



Hudson-Mohawk Group

April-June 2018

Volume 52, No. 2



“This is the American Earth”,
photograph by Ansel Adams.
Used by special permission.

Welcome to the second 2018 newsletter - due to printing issues this will be a digital only copy.

- pp.1-2 Sustainable Albany – Citizen Involvement Part of the Plan!
- pp.2-3 Landfill updates
- pp.3-4 Program meetings report - Dark Skies
- p.4 Delmar Farmers Market *and* Zero Waste at the Albany Jazz Fest
- pp.5-6 Community Choice Aggregation
- pp.6-7 Accelerating Our War on Global Warming
- p.8 Program Meetings, Volunteer opportunity *and* Save the Date for our fundraising dinner

Sustainable Albany – Citizen Involvement Part of the Plan!

The City of Albany has recently taken big steps in its goal to create a more sustainable environment, by embracing renewable energy, adopting energy-efficiency measures and encouraging citizens to get involved in one of the six subcommittees which are part of the Albany Sustainability Council (SAC.)

Energy Efficiency: With the help of a grant from the New York Power Authority (NYPA) the City’s first Energy Manager (Kevin Luteran) has been hired and on the job for about two and half years. Kevin has skillfully built a system to monitor and record each building’s energy usage. Using 2015 as a baseline, he managed the installation of high efficiency LED lightbulbs in all City-owned buildings (except the Water Dept. and Albany Housing Authority – which

will be tackled in the future.) Significant energy savings have already been realized. Electrical usage in these buildings went from approximately 15,500 megawatt hours in 2015 (MWhs – which are 1,000 kilowatt hours which are the unit of energy usage in utility bills), to approximately 13,100 MWhs in 2017 - a savings of approximately 15%. The City has plans for more energy saving measures in the near future.

Additionally, the City completed long negotiations with National Grid over street-lighting. The City is awaiting Grid’s revised offer to permit the City to purchase the street lamp fixtures - over 10,000 - and have them retrofitted with LEDs. The City would own the lamps (but not the poles or conduits) and has a plan which will reduce energy consumption by well over 50%. Over a 20 year span, the City would realize savings in the millions of dollars. Currently, the City pays approximately \$4.5 million per year for energy and the rental of the

lamp fixtures and related equipment. The details of the agreement are being kept under wraps until a final agreement is reached. The Sierra Club believes there should be more transparency in the process in that it is ratepayer \$s that Grid is using in these negotiations.

Renewable Energy: The City has embraced solar energy generation by starting with the installation of a 200 kW (kilowatts - this is the capacity) system on the roof of Swinburne Park. To date this has produced approximately 92,300 kWhs. According to Kevin Luteran, the planned buildout of solar (both on-site and credits from existing solar generation elsewhere) should total approximately 10 MWs (each MW is 1,000 kW.) When fully operational – by the end of 2018, it would produce approximately 11,826 MWhs which represents approximately 80% of the projected yearly usage! At a recent SAC meeting, Commissioner of Water Joe Coffey indicated his intention to work with Kevin and determine ways in which solar can be accommodated on City Water Dept. buildings and property. There appear to be ample unshaded areas available.

The Albany SAC has provided valuable input in two key areas of energy. By signing non-disclosure agreements with Grid, members of the SAC Energy Committee were able to view some of the technological details of the proposal and make recommendations. One of those was to incorporate sensors and other monitoring equipment to dim the lights when necessary. Another area in which the Energy Subcommittee (ES) has provided assistance is with a successful NYSERDA grant application received by the Albany Affordable Housing Partnership (AAHP.) The ES calculated the energy, demand and corresponding dollar savings associated with the “Eco-Village in Sheridan Hollow” project. The work, which is scheduled to begin this summer, involves energy efficiency retrofits, installation of solar systems on houses and businesses (at 255 Orange Street) and installation of electric vehicle charging stations

and LED lighting in the parking lot. There is also a very important solar installation training component of this project for youth and adults from the Arbor Hill and Westhill neighborhoods. For more information on the SAC, visit:

<http://www.albanysustainability.org/sac> If you are a City of Albany resident and would like to get involved in any of the six SAC subcommittees, including Energy, you can contact Pete Sheehan at psheehan74@aim.com

Landfill Updates

-- Steve Davis

The Town of Colonie landfill, located on the shore of the Mohawk River, was waiting for Department of Environmental Conservation to grant the renewal for the permit of the Landfill for the next 20 years. The plan as applied for was to raise the height of the Landfill from 430 feet to 517 with a setback of 400 feet from the river.

