

# COLUMBIA COUNTY CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES TASK FORCE

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## MEETING MINUTES - JUNE 5, 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  
Deborah Conrad  
Cara Boyle  
Matthew Mercier  
Steve Powers  
Kathy Schneider  
Betsy Albert  
Tom Paino

\*Don Meltz  
\*Brenda Adams  
\*Donal Collins

\* - denotes non-voting member

### Members Absent

Lisa Bouchard Hoe  
Will Powers  
John Bradley  
Jennifer Phillips           Notified  
Matt Stinchcomb  
Jamie Carano Nordenström  
Joshua Cohen  
Sean Casey  
Stan Yarian  
John Leone  
Laura Cannamela           Notified

### Also Present

Lindsey Strehlau-Howay - Cornell Cooperative Extension - Program Coord.

YouTube Public Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPcOAxo7xbY>

## 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 Matthew Mercier. All were in favor with none opposed.

## CURRENT ACTIONS

### Climate Action Plan (CAP)

Chairman Newman opened discussion about the status of the Climate Action Plan (CAP). We had our second meeting with the CAP Committee. Don shared the list of members on screen. The meeting focused on the RFP and Scope of Work for a consultant. We are working on one more round of edits, to be done by mid-month. We can share the RFP with the Task Force for feedback.

Don outlined the process for the rest of the year. We're hoping to get the contract with DEC finalized this month (June). We are also working on the RFP in June with the goal of having it done in early July, sending it out to prospective consultants. Responses will be due in mid-August. We will select a consultant and generate a contract with them. Hopefully sometime in November or December we will have a signed contract with our selected consultant, and will be able to begin working with them in early 2026. It is a time intensive process just to pick a consultant and the timeline may seem like it's rather long. But as I've said a few a few times, the consultants I've talked to are not ready to start until 2026 anyway. Plus from Don's experience, he believes starting a project with some intensive public outreach is best done in January and February.

Chairman Newman added - The Plan is not the product. The Plan is a mechanism for an ongoing process. The plan will be successful only if it engages the community in a meaningful way and with diverse stakeholder representatives, and moves the dial with people's understanding of the issues and the potential solutions.

Supervisor Adams added - We are also establishing a culture of doing this work, of engaging the community on a regular basis, and that culture will then lead to further education and engagement.

Chairman Newman expressed some concern about the age of the data being used for the CDRPC Regional CAP. But recognized it won't affect us too much as there will be updates to both the regional data and the county plan in future years.

Tom Paino asked if the scope of work could be shared. Chairman Newman said the draft is in the Google Drive CAP folder which is accessible to Task Force members, and will be shared directly once a near final draft is done. Don confirmed that everyone on the Task Force has viewing capabilities for everything in the online CAP folder, and will send the draft timeline out to everyone following the meeting. The regional GHG Inventory is also available online, link posted in the chat. Don can help municipalities download their data if needed.

Chairman Newman added that there are some examples of CAPs from other counties in the CAP folder.

CEC Program

Don gave a quick update on the status of the CEC program and some of the projects Columbia County is using that grant money for. He participated in a conference call with a CEC program consultant providing feedback on the benefits of the program for our county's perspective. There is still no word on when the program will be reinstated or what it will look like. But he is confident it will happen eventually. As far as county projects, we are still working on the county courthouse heat pump installation, connecting four more EV chargers at the courthouse, and finalizing the energy audit at 401 State Street.

Supervisor Adams mentioned CDRPC has been re-hired as consultants for the region, and asked if CDRPC had any idea what the new CEC program will look like. Don responded "No". Adam's concern is CEC may be less accessible to smaller communities as she has heard they are looking to get "more bang for their buck" when it comes to approving grants for specific projects.

Matthew Mercier asked if there will be another meeting where we can give feedback to Tara about CEC. Don did not know of any, as CEC is reaching out directly to individual municipalities. He said it wouldn't hurt to send Tara an email with feedback from Germantown. Matthew's concern is, the NYSERDA project manager on their solar project has changed hands multiple times, slowing progress on the project.

Chairman Newman asked if there has been any feedback on the EVs the county purchased with CEC grants. Don said no, no news is good news, no one has complained, folks are just driving them as if they are normal everyday cars as they should.

