thermostat settings, and use of appliances in County buildings.
  - 01-44 Green Fleet Policy (2009): <http://www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin/policy/01-44.htm> - calls for measuring performance of County-owned motor vehicles, having departments submit plans for reducing GHG, inventorying vehicles, and establishing a Fleet Management Team
  - 01-47 Green Building Policy (2013): <http://www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin/policy/documents/01-47GreenBuildingsAdopted05072013-Final.pdf> - adopts green building standards for all new construction and major renovation of County-owned buildings
  - 01-43 Diversity and Inclusion Policy (2013): <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/policy/01-43.pdf> - demonstrates commitment to cultivating an inclusive workplace environment, and to recruit, retain, and support a workforce that reflects and supports the diversity of the Tompkins County community.
- ❖ Building energy usage and energy efficiency improvements (linked to document as available)
- ❖ Vehicle fleet information (fuel use, mileage, other information linked as it becomes available)