Recently NYSDEC gave approval but with modifications. They scaled back the size of the landfill expansion greatly by 50 feet, making the height raise only to 467 feet. Further, the setback for the double-lined system will now be 500 feet. Other changes included relocating the entrance away from busy Rt. 9 to a less trafficked location. Additionally, replacing the current open-air leachate lagoons in favor of covered tanks is expected to reduce odor considerably.

Now in the very early stages of planning is an Anaerobic Digestion System for Albany and Saratoga County. Anaerobic digestion is a series of biological processes in which microorganisms break down biodegradable material in the absence of oxygen.

Anaerobic Digestion systems can take materials out of the “landfill stream” including food scraps, manure, biosolids, fats, oils, grease, animal slurry, fruit and vegetable waste,

slaughterhouse waste, meat packing waste, dairy factory waste and my favorite, brewery and distillery waste. The materials can then be put into a digester. The system can “digest” these materials to create biogas which contains 60-70% methane gas. This biogas end product can be used to create electricity. The solid wastes from the digester can be used as fertilizer.

The technology for landfills has advanced and there is still need for further actions. We need to do what we can from our end. My resolution is to bring my own reusable container to a restaurant for leftovers to reduce plastic or styrofoam waste for the leftovers. What will you do to reduce our waste?

To discuss this or any other landfill issue contact me at Sdavis@rrchomes.com

Report from the April 26 Program meeting -- Dark Sky Reserve, Mont Megantic, Quebec

Remi Boucher of the Mont Megantic National Park Dark Sky Reserve and Astrolab in Canada presented a fascinating program on the importance of reducing nighttime light pollution, and discussed the process that the Astrolab went through to create the largest Dark Sky Reserve in the world, at 2100 square miles, within 120 miles of Montreal.

The Mont Megantic Dark Sky Reserve encompasses not only the Mont Megantic National Park, but also the City of Sherbrooke, with a population of 212,000, and 32 other smaller municipalities. The astronomers at the Astrolab Observatory noted a progressive increase in light pollution. In fact light pollution from the surrounding area had doubled at the observatory between 1978 and 1998. Reducing light pollution in the area was necessary to keep the observatory viable.

consequences: it washes out starlight in the night sky, interferes with astronomical research, disrupts ecosystems, has adverse health effects and may impact bird migration. Also, just as importantly, it represents a waste of energy.

Dr. Boucher began his presentation with a series of breathtaking views of the night sky from the Mont Megantic Observatory. He then discussed the numerous human health benefits and environmental benefits of reducing light pollution. To meet the international standards for a dark sky reserve, Dr. Boucher said that the astronomers recognized that they would need to include the surrounding municipalities to effect a significant reduction in light pollution in the area of the observatory. He detailed how the Astrolab representatives visited officials in every municipality in the proposed dark sky reserve area to explain that installing downward facing lighting, reducing lighting intensity, strategically placing lighting fixtures, and switching to amber-toned lighting would not only reduce upward light pollution, but increase safety by reducing glare and shadows. Most importantly to the municipalities, it would reduce energy costs.

Over the course of 7 years, this partnership with municipalities resulted in the conversation of 3300 light fixtures, both municipal and private. Dr. Boucher noted that \$2 billion in annual saving could be achieved in the U.S. by reducing nighttime light pollution. In a series of dramatic "before" and "after" slides, Dr. Boucher demonstrated how the recommended lighting changes improved nighttime visibility while reducing upward nighttime light pollution. In 2007, due to the reduction in nighttime light pollution, the area was designated the first International Dark Sky Reserve in the world.

What you can do: Send a message to your mayor or municipal leader asking what is being done locally and telling them to reduce nighttime light pollution and increase energy efficiency. Contact local officials via the Sierra Club “Protect the Night” campaign at: sc.org/night.

To learn more:

International Dark Sky

Association: <http://www.darksky.org/idsp/reserves/montmegantic/>;

Sierra Magazine, March/April 2018: [*On the Hunt for Stars: In Search of a Truly Dark Night Sky | Sierra*](#)

[Club; https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2018-2-march-april/feature/hunt-for-stars-dark-skies-preserves-and-parks](https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2018-2-march-april/feature/hunt-for-stars-dark-skies-preserves-and-parks).

Delmar Farmers Market Bans Plastic Shopping Bags -- Paul Tick

The Delmar Farmers Market celebrated its Tenth Anniversary on May 5. Coinciding with this wonderful occasion, the market was pleased to announce a ban on plastic shopping bags.

