

**MEETING MINUTES FOR:  
Town of Aurora Climate Smart Community Task Force**

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**MEETING DETAILS**

**Project Manager:** Luke Wochensky, Town of Aurora Councilman

**Date:** 09/20/2023

**Time:** 6:00pm

**Location:** Town of Aurora Municipal Building, 575 Oakwood Ave. East Aurora, NY

**ATTENDANCE**

***Present:***

**Luke Wochensky**- Town of Aurora Councilman; **Joe McCann** - Town of Aurora Councilman; **Jeanne Beiter**- Senior Program Manager for Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper & Village of East Aurora Planning Board; **Claudia Newton**- ACES Representative; **Susan Russell**- ACES Representative & Village of East Aurora Zoning Board; **Steve Bjella**- Village Resident

***Present via Zoom:***

**Pat Lally**- East Aurora HS Sustainability Club; **Lori Borowiak**- Village resident; **Annika Safford** - Village resident & student at University of Vermont/Sustainability & Marketing Program, **Josh McClain** - UB Regional Institute, Sustainability and Resiliency Planner; **Jason Kulaszewski**, UB Regional Institute, Clean Energy Coordinator

***Absent:***

**Elizabeth Cassidy**- in advisory role as Aurora Town Code Enforcement Officer; **Nicole Morris-McLaughlin**- Village resident and member of ACES; **Jennifer Brazill**, Borderland Festival Organizer; **Jeffrey Shelley**- Environmental Science Instructor, East Aurora High School & Faculty Student Liaison for EAHS Sustainability Club; **Ryan McPherson**- Chief Sustainability Officer, University at Buffalo

***Visitors:***

**Sharon Bachman**- in advisory role from Cornell Cooperative Extension; **Hannah Michalek** - East Aurora High School Sustainability advising as Junior member; **Michele Bjella** - Village Resident/member of Citizens Climate Lobby; **Sandra Chelnov**, Resident of Holland, member of ACES; **Nancy Smith** - Village of East Aurora resident; **Pete, Tom, & Kseniia Baker**- Owners of Can & Bottle Return, Hamburg, NY

I. **CALL TO ORDER - 6:00PM**

II. **Approval of Minutes- Approved**

III. **Issues for Discussion**

- **CSC Resolution from Town Board** – New Official Task Force Committee members are Steve Bjella, Anika Safford, & Pat Lally. Michele Bjella, Sharon Bachman, and Hanna Michalek will be official members in January 2024.
- **Introduction to Committee** - Welcome to Josh McClain, Sustainability and Resiliency Planner from the UB Regional Institute (UBRI), who will work alongside Jason Kulaszewski.
- **News to Celebrate** - Jason Kulaszewski (UBRI) reports that the Town of Aurora has achieved Bronze Status and is the 2nd town in WNY to attain this level! Congratulations to the team and gratitude extended to Claudia Newton for extraordinary effort on compiling Operations/GHG data. Jason reviewed the 3 priority actions that were required. (GHG inventory, Complete Streets Policy, Alternative Fuel Infrastructure.) Jason also reported that the Town of Aurora's point total of 132 included additional actions and exceeded required amount of points to attain Bronze level status.
- **Silver Status Certification** - Jason Kulaszewski, (UBRI) reported that 3 additional priority actions will be required to meet requirement of 300 points in total. This total will include the 132 points already achieved for Bronze Level Status. Jason recommends that Green Parking Lot Policies which were denied under Bronze application be pursued. Other recommendations are: website development; HVAC upgrades; recycling initiatives; policies for local food systems; climate-related public events; He strongly recommends pursuit of NYSEDA Clean Energy Communities program and to continue to pursue partnership funding opportunities for planning and projects. The slide show presentation by Jason, illustrating our town's

“Pathways to Silver”, has been uploaded to our Google drive and can be accessed at any time by members of the CSC Task Force.

