

Monroe County Climate Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

via zoom

January 7, 2021 (3:30 – 5:00 p.m.)

Drafted: January 8, 2021

Approved: February 4, 2021

Members: John Botelho, Fred Ancello, Matthew O'Connor, Sue Hughes-Smith, Kathryn McArdle, Leah Wirley, Helen Frank, Liam Smith, Karla Boyce, Michael Yudelson

Absent:

Staff: Mike Garland, Tina Stevens, Joe VanKerkhove, Patrick Gooch, Clement Chung

Guests: Amanda LaValle, Europa McGovern

Welcome, Introduction and Announcements (Co-Chair O'Connor):

1. Meeting called to order at 3:33 P.M. by Co-Chair O'Connor.
2. Co-Chair Yudelson reported on communications with Legislator President Carbone regarding adoption of the C-PACE program. The Legislature had stated they preferred to have all recommendations of this committee together in one final report. The discussion included the fact that C-PACE has no burden or responsibility for the County, and a letter has been sent to County Administration to advance movement of the legislation. Mike Garland said that if the program was referred back to Environmental Services, it would be reviewed quickly and forwarded to Finance and Legal for their input.

Approval of Minutes (Co-Chair O'Connor):

1. Minutes from the December 7, 2020 meeting were unanimously approved. Motion by Co-Chair Mike Yudelson; seconded by Kate McArdle.

New Business:

1. Amanda LaValle, Coordinator and Europa McGovern, Senior Resource Technician for the Ulster County Department of the Environment, presented the Ulster County Climate Action Plan.
2. Ulster County is a unique area that supplies one-third of the drinking water for nine million people in New York City. Officials reviewed many plans in preparation for their own. Unique features of the area that were taken into consideration include mountains and rivers that can contribute to flooding issues, ticks, heat, algae blooms, draught, agriculture and habitat for threatened and endangered species. What do people love and what do they see as at risk?
3. New County Executive is supportive of these efforts. Ulster County also included Careers and Economic Development in their plan and see the ties between other County initiatives.
4. Since 2012, the County produces 100% renewable energy and offsets all other emissions (building heating and mobile emissions) by purchasing carbon credits. Ulster County is a Net Carbon Neutral Operation.
5. Ulster County's Climate Action Plan (Green New Deal) was adopted in June, 2019 by Executive Order and legislation. The legislation focused on reducing emissions community-wide; preparing for the impacts of climate change; equitable transition; protecting natural resources; 100% locally generated renewable energy for building electricity; a green careers academy and economic development for all. The legislation provided for a 25% reduction in GHG emissions by 2025 and an 80% reduction by 2050, with all building electricity provided by local sources by 2030.
6. Ulster County Framework: Focus on County Government Operations and GHG emission reduction. How are goals met, and how does the County do that in a way that helps learning and increases the capacity for future action? How can the County assist other municipalities and organizations to take on similar actions?
7. Framework is divided into four sections: Climate Action Leadership-Sustainability Guide; Carbon Neutral Government Operations Strategy; Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Implementation Roadmap.
8. Scope of the plan: Scope 1 – Direct: fuel combustion from County-owned buildings and vehicles; Scope 2 - Indirect: production of purchased energy; and Scope 3 – Direct and Indirect: Production of purchased materials and services.
9. Climate Action Leadership: provides a starting point for Ulster County action as well as case study and examples for municipalities; a compilation of UC Sustainability Guide (2013), laws, resolutions, executive orders and procedures; seek projects that extend layers of benefit to the broader community; provide environmental and economic benefit and demonstrate technology to the public. Guide is available online and a great tool to use with municipalities.
10. Carbon Neutral Government Operations Strategy - assess: monitor energy use to identify energy saving opportunities, benchmark performance and monitor/verify actions taken; avoid: unnecessary use of vehicles, equipment, buildings and space. Improve facilities to limit amount of energy necessary; conserve: use technology to make energy use more efficient; generate – utilize local, renewable energy sources to meet operational needs; offset – measure emissions and offset remaining scope 1 and 2 emissions with RECs and Carbon Credits.

