

MEETING MINUTES

Town of Aurora Climate Smart Community Task Force

MEETING DETAILS

Project Manager: Luke Wochensky, Town of Aurora Councilman

Date: 02/25/2025

Time: 6:09pm

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

ATTENDANCE

Present: **Luke Wochensky**- Town of Aurora Council member; **Claudia Newton-** ACES Representative & Town of Aurora resident; **Susan Russell-** ACES Representative & Village of East Aurora Zoning Board; **Lori Borowiak-** Village resident; **Steve Bjella-** Village resident; **Annika Safford** - Village resident & graduate of University of VT, Sustainability & Marketing Program

Present via Zoom:

Absent: **Sharon Bachman**, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension,

Visitors: **Doug Crow**, Town Planning Board Chair; **Jess Armbrust**, Town Board Trustee, **John Hughes** - Town Resident, Michell Bjella, Village resident & Member of Citizens Climate Lobby.

Agenda

- I. Call to Order
- II. Issues for Discussion
 1. Clean Fleets Inventory: Claudia. Inventory completed by CADMUS is attached to the minutes and will be posted on the website.
 2. Silver Status Certification – planning
 - Comprehensive plan update (Ray Wrazen)

You can view the plan at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cl/fi/p1gmjef3s7jzlx5ykv5e/Aurora-Comp-Plan-Final-Report-Combined-FINAL.pdf?rlkey=22wn6xxhdwzkji2dih1pnupo2&st=kszc92wa&dl=0>

The Public Hearing is schedule for our next Town Board meeting at 6:30 pm on March 9 2026 at the Municipal Center. At that Hearing the public will have an opportunity to weigh in both pro and con to the

proposed plan. In addition, the Town Board will get input from the Planning Board prior to the Hearing. Last Thursday they met to review the Plan and Jess Armbrust, Liz Cassidy and I were in attendance. The discussion was favorable to recommending passage and I believe that they will be offering input related to priorities once we get into Implementation mode. I was pleased that they agreed that two of the first steps should be the formation of a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Steering committee to ensure that timetables are established, funding secured and tracking and reporting keep the project moving forward.

Secondly would be the establishment of a Zoning Audit and Reconciliation team and process. In the Comp plan we have a Future Land Use plan and there are disconnects to our current Zoning. The ZAR is the process from identifying the disconnects through to the ultimate approval of updated Zoning code. Estimated timetable per Liz is 18 to 24 months. So, the quicker we get to it the better.

If all goes well at the Public Hearing we project plan approval at the March 23rd Town Board meeting. By approving, we will ensure that an extension to the Zoning Moratorium will not be necessary. IF we had to do so it would require a new local law. Not desirable. Related to that is with an adopted Comprehensive plan we will have a strong legal basis to review and approve/deny challenges to the current zoning. Finally, we will be reviewing possible grant funding for the Implementation of the Comp plan. Nothing specific at this point. I do plan on meeting with our grant writer on March 6 to discuss some of the possibilities and perhaps a funding game plan.

Overall, a long but very productive road has been traveled. Key is to keep that momentum moving. If you have any questions, issues or concerns please let me know. One other thing. Would appreciate any input on the cover page for the Comprehensive Plan.”

- **Salt Barn** - \$486K Water Quality Improvement Grant has been granted toward the replacement of the Town’s deteriorated salt barn. Less road salt is also being used by the Highway Dept via beet juice brine.
- **Natural resources inventory** - First draft is complete- looking for funds to hire consultant to enhance. On hold for remainder of this year pending funding.
- **Grant opportunities** (see attached) - Next Town Board work session will review all. Prioritizing: 1) Munciple Parks Grant for Warren Drive, including Senior walking trail and handicap access, skate park, Lacrosse wall, shelter, community building; 2) DEC Land Acquisition for Open Space- being pursued for Est 118 acres site in the town. 3) CSC Grant - Hire a consultant for the Natural Resources Inventory. A Tree Inventory is a possible alternative idea. 4) NYSERDA - There are no feasible ideas at this point due to complications of addressing total project needs of target buildings such as the 2 libraries, in part due to management/maintenance relationship with Erie County. Heat pumps,/ geothermal solutions are cost prohibitive for these buildings. Needed indow and insulation improvement at the Main St library can not be included unless alternative heat remedy is also included. The Highway Barn structure needs to be replaced and is not a good match for this grant.

3. Clean Energy Community Goals: Luke- No response from previous contractors regarding solar panel estimates for the Municipal Bldg roof.
 - Community Campaign update - Sue suggested a recharge of the Community Solar Program could be helpful. Brad Tito has offered to author a letter that could be sent to all Town Residents to promote the program, which has stalled.
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4. CSC Task Force moving forward - Discussion postponed due to time constraints.
5. Scoot Around June - Discussion postponed due to time constraints.
6. Review priority and goals - Discussion postponed due to time constraints.

III. Open Discussion - Sue: Repair Cafe scheduled for 8/27/26, 5-8pm. Annika volunteered to assist Sue with planning. Possible partial funding sources: Cornell Climate Stewards Program and Moog.

IV. Closing Remarks

V. Adjournment

V. ADJOURNMENT - Meeting adjourned at 7:20pm
Next Meeting: March 25th 2026 6pm

Minutes submitted by: Susan Russell

(Note: Grant chart attachment on following page.)

