

Minutes of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force Meeting December 15, 2023

The Dec. 2023 meeting of the Putnam County Climate Smart task force was called to order at 10:02 a.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions (Members Present)

- **Iiona Campo**, Planning Assistant / Climate Smart Coordinator, Putnam County Planning Department
- **Barbara Barosa**, Commissioner of Planning, Putnam County Planning Department
- **Neal Tomann**, Soil & Water Conservation District Director, Putnam County
- **Sean Bennett**, Planner, Putnam County Planning Department
- **Joe Bellucci**, Deputy Commissioner, Putnam County Department of Public Works
- **Hon. Amy Sayegh**, County Legislator District 8 / Deputy Chair of Legislature, Putnam County
- **Jennifer Caruso**, Director of Compliance & Intergovernmental Relations, Putnam County
- **Shawn Rogan**, Director of Environmental Health, Putnam County Health Department & Town Board Member, Town of Patterson, NY
- **Michael O'Brien**, Clerk, Putnam County Planning Department
- **Max Garfinkle**, Natural Resources Officer / Wetlands Inspector, Town of Philipstown & Biologist with NYS Parks, Palisades Region
- **Joe Montuori**, Executive Director, Sustainable Putnam
- **Eleanor Peck**, Clean Energy Communities Coordinator, Hudson Valley Regional Council
- **Amanda Catale**, Community Energy Advisor, Putnam County Cornell Cooperative Extension
- **Anne Campbell**, Town Board Councilwoman, Town of Kent, NY

2. Introduction to Climate Smart Communities Program

- The Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Program launched in 2009, certification program began in 2013, and the website/submission portal was established in 2018.
- The program's goals are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while saving taxpayer dollars, increase energy security, improve community public health, support green innovation economies, and demonstrate leadership.
- Main goal is to adapt local infrastructure to accommodate impending climate change threats.

3. Brief History of Climate Smart Initiatives in Putnam County

- The County passed a resolution in June 2019 to *register* as a Climate Smart Community. Putnam County's new goal is to apply for Bronze-level certification by April 2024.
- There are currently 401 registered Climate Smart communities in New York State, out of which only 132 are certified (approx. 1/4 of registered communities are certified).
- The program is sponsored by a few different agencies in New York State including: Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), Department of Public Service, Department of Health, Department of State, and the Power Authority (NYPA). DEC is the main administrator of the program.
- There are several different levels of certification: Bronze (120 points) and Silver (300 points). Surrounding counties with Bronze certification include Dutchess, Orange, Westchester, and Albany, with Ulster County having Silver certification.

Previous Accomplishments

- In 2019 Ameresco completed an investment grade energy audit (IGA) of Putnam County facilities. The report detailed energy consumption for these buildings and recommended various energy efficiency upgrades.
- Lauri Taylor was first appointed coordinator in 2019 and the Executive Capital Projects Committee served as the initial Climate Smart Task Force. Notable, Lauri Taylor conducted a lot of outreach to various department and local communities and helped to set up the County's Climate Smart website.
- Prior to this first meeting of the Climate Smart Task Force, Climate Smart agenda items have been discussed at monthly Soil & Water Conservation District meetings as well.

4. Review of Putnam County Climate Smart Actions – Narrowed Down Spreadsheet

A table of Climate Smart Actions was presented with actions broken down into mandatory, priority, and voluntary categories. Of the total 118 actions available, 23 were prioritized as being the most achievable for Putnam County. These actions and updates include:

- Action: **Complete Streets Policy** - Submitted to the County Legislature (awaiting approval).
- Action: **Interior/Exterior Lighting & HVAC Upgrades** – Awaiting Ameresco report for county building energy upgrades.
- Action: **Fleet Inventory** – A comprehensive list was sent over from the Purchasing Dept. The list needs to be updated to include more information. Neal and Michael are currently working on this.
- Awaiting information of solar panel installations on county buildings.
(J. Bellucci lists buildings with solar projects: Kern, COB, DBS Campus buildings 1,2,3)
(J. Montuori mentioned meetings on community solar use for excess energy generated by COP solar installations)
- Action: **Recycling Bins in Government Buildings** – Memo. needed regarding policy of installation of recycling bins in all government buildings (addressed to Shawn – will check with staff working on program for documentation)
- Action: **Construction and Demolition Waste Policy** – Discussed Broome County's efforts on this issue and the possibility of mirroring those efforts thus far. Neal is currently working on this.
- Action: **Planning for Biking and Walking** – The Planning Dept. will produce a narrative describing the County's efforts over the years, including possible photographs of bikeways. Bikeways are broken down into various stages depending on funding.
- Action: **Access to Public Transit** – The County has provided public transit services since the 1990s and Ilona will upload the County's transportation website link into the Climate Smart portal. Additionally, they are looking for commuter shuttles and collaboration with regional transit agencies which the County already incorporates (Westchester County BEE-Line, HART, etc.). We are also trying to implement a demand response system in the coming year. The majority of this action's requirements have been completed, it's just a matter of finding the documentation.
- Action: **Climate Vulnerability Assessment** – This priority action is going to require a lot of interdepartmental collaboration. We will need to work with various towns and departments including the Department of Health, the Department of Public Works, and the Bureau of Emergency Services.
- Action: **Hazard Mitigation Plan** – Completed and approved by the County Legislature and FEMA in 2021, the Plan is available via the [website](#) and it has already been uploaded to the portal. FEMA adoption documentation will be necessary for this item, once received, it will also be uploaded.

