



Hudson-Mohawk Group

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

Community Choice Aggregation - What is it and how does it work? *By Monica Gray*

This is a timely question in light of the proliferation of “CCAs”. A CCA program allows municipalities to purchase electricity in bulk from suppliers on behalf of their residents, and to select electricity from clean energy sources, such as solar, hydro, and wind. Municipalities across the greater Capital District have joined together to form a CCA with the help of Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA), an aggregator of electricity, natural gas and renewable power. MEGA’s role is to negotiate competitive prices for electricity and natural gas for its members in order to minimize the cost of energy. It also is expected to provide a renewable choice (for electric supply) for members, and under the guidelines support New York State renewable energy. The expected practice is for CCAs to enter into contracts with smaller NYS-based renewables which provides a critical funding stream for many of these small/ community-based generators.

The key aspect of the CCA is that it uses an opt out provision whereby once a municipality commits legally to join the CCA and completes all the necessary steps, all residents (and businesses if they choose) are signed up with the new supplier unless they choose not to (opt out.) All residents are sent a letter detailing how the program will work and given the opportunity to opt out of the CCA if they choose and remain with their current supplier, which for many of our members is either National Grid or New York State Gas and Electric. Subsequent to sign up, residents can opt out any time they wish.

By using bulk purchasing power, a CCA can reduce greenhouse gas emissions through establishment of renewable options (i.e., wind, solar, hydro) and help New York reach our state’s bold clean energy tar-

gets. Our local CCA now includes six cities - Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Saratoga Springs, Glens Falls and Watervliet; five towns - Bethlehem, New Scotland Guilderland, Vorheesville and Knox; and three villages - Altamont, Kinderhook and Charlton. To participate, each municipality has to pass a local enabling law and follow the procedures outlined by the New York State Department of Public Service. Look for opportunities to support the CCA in your area.

To learn more about CCA in New York to the NYSERDA webpage: <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Clean-Energy-Communities/Clean-Energy-Communities-Program-High-Impact-Action-Toolkits/Community-Choice-Aggregation>

Bond Act for New York State - What’s the Deal? *By Pete Sheehan*

In his State of the State address, Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed a \$3 billion Bond Act referred to as the “*Restore Mother Nature*” initiative. The governor said the bond act would connect streams and waterways, restore freshwater and tidal wetlands and reclaim natural floodplains as a method to reduce the risk of flooding in the state. As part of the plan, New York would restock some 200 million shellfish off the coast of Long Island, upgrade fish hatcheries across the state, create more open space and plant more trees to help restore wildlife habitats. Additionally, the initiative would seek to restore up to 10,000 acres of freshwater wetlands, and reconnect or replant 10,000 miles of stream habitat, according to the Governor.

The Restore Mother Nature Bond would build what

(Bond Act, cont'd from page 1)

Cuomo envisions as “world-class” fish hatcheries to produce an additional 500,000 trout and salmon; triple walleye fingerling production and establish a hardier strain of brown trout. At the same time, funding would be used to fight invasive species, in particular, to address harmful algae blooms that poison waterways. “We must develop a solution to the harmful algal blooms before they destroy our water,” the governor said. Working with Clarkson University and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Cuomo is looking to design and build emergency response equipment that could mitigate or eliminate Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in state waterways. The initiative would include working with farmers and communities to reduce runoff that allows harmful algae to bloom. “The earth was at a balance. We caused the imbalance,” the governor said.

Our Conservation Director Roger Downs and other environmental groups will be providing input and monitoring developments closely in the coming months to ensure that the design of the program actually addresses and improves our natural resources as suggested in the title and as listed in the State of the State message. It should be noted that the last environmental bond act to pass was the 1996 Clean Air Clean Water Bond Act put forth by Governor George Pataki. It provided significant funding for local water and sewage treatment repairs and upgrades. It was supported by most environmental groups including the Sierra Club as well as New York State Business Council.

Reducing Foodscrap Waste - A Top Priority for America and NYS - by Tina Lieberman

With its groundbreaking 2012 report, the National Resource Defense Council alerted the public to the incredible amount of food Americans waste and the severe environmental impacts of that waste. According to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA), the United States wastes about 40% of its food supply per year, worth \$160 billion. That averages out to one pound of wasted food per person per day. Only a small percentage currently gets composted (about 6%) with about 22% being combusted in incinerators along with other municipal solid waste. That means 30.6 million tons enter landfills where it generates huge amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas that is at least 25x more potent at trapping atmospheric heat than carbon dioxide.

No wonder then that the book [Drawdown](#) lists reducing food waste as the third most effective thing we can do to combat climate change, right after eliminating the refrigeration chemical HFC (#1) and utilizing wind energy (#2). [Drawdown](#) estimates that a 50% reduction in food waste by 2050 could reduce CO2 emissions by an equivalent of 70.53 gigatons. Sending food waste to the landfill or burning it with toxic solid waste also prevents precious nutrients and minerals from being put back into the soil where it is needed most for the sake of our future food supply.

