

COLUMBIA COUNTY CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES TASK FORCE

MEETING MINUTES - NOVEMBER 6, 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 10:00 am.

Attendance

Don Meltz took the roll call

Members Present

David Newman, Chair
Lisa Bouchard Hoe
Deborah Conrad
John Bradley
Jennifer Phillips
Cara Boyle
Matthew Mercier
Joshua Cohen
Steve Powers
Kathy Schneider
Betsy Albert
Tom Paino
Laura Cannamela

*Don Meltz

*Brenda Adams

*Donal Collins

* - denotes non-voting member

Members Absent

Will Powers
Matt Stinchcomb
Jamie Carano Nordenström
Sean Casey
Stan Yarian
John Leone

Also Present

Terrence Duvall - Columbia Land Conservancy, Director of Land Protection & Stewardship
Christina Bohnsack - Capital Region Clean Energy Hub
Lindsey Strehlau-Howay - Cornell Cooperative Extension - Program Coord.

YouTube Public Link:

MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Newman thanked everyone for joining.

Don Meltz recorded attendance as members and guests arrived.

Steve Powers made a motion to accept the minutes. Betsy Albert seconded. 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).

Don Meltz reported that a contract for the Climate Action Plan is available for in-house county department review and circulation through the county. It will be reviewed by the attorney, then sent back to DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) along with the minority women-owned business plan and service disabled veterans plan. Don Meltz estimated that the earliest a signed contract with DEC could be expected is the end of the year, with the Request for Proposals (RFP) potentially being sent out by the end of February.

Chairman Newman inquired about sending the draft RFP to DEC for concurrent review, however DEC requires the contract to be signed first. Then following the contract signing, there must be an initial contract meeting with the CAP committee to discuss the RFP and timeline before DEC will review it, which they estimated would be sometime in January or February. David Newman suggested trying to accelerate the process by scheduling the initial meeting via a Doodle poll before the end of the year, assuming the contract will be finalized by then.

Greenhouse Gas Inventory Review

Chairman Newman introduced the 10-page summary of the county's greenhouse gas inventory, covering the period from 2010 to 2022, which showed a 15% reduction in emissions. The inventory focuses on Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions (direct emissions and emissions from consumed electricity) but does not fully cover Scope 3 (indirect emissions). The sectors analyzed include the built environment, transportation, waste, industry, refrigerants, and agriculture.

The largest emission sectors were identified as transportation first, followed by the built environment, with agriculture being the third largest at 10%. The state goal is an 85% reduction in emissions by 2050, with the remaining 15% planned to be offset by land use, forestry, and natural sequestration. The largest reductions occurred in the built environment and transportation, but agriculture emissions increased by about 10%.

Jennifer Phillips suggested the increase in agricultural emissions might be linked to the movement toward concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and resulting methane from manure management. She offered to have graduate students compare the inventory's methodology for agriculture with their process model, noting a significant difference in their initial figures, to help the committee understand the various approaches to calculating these numbers and why the numbers may be increasing.

Christina Bohnsack shared that farmers she spoke with were not supportive of individual on-farm biogas production plants and suggested a regional initiative for a centralized methane facility for cattle farms.

Supervisor Adams raised a concern that closing transfer stations will increase the carbon footprint associated with trucking waste longer distances, possibly to states like Alabama or Mississippi, as New York State will be out of landfill space by 2030 or 2035. She noted that few transfer stations are connected to rail lines, which would help mitigate road mileage emissions.

Supervisor Collins mentioned the significant, but hard-to-calculate, contribution of Scope 3 emissions, for example, importing fresh produce like strawberries in the winter. Chairman Newman stressed the importance of viewing emission reductions in the context of these uncertainties to avoid overstating simple numbers. He also noted that gentrification leading to non-farmers buying farmland, forcing farmers to travel further, could also contribute to the agricultural footprint.

Earth Day/Arbor Day Events Planning

Chairman Newman proposed moving forward with a community tree planting for Earth Day, suggesting the need for a planning group to determine locations, sourcing, costs, and volunteer recruitment. Terence Duvall and Laura Cannamela volunteered to join the planning group, with Laura Cannamela offering to coordinate an event at the municipal Pachaquack Park in Valatie. Supervisor Adams suggested expanding the initiative to include both Earth Day and Arbor Day, proposing a goal of having an Earth Day celebration, such as a film at the Crandell Theater, or a cleanup day in every town and village in the county.

Betsy Albert asked for clarification on the specific date for the events, with Chairman Newman suggesting the weekends around Earth Day (April 22nd) and Arbor Day (April 24th). Supervisor Adams advised checking for conflicts with religious holidays and coordinating with the Cornell Bare Root Tree Program for sourcing trees. Christina Bohnsack volunteered to be a point person for Germantown and suggested hosting an energy literacy workshop through the clean energy hub. Christina also suggested encouraging all local organizations to participate in Earth Day by having them lead activities, such as a gear swap or invasive species clearing.

Chairman Newman discussed the importance of clear messaging, particularly highlighting the affordability and economic benefits of climate work, like heat pumps and energy efficiency, in light of public skepticism when grants are reduced. He suggested doing a press release and/or fact sheet on GHG inventories to talk about reductions and provide quotes from community leaders, focusing on affordability, resilience, and equity. He suggested treating the press release, Earth Day events, and an advocacy day as three distinct activities.