- **NYSERDA Clean Energy Communités:** Presentation by Jason Kulaszewski, (UBRI). The Town of Aurora is currently 400 points away from grant funding under this program. Jason recommends planning of **CEC Community Campaigns** which are comprised of 3 campaign themes: Promotion of Residential Community Solar sign-ups; Campaign for promotion of electric vehicles; Campaign for clean heating and cooling technologies. Funding is based on how many residents sign up for programs. Funding can be applied toward any clean energy projects. Task Force members discussed possible Earth Day or tabling events at East Aurora Co-op as opportunities to present community campaigns with HVAC Vendors, solar community sign-ups, etc. Jason affirmed that ongoing education projects (eg, Menu for the Future, private and public Food Scraps Recycling initiatives) can be worked with and framed in manner that will help attain required silver status. The updated CEC Campaign guidelines are available in the Task Force Google Docs.
- **CSC website** – Update (Sue Russell) The website is 75% complete but have needed to divert attention to the DEC Food Scraps Grant deadline. (See below “Composting Update” below.)
- **Composting Update** – Sue Russell/Joe McCann: The deadline for the DEC Grant Application for Municipal Food Scraps Recycling was suddenly moved from 5/24 to October 1st, 2023. We are striving to meet the deadline for submission. Goal is to have draft ready for Joe to review by Friday, 9/22/23. We are applying for pilot program funding to purchase a Drop Spot Shed that would be open year round on Saturdays from 10am-2pm; tote bins for food scraps, kitchen countertop caddies, and money for promotional materials. Our match requirement would be met with volunteer ambassadors at education outreach tables and for drop spot supervision. Joe McCann favors Town Municipal Parking lot as potential site for drop spot. A Task Force committee would need to be formed to create name/logo design, education and promotion materials, and to coordinate volunteer schedule. If the funding is awarded we are possibly

targeting an Earth Day (4/20/24) launch event with free kitchen caddie giveaways to encourage program participation.

- **Can Bottle Return Presentation** – Pete, Tom, & Kseniia Baker-owners of Can & Bottle Return in Hamburg, NY. This local company has state of the art equipment and are offering their services for Town and Village events that currently lack recycling opportunities.
- They are equipped to handle mass gathering events and currently collect 500,000-600,000 units per week. Their mechanized system handles 400 units per minute. Municipality keeps the deposit on qualifying units, and can designate fundraising recipient(s) if they choose. The company makes money on the resale of materials, not on the return deposit. Town Councilman Luke Wochensky and Joe McCann propose to update special use permits with a requirement to provide recycling. Suggestions made to reach out to ACES for assistance in spreading the word to restaurant vendors who currently lack a viable recycling option; additional outreach could include the Chamber of Commerce, and the Village Board to spread the word about the company's ability to provide recycling at Village and Chamber sponsored events.
- **Village Visibility Code Proposal** – Nancy Smith shared concerns regarding a proposed expansion by Village Board of the current village code which restricts corner lot vegetation planting height to 2-6ft for safety/visibility purposes. (The current Town ordinance prohibits vegetation over 8" height.) Concern is that proposed expansion could be applied to right-of-way on entire streets and front yards of properties. Such municipal actions have national implications with a detrimental impact on property owner's rights to landscape using a wide-range of non-grass options. A Village Public hearing took place on Monday, 9/18/23. Decision was to close hearing and consider drafting a revised proposal. Nancy requests assistance from committee members to research proposals for a reasonable code that will preserve species diversification options and protect owner's ability to choose, while also addressing reasonable safety and visibility guidelines. Sharon Bachman volunteered to assist; Luke Wochensky volunteered to draft a letter to Village Board representing

the CSC Task Force and request they postpone any decisions with the hope that a collaborative effort can be made between the Village and the Town Boards; Luke also volunteered to consult with Jason Kulaszewski, from the UB Regional Institute, and Hanna Michalek will reach out to High School Sustainability Committee for youth input. Nancy Smith will send committee an article from “Next City” entitled “It’s Time For Cities To Rethink Lawn Policy” by Amy McEuen, 4/13/23). Luke Wochensky will email the article to all Task Force members.

**IV. Open Discussion - N/A**

**V. Closing Remarks - N/A**

**VI. ADJOURNMENT - Meeting adjourned at 7:22 pm**

Minutes submitted by: Susan Russell

\*Note: Slide show by Jason Kulaszewski (Town of Aurora Pathways to Silver) has been uploaded to Google Drive.