11. Carbon Neutral Government Operations Strategy: consolidate operations to reduce number of square feet necessary to conduct county business; improving building envelope to reduce heating and cooling; employ lighting sensors; employ route building software to help employees consolidate trips; employ energy efficient technology, such as LEDs and heat pumps; on-site electricity generation; purchase local generated electricity from a third party; remote net metering from County owned or controlled site; on-site and mobile combustion of biomass or biomass-derived fuels.
12. Renewable Energy Credits: County purchases certified renewable energy credits certified by Green E-Energy to offset 100% of its grid supplied energy use. Carbon credits: Large portion of County emissions generated by direct energy sources – specifically mobile combustion for the operation of fleet vehicles and stationary combustion for building heating. For these sources, County purchases carbon credits to offset emissions. Offsets are verified by a third-party, the Climate Action Reserve (CAR).
13. Greenhouse Gas Inventory: First completed in 2012 and covers all building and fleet energy usage. Ulster County Green Fleet Law requires annual reporting; building benchmarking resolution requires annual reporting on building. In 2018, energy expenses cost \$3.1 million, emitting 9,360 MT CO₂E. 2018 emissions: 3% propane, 11% Natural gas, 16% heating oil, 23% gasoline; 16% electricity and 31% diesel.
14. Implementation roadmap: 2025 goal is 25% reduction from 2012 baseline (7098 MT CO₂e); Fleet – 20% reduction from 2018; Transit – 25% education from 2018; buildings and facilities – 25%.
15. Focus area #1 – Buildings: audit to identify opportunities for GHG reductions; ensure buildings are heated, cooled and lit only when needed and improve building envelopes and right-size HVAC equipment; improve efficiency of HVAC and electrical systems; utilize locally generated renewable electricity to meet energy needs and measure emissions and offset remaining Scope 1 and 2 emissions with RECs and Carbon Credits.
16. Focus area #2 – Vehicle Fleet: improve vehicle inventory to allow for right-sizing analysis and decision making; right-size fleet using audits and life-cycle methodology; reduce vehicle miles travelled; expand the percentage of green vehicles; utilize renewables onsite to meet electric vehicle charging needs; increase usage of renewable biofuels and measure emissions and offset remaining Scope 1 and 2 emissions with RECs and Carbon Credits.
17. Focus area #3 – Transit Fleet: determine feasibility of fleet electrification; use route planning to maximize ridership per VMT; implement electrification of buses, paratransit and support vehicles; utilize locally-generated renewable electricity to meet electric vehicle charging needs and increase usage of renewable biofuels; measure emissions and offset remaining Scope 1 and 2 emissions with RECs and Carbon Credits.
18. Focus area #4 – Policy and Procedure: improve tracking and reporting; analyze County operations to find areas for improvement; implement policies and procedures to set policy and procedures to direct organizational practices and promote a culture of energy efficiency and waste reduction; continue to purchase carbon credits to offset emissions.
19. Focus area #5 - Scope 3 emissions: Broaden scope of tracking activities to improve ability to quantify Scope 3 emissions; implement policies and procedures to affect behavior and energy use needs; implement policies and procedures to reduce waste, water use and promote energy efficiency and continue to purchase carbon credits to offset quantified Scope 3 emissions.
20. Next steps: encourage other municipalities and organizations to go through the CAP process; funded by the NYS DEC to complete Climate Change Vulnerability and Resiliency Planning project; support Community-Wide Climate Planning and Emissions Reductions.
21. Matt O'Connor asked about efforts being delayed due to the pandemic. Amanda stated that two projects had been moved forward: a large-scale solar project and electric transit.
22. Amanda discussed the fact that once a plan is adopted by the legislature, grant opportunities can be pursued. Grant offerings have been scarce in 2020.
23. Liam Smith asked about how carbon offsets were acquired. Amanda suggested calling carbon traders and getting prices on verified carbon offsets. These offsets are purchased like a renewable energy credit as a commodity and verified by a third party, such as Green-E or CAR. Some will allow selection of a project that is of interest to you. There is a wide variety in price. The “social” cost of emissions was recently valued by the DEC at \$140-\$150 per ton. Local groups, such as Tompkins County, have residents buy their own carbon offsets to fund their own projects.
24. Clement Chung asked if Ulster County operated their own transit system and Amanda stated they did.
25. Mike Garland talked about the County's Energy Aggregation efforts to purchase Carbon Credits and REC's.
26. Pat Gooch asked how employees were included in GHG accounting. Amanda stated that personnel data was used to track travel to and from an employee's report to site, combined with modes of transportation.
27. Pat asked about how were goals for 2025 determined. Amanda said alignment with NYS goals was one consideration.
28. Karla Boyce asked about how to combat public pushback against projects such as community solar. Amanda stated that public education to change the culture is important. The Scenic Hudson Conservation Group has good online tools for that purpose. NYS is also in the process of changing laws to streamline the approval of such projects. Sue Hughes-Smith asked about COMIDA as they have a leadership role in solar projects. Pat Gooch will invite Ana Liss, the County's Planning Director, to speak about solar support at an upcoming meeting.

29. John Botelho asked about budget and political pushback for projects. Amanda stated that the Ulster Legislature had committed to carbon neutral operations.
30. Mike Garland asked about tree planting initiatives. Amanda thought that a unique REC could be accomplished if quantified.
31. Clement Chung stated that the first meeting with the Climate Action Plan Consultant, Bergmann, will be held on Friday, January 8.

Public Forum:

1. No public comments or requests to speak were received.

New Business:

1. Next meeting is Thursday, February 4 at 3:30, via Zoom. Link will be sent out one week prior.

Motion to adjourn by Kate McArdle; second by Karla Boyce. Meeting adjourned at 4:50 PM.