

# COLUMBIA COUNTY CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES TASK FORCE

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## MEETING MINUTES - MAY 1, 2025

### Call to Order

The Columbia County Climate Smart Communities Task Force Virtual Google Meet Meeting was called to order by Chairman David Newman at 10:01 am.

### Attendance

Don Meltz took the roll call

### Members Present

David Newman, Chair  
Lisa Bouchard Hoe  
John Bradley  
Jennifer Phillips  
Cara Boyle  
Matthew Mercier  
Joshua Cohen  
Steve Powers  
Kathy Schneider  
Tom Paino

\*Don Meltz

\*Brenda Adams           Notified

\* - denotes non-voting member

### Members Absent

Will Powers  
Deborah Conrad  
Matt Stinchcomb  
Jamie Carano Nordenström  
Sean Casey  
Stan Yarian  
John Leone  
Betsy Albert  
Bill Mancini           Notified  
Laura Cannamela

\*Donal Collins

### Also Present

Terrence Duvall - Columbia Land Conservancy  
Tara Donadio - CDRPC, Assistant Director of Sustainability  
Oswaldo Rosete - Columbia County MIS  
YouTube Public Link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/2u-5zkVuvTY>

## MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Newman thanked everyone for joining.

Don Meltz recorded attendance.

Steve Powers made a motion to approve the April 2025 minutes, seconded by Jennifer Phillips. All were in favor with none opposed.

## CURRENT ACTIONS

### Climate Action Plan (CAP)

Don Meltz gave a brief update on the CAP process. We held our first CAP committee meeting last Friday (April 25<sup>th</sup>). He listed all of the appointed members of the committee. We received an email from DEC saying they are beginning development of the grant contract, which will be a negotiated process. The \$60,000 in grants are for a government operations and a community GHG inventory and a government operations and community climate action plan. We will now update our workplan and budget, copied from our application, and send them in to DEC. DEC will add in some required deliverables at specific points in the project timeline. Don may reach out to the volunteers who offered their time to verify their initial commitment.

Chairman Newman added the CAP committee members are providing feedback on an initial scope of work. He asked about use of current volunteer and staff time. Don said he is tracking all time we are putting into the project as of March 15<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers will be reimbursed at a volunteer rate regardless of their level of expertise. But staff will be reimbursed at their regular salaried rate.

Chairman Newman - We will be reaching out to community stakeholders, businesses, and experts in specific sectors to gain insight from them.

Supervisor Adams - We are soliciting input from the CAP members on the RFP, and also working on a timeline for the RFP process, and a list of firms that might be interested in responding to the RFP.

Tom Paono - Several Towns and Villages have Climate Action Plans in place. Will we be using any of those towards this effort? Chairman Newman is not sure yet, how we might integrate or correlate the county CAP with the towns and villages. Jennifer Philips wondered if the local CAPS are based on government operations or community GHG inventories. Tara Donadio responded, most of the local CAPS are government operations. Many more have done inventories than have done plans.

Jennifer gave a brief update on her work with Bard students and what they will be presenting tomorrow (May 2<sup>nd</sup>). They have finished the primary report. They will be giving a PowerPoint presentation looking at emissions as well as assessing how effective various strategies are.

Supervisor Adams wanted to make sure Will Yandik was invited in case he wanted to join in. Chairman Newman agreed.

Don asked if the zoom would be recorded as he will be out of the office. Jennifer said she would record it.

National Climate News

Chairman Newman provided some information on a few actions being taken at the federal level and commentary on the impacts of those changes. Specifically he mentioned the National Climate Assessment which is a mandated assessment of national climate progress which is done every five years or so. The authors of this assessment are expert scientists from around the country who then submit this report to the international bodies that are looking at how each country is doing um in its commitments under the Paris agreement and under the climate change convention. **Those authors were all fired this week and that assessment is in question.**

There was a climate smart commodities grant program which was \$3 billion or so that was allocated under the inflation reduction act in the previous administration and many if not all of those contracts and funding has been withdrawn. These are programs that are paying for farmers to plant trees to create more resilience on their farms to plant cover crops to protect riparian areas and other parts of their farms. These are very tangible projects that are helping to encourage the development of agroforestry and alternative orchard crops to expand the robustness of our agricultural systems in the face of climate change. So, those programs are either at risk or eliminated.

Many websites - USDA, EPA, FEMA, have been either scrubbed or threatened to be scrubbed of any reference to climate change. These informational sources are essential because they're considered pretty objective. They are not coming from some biased perspective. These are government scientists who are not political, not partisan, they go from administration to administration and historically have carried through as civil servants and they are some of the best scientists in the world who are sacrificing some of their pay for working at a government salary.

Staff and funding for FEMA which is our frontline response to disaster, is being cut. And as the number of climate related disasters is on the increase the experts that know how to respond to disasters will be less equipped to help out in in our communities.

The office of special presidential envoy for climate and foreign service staff at the state department that work on climate change has been removed and the climate related foreign service officers work at the state department also has been shut down.

It's important to know what's happening and look closely at it. My opinion, none of this is good but there's very broad resistance against these changes and I think many of them will be reversed. We will continue doing our work locally, everyone in their community doing their work and hopefully we don't lose much ground in the next few years.

Jennifer Philips added that her students were concerned over the availability of the COMET tool they were using for the Ag emissions modeling, as it is a USDA webpage interface.

Supervisor Adams mentioned that the most significant additions to the Columbia County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), currently being updated, were the climate adaptation and resiliency pieces. And we are glad that we were able to embed those pieces in the plan and get them preserved.

Steve Powers asked if the grant for the HMP was reimbursable, or was the money paid upfront. Don did not know. Supervisor Adams will look into this.

Tom Paino had trouble accessing the HMP. Supervisor Adams said the link for public comment expired on April 15<sup>th</sup>. It will now be amended and published again. She checked to see if the link was still up, she will send the draft to Don, who can then send it around.

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Local Task Force Actions, Updates, and other topics - All Members

Cara Boyle - CLC has an open house on Saturday at their office in Chatham where they will launch information and maps regarding the Countywide Conservation Plan. On May 17<sup>th</sup> CLC will be planting 1,500 trees in their community forest. For Copake, they have planted 13 trees obtained through the County Soil and Water Cons. District. May 1<sup>th</sup> there will be a Taghkanic Talks on trees and "The Forest in Your Backyard". Energy audits are being done for the town park buildings and town garage. Tara Donadio added DEC has a 25,000,000 trees by 2033 initiative, so they are trying to track all these tree planting activities.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Newman adjourned the meeting at 10:47 a.m.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 6/5/2025 at 10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Meltz

Columbia County Planning Department