Our farm market recognizes that a sustainable planet needs a sustainable food system. Such a system takes into consideration not just how close to home our food is produced, or how our food is grown, but also how our food is packaged and how it is carried home.

Zero Waste Jazes up the City of Albany -- Tina Lieberman

The City of Albany is about to hold its first ever Zero Waste Festival! Albany’s Riverfront Jazz Festival is slated to celebrate its 17th anniversary on Saturday, September 8th from 1-9 pm at Jennings Landing. For the first time this festival will bring its attendees more than great music, Hudson River views and evening fireworks – the festival will also bring new hands-on insight into waste reduction, recycling and composting.

To accomplish this, the City of Albany will be partnering with Zero Waste Capital District, a newly formed volunteer coalition that includes the Sierra Club Hudson-Mohawk Group. With

the combined efforts of Zero Waste Capital District and the City of Albany’s Department of General Services, the City hopes to make this the most environmentally friendly festival in the area. Zero Waste Capital District will be training dozens of volunteers, who will be present at several Zero Waste Stations at the Festival. These friendly “Zero Waste Ambassadors” will help attendees sort their Festival waste into compost and recycling bins first, and then put what's left into the landfill basket. Volunteers will also provide helpful tips to festival attendees on how to compost and recycle at home.

Food vendors are encouraged to set aside their food waste at the festival for collection and to use products such as utensils, cups and plates that are either compostable in a commercial (high heat) facility, or recyclable. Attendees are encouraged to bring reusable water bottles, cups and utensils from home and to bring their food waste to one of the Zero Waste Stations at the Festival. Zero To Go, a business located in Beacon, NY will be serving as consultants, bringing their expertise in organizing zero waste events to this festival. FoodScraps360, a local business, will be collecting the compostable waste from the event. The cost of composting at \$14/bag is supported by individual and organization donations.



A zero waste station, courtesy of Zero to Go, a Hudson-Vally business that helps run zero waste festivals and events.

The goals of the Zero Waste Jazz Festival are to reduce the amount of waste Albany residents add to the almost-full Rapp Road Landfill, recycle material for further use, and put valuable nutrients back into the soil. The Albany 2030 Plan calls for a 65% diversion of solid waste from the Rapp Road Landfill. Reducing waste saves the city – and ultimately residents – money, improves neighborhood cleanliness and saves thousands of tons of earth-warming methane emissions from being produced by the landfill. A Zero Waste Festival is a great way to reach lots of residents with an important hands-on demonstration of what we can do to reduce waste and live more sustainably when we try.

To be a volunteer Zero Waste Ambassador at the September 8th Riverfront Jazz Festival or to sponsor a \$14 bag of compost, please contact Tina at tlieberm1@gmail.com or Diana at comphomellc@gmail.com.

The Power and Potential of Community Choice Aggregation -- Tina Lieberman

Community Choice Aggregation, CCA for short, is basically a way that municipalities can band together to create a “discount buying club” for electricity. The exciting part about CCAs is that it is also a way that municipalities can choose to provide affordable clean energy to ALL their residents and businesses.

The Public Service Commission approved CCAs in New York State in 2016. Seven states currently allow this electricity purchase option: New York, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, New Jersey, and Rhode Island.

More than anything, CCA is a strategy that puts control of choosing an energy supply in local hands. Instead of allowing the local utility to choose the default mix of electricity residents receive (generated by gas, coal, hydro, wind, solar and/or nuclear), the municipality gets to make the decision. Counties cannot participate in

a CCA; a CCA can only be formed on the smallest local level: cities, towns and villages.

When a local government agrees to join a CCA, by default all utility customers in that community will receive their electricity through the CCA unless they opt out. Multiple governments can join together in the CCA to provide the purchase power of upwards of 40,000 households. This large volume of customers enables the CCA to obtain lower prices for energy supply. CCAs can use this bulk purchasing power to buy a regular “brown” energy mix that contains fossil fuels, to buy 100% renewables through RECS (renewable energy credits) or to mix it up and buy a percentage of both. Once formed, the aggregate purchasing group can also be used to encourage customers to buy into local community solar. Hopefully, community solar may one day be integrated into the default mix itself.

Currently there is only one operating CCA in NYS--Westchester Power. However the Public Service Commission recently approved a CCA plan for five upstate NY municipalities: the villages of Fayetteville, Minoa, Coxsackie and the towns of Cairo and New Baltimore. Another CCA has been approved for the City of Elmira and the towns of Oneonta, Montour, Horseheads, Union, and Binghamton as well as the Village of Montour Falls. While each municipality must pass a law allowing for participation in a CCA, an administrator is usually contracted to do the competitive bidding and procurement.