**OTHER UPDATES**

Columbia Land Conservancy

Betsy Albert reminded everyone to take a look at the countywide conservation plan survey, and that there's a tall town hall event on July 19th from 10 to 12 at Columbia Green.

Cara Boyle added - It would be great if everybody could try to find a way to distribute the survey and encourage people to fill it out and then also attend the town hall. It's meant for the whole community and we mean everybody in the community we want to hear as much feedback as possible.

Betsy also recapped a tree planting event in Taghkanic on May 17<sup>th</sup>, planting about 1,200 trees. A follow-up planting a couple weeks later added a few hundred more. There is a link on the CLC website for folks who are interested in serving on a committee to help with management of this "community forest". One of the goals of this project is to find ways to reach out to a broader audience, beyond the typical groups of volunteers for these types of projects.

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Lindsey Strehlau-Howay - Gave a few updates. Silva Pasture Field Day is Thursday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. You can register online at our website. We still have two other parts of our three-part series on outdoor mushroom farming, June 26 and July 17th are the two dates.

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Chairman Newman asked for some more information about the Silva Pasture Field Day. Lindsey responded: It is about learning about climate smart farming with trees and livestock, the carbon benefits, and the funding resources available. Location is Gansevoort Farm in Germantown, 1827 Route 9. It's a collaboration between Scenic Hudson and Sunset Consulting LLC. And it is a pay what you can, sliding scale, so \$10, \$15 or \$20, your choice. Hours are 5:00 to 7:00. Don will post the info and send it around to Task Force members.

Chairman Newman - Arthur's Point Farm is working with Tracy Testo on a workshop that they'll be doing in September, looking at reforestation examples and maybe some riparian restoration work as well. That hasn't been set yet, but more to come.

Lindsey and Chairman Newman then discussed some culvert training going on at Cornell Cooperative Extension, and culvert assessments being done or need to be done around the county.

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

Don - Laura Cannamela could not make the meeting today, but emailed an update from Valatie. Their work scheduled around the volunteer work days planned at River Street Park. May 17th they planted about 240 saplings and they had a good downpour about an hour after they planted them so hopefully they'll survive. The last spring work day at the park is scheduled for June 21<sup>st</sup>.

Don also mentioned Bill Mancini has resigned from the task force so we have an opening for the Village of Kinderhook. There was general expression of sadness to see him go.

Kathy Schneider - Stuyvesant had pre-notification that they were going to get an Estuary program grant for doing a natural and cultural resources inventory. It was pre-notification so we weren't allowed to talk about it or do a press release, but now it's been announced so we're official. I'm wanting to tap into the expertise of this group. I've looked at their instructions and I think at this point we're waiting for an official letter of notification from them. We have not gotten that, but when that happens then we can start developing an RFP. But I haven't heard from them and neither has the town or the other person that wrote the grant with me. Anybody have an experience here about what I should do next? Supervisor Adams suggested reaching out to Dylan Cipkowski at Soil and Water.

Matthew Mercier - Germantown is opening bids tomorrow on their salt shed solar array. The town has to install a new National Grid meter because there was no electricity to the shed, and in anticipation of installing charging stations and purchasing EVs in the future. Supervisor Adams asked if they had to do a transformer upgrade as Canaan had to do. Matthew responded no, but there were other grid issues that stalled the project, and which the volunteers were not aware of. Betsy added that a similar thing happened in Taghkanic as well, taking three months before the electric was upgraded to what it needed to be.

Betsy Albert - Taghkanic will be installing a "Beaver Deceiver" near a road that is frequently flooded due to beaver activity. She added, the folks at DEC were very supportive of the project, helping with the permitting process.

Supervisor Adams - Canaan completed the installation of solar panels on their highway garage, with capacity for both the garage and town hall heat pumps. They also are working with Soil and Water on an invasive species removal project on Stoddard Pond.

July Meeting

Chairman Newman - The July meeting would be on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, with the only agenda item so far (other than the local updates) being the CAP, and last comments on the RFP. It was decided to hold the July meeting even with a shortened agenda.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Newman adjourned the meeting at 10:46 a.m.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 7/3/2025 at 10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Meltz

Columbia County Planning Department