Local Task Force Reports and Roadmaps

Don Meltz described plans to compile a more comprehensive list of all projects completed by local task forces historically, not just the county task force, to include in his annual report, acknowledging there are potentially hundreds of projects. Cara Boyle proposed that the EMC (Environmental Management Council) could lead the creation of a semi-annual newsletter to showcase local accomplishments and help share resources among towns, suggesting Earth Day as a target for the first publication.

Don Meltz confirmed he only needs the basic facts for a county report, not a newsletter format. Cara Boyle suggested using a shared Google Doc for all town representatives to upload their historical accomplishments to help compile the information. Supervisor Adams proposed including infographics in the newsletter on topics

such as the number of bronze or silver certified communities, solar panels, heat pumps, and EV chargers. Chairman Newman encouraged all representatives to gather a comprehensive history of accomplishments from their towns and send it to Don.

Steve Powers noted that in their town, the supervisor requests updates from every committee, including the Climate Smart Community before the monthly town board meetings. These updates are then shared with the public, offering insight into their progress. Chairman Newman encouraged participants to gather historic and comprehensive information from their towns and submit it to Don as soon as possible. He also announced that he would be organizing a Doodle poll for planning exercises focused on outreach, publicity, and event planning, including potential efforts for Earth Day and Arbor Day. Steve Powers mentioned a college student is working on a GIS project about climate smart communities in the county, and Don Meltz agreed to provide the student with requested information, which may be incorporated into this broader effort.

Task Force Nominations

Chairman Newman reminded members to inform their town of their enthusiasm for serving again to be recommended, or to recommend an alternate if they are unable to continue. Don Meltz reported that seven official nominations had been submitted, but the list was last updated the previous week. Supervisor Adams confirmed that their nomination would be approved and submitted soon, and Jennifer Phillips mentioned having reminded their supervisor, though their nomination will await the December town board meeting for approval.

OTHER UPDATES

Columbia Land Conservancy

Terence Duvall provided an update on the countywide conservation plan, noting a successful online town hall with over 100 attendees. CLC is preparing a less technical, public-facing report from the consultants' draft, which they plan to share early next year, including specific outreach to municipalities. Terence also expressed interest in presenting the report to the board of supervisors in January, February, or March.

Capital Region Clean Energy Hub

Supervisor Adams - asked Christina Bohnsack about data regarding program cuts, specifically the Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement (HERR) program and general heat maintenance for lower-income and senior families. Christina confirmed that the HERR program is a major issue, and although she lacked Columbia County-specific data, the statewide program served 4,500 families with \$27 million last year. Replacement funds are being sought from sources like the National Grid Foundation, but will not cover the full need.

Christina Bohnsack - The HEAP program, much like SNAP, is suspended, creating a cascade effect as a HEAP letter is often required for other services. Christina suggested a potential space heater rental or borrowing program as a temporary solution to prevent freezing while individuals wait for heat system repairs or replacement, which could take over a month.

Christina announced upcoming events focused on energy literacy and efficiency. An event with Spark of Hudson on January 10th will feature a guide book on reading energy bills and participating in rate cases, alongside

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energy-saving kits. There are two planned events at Columbia Green College: one on February 26th focusing on energy literacy and heat pumps, and another on April 29th emphasizing solar energy.

Christina mentioned a new battery storage program through NYSERDA, run via the New York Sun program, suggesting that solar incentives might shift to battery storage. Outreach for this initiative is planned through local fire departments, and Christina will share more information as she receives it. Deb Conrad requested flyers or graphics for these programs to be posted on their website.

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Lindsey Strehlau-Howay - provided updates on CCE events, including a Game of Logging Level 1 class on November 12th in Delhi focused on chainsaw use and directional felling. The Columbia and Green County's annual meeting will be held on November 12th at the Acra office, featuring volunteer recognition and a brief business meeting. Lindsey also mentioned a webinar on energy efficiency for the mid-lower Hudson Valley on November 13th and an in-person program on forest commons in New York State, also on November 13th.

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

Cara Boyle - introduced a discussion from the Environmental Management Council (EMC) regarding a potential countywide ban on herbicide use on public roads with some towns reporting they already do not use them. Cara sought input on whether this should be a countywide effort or if towns should start by passing resolutions to limit herbicide use to essential cases like managing invasive species. Chairman Newman expressed interest from their town, but noted they had not received a clear policy response.

Cara noted that a lack of clear policy on herbicide use was reported in Ancram after sightings of spraying, which some believed was related to state efforts. Chairman Newman brought up that mowing also spreads invasives such as stiltgrass, and encouraged members to continue seeking clear answers from their towns. Cara proposed co-sponsoring an outreach event with a good speaker to educate the public on the pros and cons of herbicide use for road maintenance. Christina Bohnsack added that Amtrak sprays heavily along the tracks, sometimes near the river, and is reportedly exempt from typical protections because it is a federal agency.

Steve Powers - reported receiving an email from Congressman Nick Langworthy's office seeking town and county support for the Energy Choice Act, national legislation that would end New York State's ban on propane and natural gas hookups. Supervisor Collins confirmed receipt of the email and offered to share the resolution with everyone. Steve clarified that they are not in favor of this legislation but brought it to the group's attention.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Newman adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 12/4/2025 at 10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Meltz

Columbia County Planning Department