- Action: **Cooling Centers** – Initiative of the Health Department, which included a lot of social media outreach. Action documentation has already been uploaded to the portal.
- Action: **Conserve Natural Areas** – The County conserved 131 acres across street from the Centennial Golf Course, a steeply wooded vacant property that slopes towards a reservoir. This should amount to 20 points. The more acres, the more points.
- Action: **Culverts and Dams** – Neal is continuing to work on the culvert component of this action. A comprehensive dam inventory detailing 129 dams was uploaded to the portal. The dam inventory spreadsheet includes both public and private dams. We are also getting involved with towns on their dam inventories/maintenance records. J. Bellucci stated that we have 83 culverts in the County that we periodically inspect. The dam inventory is only worth 2 points, but we will try to get more information on right-sizing dams and culverts in the coming months for an additional 6 points.
- Action: **Farmers Markets** – Lauri Taylor previously handled brochures and marketing for farmers markets but is has since been taken on by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Putnam County. Amy asked if Tourism has promotional information on the farmers markets, Ilona will look into this more.
- Action: **Local Climate Action Website** – Ilona discussed working with the county IT department to update the [website](#) and to include content in a list similar to the Climate Smart Action spreadsheet - outlining the various actions, their completion status and assigned points.
- Action: **Social Media** – Still waiting to find out if the County has a social media policy and if we can go forward with this. Jennifer Caruso emailed after the meeting that Chirs Formisano of the County Exec.'s Office can help with this action. There is also an IT policy that must be followed before establishing social media accounts. Ilona said we should aim to create a Facebook or Instagram page for Climate Smart as well Soil & Water / Ag.

Other Actions to Consider:

- **Partnerships with Other Entities** – Such as Sustainable Hudson, Sustainable Putnam, and Hudson Valley Regional Council. Eleanor mentioned that HVRC and the Climate Smart website have more information on how to achieve this action.
- **Clean Energy Upgrades** – Previously completed for the most part, but CSC personnel will also be looking for approval from NYSERDA. Can the County realistically install wind and geothermal generators?
- **Greenhouse Gas Inventory** – an ambitious item, but Ameresco could possibly do something similar to what they did with the building energy audit. J. Bellucci said that this should be something they compile once they finish the other upgrades. Eleanor mentioned that HVRC has a template for this action and that they recently updated their Mid-Hudson Regional GHG Inventory which includes helpful statistics/data of the County.
- **Natural Resources Inventory** – We have an inventory that was completed in 2024, it is not a comprehensive list but rather a series of documents and maps of the natural resources in the County. Max said that the Town of Philipstown has completed an NRI of its own and that we might be able to look into compiling inventories from them and other towns. Amy mentioned that the Town of Putnam Valley has done one as well. Eleanor stated that the Hudson River Estuaries Program offers a grant program providing a 15% match to assist communities in doing Natural Resource Inventories. She also stated that HVRC would be interested in working with Ameresco and Putnam County on the Greenhouse Gas Inventory as they have a template we can use. There is also a regional inventory that the County could use and get Climate Smart credit for. She also mentioned that because this is a priority action, it is a good idea to have back-up priority items, instead of just the three required. Ilona asked if they get into details for each municipality or just general estimates. Eleanor said they do get quite detailed and there's a 40-page methodology document to back it up.