According to Bradford Tito, Program Manager for NYSERDA's Communities and Local Government group: "It is important to note that currently, because of the nature of energy markets and the need for CCAs to purchase renewable energy credits (RECS) in order for energy supplies to be “green”, the default “green” option is more expensive than the “basic” supply option. However, it is possible that even with this premium, the CCA’s “green” rate may be less than the utility rate. The only

way to confirm price is with competitive procurement."

Here's the latest data from NYSERDA: of the 20 municipalities participating in Westchester Power, 14 municipalities chose to enroll their residents into a "green" option as the default supply mix. Since May 2016, residential customers in Con Edison territory have paid a green power supply rate that was approximately 3.5% less than Con Edison's default supply rate, while the non-green "basic" supply rate was approximately 7.2% less than Con Edison's default supply rate. That means that a typical residence using 500 kWhs per month paid approximately \$2.32 less per month for "green power" and \$3.82 less per month for a non-green supply, compared to if they had stayed with Con Edison's default supply rate.

Many environmental groups and sustainability-minded towns and cities are exploring CCAs as an option that can potentially move an entire local population onto renewable electricity, while also saving them money. However there are also local officials who eschew the green energy option in favor of maximizing residents' savings, making money the only priority. In the Capital Region, several stakeholder groups have formed a Steering Committee investigating the formation of a CCA that will promote both green energy *and* savings to local residents and businesses. Maximizing locally generated renewable energy and jobs is also a key goal.

Randolph Horner, Director of Renewable New York, LLC, sees aggregating "Communities of Customers" as a great way to support the financing for building clean energy generating facilities. He states: "At a scale of 20,000 to 80,000 participants per group, solar PV and energy storage investments can be made on otherwise un-developable brownfield sites and renewable power can be priced below that generated with fossil fuel."

If you're interested in becoming a supporter of

CCA in your community, contact Susan Lawrence of the Sierra Club Hudson-Mohawk Group at shlawr2@aol.com or Tina Lieberman at tlieberm1@gmail.com. For excellent resources about CCAs and a CCA Toolkit go to NYSERDA.ny.gov and search for CCA.

Accelerating Our War on Global Warming -- Susan Lawrence

Every day it seems we learn about the latest evidence of global warming and the escalating threats to the future of our planet and life on it. And every day it seems we learn about new and escalating initiatives to curb greenhouse gas emissions and related pollutants in the US at the national, state, and local level.

We must use the tools of grassroots empowerment and action to be catalysts, creators, lobbyists for actions in our communities to make a difference in what needs to be the war on global warming. The amazing grassroots efforts mushrooming from local actions across the state were and continue to be key factors in the ban on hydraulic fracturing for natural gas in our state. The ban sent a clarion call around the nation and to the world about taking action.

Now in our communities, our state, nation, and the world, we need to fight in all sectors – electricity, heating/cooling, transportation, to meet the goals of the Paris Accord and much more and as soon as possible. Make no mistake about it. This is a war with many campaigns, some carefully coordinated and some just spontaneous and inherently creative.

There is a lot of encouraging news about options for increasing use of solar power, geothermal heating, energy storage systems, energy efficiency and conservation, but in this country and the world we are so far behind on what needs to be done.

In NYS, only about five percent of electricity is provided by solar power and wind power with the bulk of renewable electric power from hydropower (primarily from Niagara Falls and other instate systems).

Moving to renewable electricity may seem like the low hanging fruit but there are obstacles getting in the way including zoning against solar farms and wind turbines. However, pooling the grassroots efforts of a variety of stakeholders as reported on in this newsletter to advocate for Community Choice Aggregation provides new innovative approaches to mass bulk purchasing for renewable electricity for residences and small businesses.

I have advocated for localities taking full advantage of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Climate Smart Communities and the Energy Research and Development's Energy Smart Communities to take small and big steps for comprehensive or individual initiatives to move toward sustainability. In addition to reaching out - with other concerned stakeholders - to our mayors, town supervisors, city councils, board of supervisors, school superintendents, school boards, we can also reach out to water districts, public transportation providers, the business community, and more to take actions. For example, our public bus and school bus systems can start procuring electric buses at life-cycle costs comparable to fossil-fuel powered buses. And many more electric-vehicle charging stations are needed in our communities.

To get involved with the Sierra Club on our campaigns to move to sustainable communities, please contact Susan Lawrence, HMG Conservation Chair, and others identified in this newsletter. There is more information on our Chapter website, www.newyork.sierraclub on these matters as well as calls for action at the State level. Please share with us what is happening in your communities to move them to sustainability.