The EPA has therefore set a national goal of reducing food waste 50% by 2030. In 2019, New York State enacted monumental legislation to move this effort forward by passing the new Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling law. Starting January 1st, 2022, large generators of food scraps (generating two tons per week or more) must donate any edible food to food rescue organizations, and recycle all remaining food scraps if they are within 25 miles of an organics recycler (composting facility, anaerobic digester, etc.).

According to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) website, examples of large generators of food scraps include restaurants, grocery stores, hotels/motels, colleges, malls and event centers. The law excludes hospitals, nursing homes, adult care facilities, K-12 schools, and New York City (which has its own local law requiring diversion of food scraps from disposal). This legislation will not only help us mitigate climate change, but will also help direct more food to New Yorkers in need. It is estimated that nearly 2.5 million New Yorkers struggle to have enough to eat. Reducing the food we waste means we also stop wasting all the energy, water and labor it takes to put that food on our plates.

There's a lot you can do to reduce your personal food waste too, which will help the planet and your pocketbook. [Some suggestions:](#) Consider shopping in your fridge, and using up leftovers before you go to the grocery store. Shop with a list and buy only what you know you can use. Freeze leftover veggies for soup and fruit surplus for smoothies. Donate leftover food to local shelters and food pantries. Compost what is no longer edible either in your backyard, at a local community compost drop off site, or by hiring a food scraps pick up service.

If you have questions about the NYS Food Scraps Recycling Law contact FoodScrapsLaw@dec.ny.gov. If you want to learn how to compost, find a compost drop off site or compost pick up service in the Capital Region contact ZeroWasteCD@gmail.com or info@RadixCenter.org.

Reusable Shopping Bags—the Time is Now!

Are you ready? Got enough reusable shopping bags on hand? The statewide plastic bag ban will go into effect March 1, 2020. At that time, supermarkets and other stores will no longer be able to hand you a single-use plastic shopping bag with your purchase. The law does carve out exceptions for plastic produce and meat bags, restaurant take out bags, dry cleaning bags and plastic bags that you buy in bulk such as garbage bags.

Unfortunately, most stores are likely to pack shoppers' purchases into a paper bag instead. These pose their own environmental challenges. While paper bags will biodegrade and are not made from fossil fuel by-products like plastics, they use fossil fuels in their production and shipping, not to mention trees and a lot of water. While some counties and cities have enacted laws charging a 5 cent fee for paper bags as a way to incentivize people to bring their own bags, many have not. We encourage all Sierra Club members to contact their local elected officials and ask them to enact this 5 cent fee if they haven't already.

Some stores are ahead of the game though! For example, Wegmans announced that as of Monday, January 27, 2020 all Wegmans stores will no longer carry plastic bags. At stores where the county or municipality have not chosen to institute a 5-cent fee for paper bags, Wegmans will charge 5 cents per bag with the proceeds being donated to the local food bank serving each region.

According to Wegman's they've already been charging this 5 cent fee at two pilot stores in Corning and Ithaca with fabulous results. They report that on average 20% of the bags used across all Wegman stores are reusable. But at their pilot stores, they've "flipped that statistic" so that only 20% of the bags are single-use. Their goal is to eliminate all single use bags: plastic and paper too. Wouldn't it be good to hear that our other supermarket chains have followed suit? Maybe it's time to start a petition.

<https://www.wegmans.com/news-media/press-releases/wegmans-announces-date-for-elimination-of-plastic-bags-in-all-new-york-state-stores/>

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Transco - A Transmission Upgrade Presentation to the Hudson Mohawk Executive Committee

Recently, we participated in a discussion with representatives of Transco which is a project of four New York State utilities, Con Edison, National Grid, Avangrid and CH Energy Group (Central Hudson..) The presentation was very informative about this transmission upgrade split into two segments. The first segment covers from the Marcy substation to New Scotland and Rotterdam. The second segment covers from the Knickerbocker substation (in Schodack) down to Pleasant Valley. The main claim by Transco is that it will relieve some of the west to east congestion, which should improve the delivery of wind energy in Western New York down into Westchester County and beyond. We are still in the process of evaluating this project.

Sierra Club Hudson Mohawk Group

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Community (and Large Scale) Solar - Providing citizens the chance to use renewable energy. Here is what a large community solar installation looks like from above. It is quickly developing into a game-changing renewable resource for New York State. There are concerns about the use of farmland and sensitive environmental tracts of land used to construct it. We'd like to get your opinion on this very relevant development. Please send your comments to sierraclubhmggroup@yahoo.com