- **Fleet Efficiency Policy** – Neal mentioned the spreadsheet of county vehicles again and Barbara said the county is moving toward a new vehicle leasing policy which will include newer more efficient vehicles.
- **Reuse Policy** – Members discussed what is meant by “reuse policy”. Ideas such as library book exchanges were mentioned. Basically, anytime an item is no longer needed, it should be advertised for other people or organizations/departments to use. Ilona said we will look for documentation on existing ‘reuse’ activities.
- **Alternative Fuel Infrastructure (EV Charging Stations)** – The Transit Facility received an MEP (NYSDOT) grant to put dual charging stations on site. We also have our first hybrid vehicle, the new trolley which was delivered in Oct. 2023. Ilona stated that a number of companies have approached the County about installing EV charging stations at County-owned park-and-rides and other locations of interest. Eleanor was asked if and how the County could credit for town-based initiatives with regard to EV charging facilities. She responded that there is a way to get credit for partnership programs or projects, but you have to show some county involvement.
- **Reuse Programs/Repair Cafés** – Joseph Montuori mentioned Sustainable Putnam’s sponsored Repair Cafés. He said they just had their first one in Mahopac last week and it went very well. It was held at the Mahopac Middle School and Legislator Amy Sayegh brokered the arrangement with the school superintendent to arrange for use of the school’s cafeteria. The event involved about 15 volunteers actually repairing items (toasters, lamps, small appliances, clothes, etc.) and another 15 volunteers assisted with set-up and logistics. He said they were able to leverage volunteers from a larger network of repair cafés throughout the Hudson Valley. He said they plan to do more, about one per season. Neal asked if they had insurance policy in case of liability for improperly repaired appliances. Joseph stated that they do have a policy as well as a waiver. He also discussed the possibility of searching for alternative locations but said that that can be tricky. Amy said utilizing the schools is a great option because it reaches the kids and parents and helps get them thinking about repairing instead of replacing.
- **Heat Emergency Plan** – Shawn was asked if the Health Department has any policies/plans on dealing with extreme heat events. He said they do advertising/communication through social media and news briefs via the Health Education division, which he said also serves as a way of getting the word out about the cooling centers. Barbara asked if they have anything similar for extreme cold events. Amy responded that the County does have warming centers as well and that the Department of Social Services canvasses the homeless populations and will assist them in finding shelter for the night at hotels.
- **Water Smart Landscaping** – Planting of native species at county facilities was discussed as was the installation of rain gardens at county parks and Tilly Foster Farm.
- **Climate Change Education and Engagement** – Follow up with Joseph Montuori and Eleanor about hosting some local seminars. The idea of putting together a combined Climate Smart/Soil & Water workshop was discussed. Eleanor said that meetings and workshops would definitely be useful for Climate Smart credits, but that they would had to have hosted 2 events within the past year. It also requires that the community have a plan in place stating how it is going to do community education and engagement. She also said HVRC has a template for such a plan that she would be happy to share with the group.
- **Recycling Program for Public Spaces and Events** – Neal asked if there was a recycling plan in place for the large events such as weddings or concerts at Tilly Foster. Shawn said that the Health Department’s Recycling Program does have large plastic recycling bins that they loan out for events, such as the Garrison Arts Festival, for instance. Ilona asked Shawn if he knew where the waste collected in Putnam County goes, if there are any landfills in the County. He said that the County does not have any landfill facilities and that waste is collected by the contracted hauler to private transfer facilities and then to waste-to-energy facilities such as the Wheelabrator facility in Peekskill. Amy said that all of the Town of Carmel’s waste ends up at the Wheelabrator facility which then provides power to White Plains Linen, a business located next door. Ilona asked if

there was any way to get more information/documentation on this. Amy said that Wheelabrator is very open and happy to share information about their service and will even provide tours. Ilona asked about the “Cash for Cans” redemption center located in Carmel to see if anyone knew where those containers were sent beyond that point. Ilona said she would be very interested in learning more about where the waste collected in the county goes. Shawn said that there needs to be a separate conversation (perhaps outside the issue of Climate Smart) about solid waste in the County. He gave a brief history of the solid waste program in Putnam County and its current status, and said the County needs to address it more broadly from the top down.

- Commissioner Barosa asked if anyone had any other suggestions for any other actions that we should be considering. Shawn mentioned that some towns have or are considering composting facilities, in addition to standard yard waste collection and Christmas tree mulching. He said there has also been talk of finding a place for composting, possibly Tilly Foster. Joseph Montuori said that the Town of Philipstown’s composting site has been very simple and cost-effective involving a few rolling bins, compostable liners, and a contract with a hauler.
- Eleanor said this meeting was a really great start and was excited to work with everyone.

5. Next Steps

Ilona explained how the goal is to achieve Bronze-level certification. The CSC certification program is a rolling program with three application deadlines each year and we are aiming to submit documentation for the April 5th, 2024 deadline. She also said she wanted to have another meeting set up for January or February and then after that Task Force meetings can be held quarterly/seasonally or biannually. Barbara also reiterated that this was a rolling application process and that if the County receives Bronze-level certification, we will still have to recertify again in three years (**correction**: 5 years). Ilona asked everyone present if the meeting time of 10:00 AM on Fridays still works well, everyone agreed.

Neal suggested going around the room restating what everyone will be working on. From Joseph Montuori we’re looking for the Repair Café information, Max is going to try and help with the Natural Resource Inventory, Eleanor can help with the Climate Change Education and Engagement, Amy Sayegh was asked to provide further information on the Wheelabrator facility, and Shawn will be helping with information about the recycling bins, more information on the cooling centers, and composting efforts. A sidebar conversation about municipal solid waste planning will also be scheduled within the next month or so.

Meeting adjourned at 11:01 AM