SIERRA CLUB HUDSON-MOHAWK GROUP LEADERSHIP

Chair: *Pete Sheehan, psheehan74@aim.com

Vice Chair: *Roger Gray, rtg50@aol.com

Secretary: *Monica Gray,
monicafgray@hotmail.com

Treasurer: *Jim Dufresne: 233-7957;
Jdufre1928@aol.com

Conservation Chair: *Susan Lawrence,
shlawr2@aol.com

Chapter Delegate: *Virginia Boyle Traver,
virginiabt28@hotmail.com

Membership: *Virginia Boyle Traver,
virginiabt28@hotmail.com

Volunteers/Education Chair: *Tina Lieberman
tlieberm1@gmail.com

Outings Chair: vacant

Political Chair: *Steve Redler 428-8993;
steveredler@yahoo.com

Environmental Justice: *Aaron Mair,
aaronmair@yahoo.com

Green Calendar: *Tina Lieberman

Newsletter Editor: *Monica Gray

Media/Publicity Chair: *Jon Nemer
jello165@hotmail.com

FaceBook: *Virginia Boyle Traver

Website: *Pete Sheehan

Saratoga County Conservation: Bill Koebbeman,
wkebb2@nycap.rr.com

Issue Gurus

Adirondacks: *Roger Gray

Clean Air: *Susan Lawrence

Clean Water: *Susan Lawrence, *Aaron Mair

Energy: *Pete Sheehan, *Virginia Boyle Traver,
Susan Lawrence, *Tina Lieberman

Hudson River: *Aaron Mair, Bill Koebbeman

Sprawl/Smart Growth:

*Susan Lawrence and *Virginia Boyle Traver

Hudson Mohawk Group Executive Committee elections

Thanks to all who voted in the recent Hudson Mohawk Group Executive Committee elections. All the candidates will be continuing their good work with the Executive Committee.

Hudson-Mohawk Group Member Meetings 2018

Sierra Club is collaborating with WAMC's The Linda Performing Arts Studio, and with the Honest Weight Food Coop's 'Food For Thought' to present these programs. All programs will be at WAMC's The Linda Performing Arts Center, 399 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12208 (Parking is available next to The Linda). Doors open at 6PM, with a delicious free vegetarian buffet prepared by Coop volunteers. Music by Jack Empie & Friends from 6 -7 PM. The program begins at 7PM.

The program is free and open to the public; but please make a reservation at WAMC/The Linda website so we can plan efficiently.

As the venue is already booked we will not be holding a Sierra Club Program Meeting in May

Final program meeting - June 21

Leaving the Carbon Economy: Susan Butler, PhD, a Tufts University researcher, and Sierra Club Massachusetts member, will show her fascinating film, "Leaving the Carbon Economy," the story of one homeowner's frustration with her carbon footprint and how it led her to dig up her property to make a change. This 15-minute film shows how she re-engineers her life and her house to get her carbon footprint as close to zero or below as possible.

After the film she will conduct an "EcoChat: Sustainable Me, Sustainable You" with the audience about ways to pull the plug on the carbon economy. "A great story about how one household can go all the way. One house has moved off imported energy and onto new technologies gathering all its energy from sunshine that lands in the lot. See the film; change your life too." --Emily Norton, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Sierra Club.

A big thank you to WAMC's The Linda Performing Arts Center and the Honest Weight Food Coop's Food for Thought program for their partnership in presenting this year's member programs.

Find out more about The Linda and upcoming events via their website <https://www.thelinda.org> and read about Albany's Homegrown Grocery Store, the Honest Weight Food Coop, at <https://www.honestweight.coop/index.php>

Volunteer Opportunity

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter is looking for a volunteer to be Elections Compliance Officer for the Chapter. This person ensures that the Political campaign activities of the Club and its local groups adhere to all the state election laws pertaining to campaign contributions, and communication of these activities to members and the public. This is an ideal position for someone who likes to research issues. The Compliance Officer gets emails from Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee members on questions about Sierra Club policy, looks up the policy on-line, occasionally calls the National Office for clarification and responds promptly. To volunteer, contact Steve Redler - (518) 428-8993; steveredler@yahoo.com

Save the Date

We will be having a Hudson Mohawk Group fundraising evening and dinner on Thursday September 13th at The Five Rivers Environmental Center in Delmar, New York. Five Rivers Environmental Education Center is a D.E.C. facility comprising over 450 acres of fields, forests, and wetlands. The eco-friendly visitor center with interactive displays and exhibits was built in June 2017. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1835.html>