Grant Opportunities Summary - Town of Aurora

Funder	Grant Title	Eligibility	Open Date	Proposal Due	Decision	Funding Amount	Match Requirement	Project Start	Project Period	RFP/RFA link	Website link	Project Type	
NYS Dept. of Agriculture & Markets	Companion Animal Capital Projects	Municipal	1/2/2026	1/30/2026	July	\$20,000 - \$500,000	10%	July 2026	3 years	https://nyculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2025/11/requestforproposals_rfp0388_companionanimalscapitalprojectsfund.pdf		Dog Kennel	
NYS Office of Parks Recreation & Historic Preservation	Municipal Parks and Recreation Grant Program (MPRG)	Local government	Now	2/9/2026		Up to \$1 million	10%				https://parks.ny.gov/grants/municipal-parks-recreation/default.aspx	Construction of recreational facilities and improvements to municipally owned recreational sites and parks. Examples: playgrounds, courts, playing fields, and facilities for swimming, biking, boating, picnicking, hiking, fishing, camping or other recreational activities.	
Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP)	Community Challenge Grant	Government entities	1/2/2026	3/4/2026	July	\$500 - \$25,000	None	August	4 months	https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2020/2020-challenge.html	https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2024/2024-challenge.html	Increasing civic engagement and creating vibrant public places that improve open spaces, parks and access to other amenities.	
NYS Dept of Environmental Conservation	Open Space Conservation Grant	Municipal	12/2/2025	4/15/2026	August	\$50,000 - \$3.5 million	None	1/1/2026	2 years	https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/osgprfa.pdf	https://dec.ny.gov/nature/open-space/open-space-conservation-grant	Land acquisition for open space	
NY Consolidated Funding Application - Department of Environmental Conservation	Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Grants	Municipal	5/28/2026	7/31/2026	November - December	\$10,000 - \$200,000 for CSC category	50% for MHI > \$65,108 (TOA is \$95,537)		3/15/2025	5 years	https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/cscgrfa.pdf	Grants For Climate Action - NYSDEC	Funding for municipalities to perform inventories, assessments, and planning projects that advance their ability to address climate change at the local level and become certified Climate Smart Communities
NYSCEA - NYSERDA	Building Cleaner Communities Competition	Loc	5/28/2026	7/31/2026	Fall	\$1.7 million, or \$2 million for Ground Source HP	60%				https://www.nysceda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Building-Cleaner-Communities-Competition	Design and construction of carbon neutral or net zero energy performance at the facility level, supporting building-specific measures for efficiency, all-electric heating and cooling, renewable energy, storage and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Ground Source Heat Pumps include a higher \$2 million cap.	
NY Consolidated Funding Application - Department of Environmental Conservation	Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP)	Municipal	5/28/2026	7/31/2026	Fall	\$100K - \$15 million depending on category	25%				https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/grant-applications/wqip-program	Salt Storage /Road Salt Reduction	
NY Consolidated Funding Application - Office of Parks Recreation & Historic Preservation	Environmental Protection Fund Grants Program	Municipalities	5/28/2026	7/31/2026	Fall	Up to \$675,000	50% Total Project Cost	Open	1-5 years	https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/2021_REResources_Available_Guide.pdf	https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/ https://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/appropriation/fy26-appropriations-requests/	Acquisition, planning, development, and improvement of parks - whether this will fund accessible diamonds depends on 2026 priorities - \$100K of total \$200K	
Kirsten Gillibrand Office	Congressional Delegated Spending	Local government	Spring 2026			Avg application \$1,000,000	45%				https://www.cfbg.org/nonprofits/grants/ralph-c-wilson-ir-trails-maintenance-fund-for-western-new-york/	Community Facilities - Town Court	
Ralph Wilson Foundation	WNY Trails Fund	Local government	Spring 2026			None specified	50%				https://www.nfwf.org/programs/sustain-our-great-lakes-program/sustain-our-great-lakes-2021-request-proposals	Trails and connectivity: Rails2Trails, Majors (our boardwalk is a bit old), and maybe at Knox we could talk to the Knox Park people. Also, we could use a map at JP Nicely.	
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation	Sustain Our Great Lakes Program	Local governments	Spring 2026		September	\$100,000-\$1,000,000	50% Total Project Cost suggested	September	2 years	https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/2021_SOGL_RFP.pdf		1) Restore and Enhance Stream and Riparian Habitat; 2) Expand Green Stormwater Infrastructure 3) Habitat Restoration through Invasive Species Control	
Empire State Development	Business Food Waste Mitigation Grant Program	Local government	Spring 2026			\$100,000 - \$750,000	50%				https://esd.ny.gov/business-food-waste-mitigation-grant-program	Compost programs - processing equipment (e.g. compactor, dehydrator, depackager, windrow turner, grinder); management equipment (e.g. forklift); and transportation equipment (e.g. trucks).	
US Dept of Agriculture/US Forest Service - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	Cooperative Weed Management Area grants	Local government in partnership with PRISM*	Spring 2026		Spring 2026	\$15,000-\$50,000	20% Total Project Cost	Fall	2 years	https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/CWMAInstructions	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r9/workingtogether/grants/?cid=FEPRD88819	Detect, prevent, eradicate, and/or control invasive plant species to promote ecological resiliency, watershed stability, and biological diversity.	
US Dept of Agriculture/US Forest Service - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	Forest Restoration	Local government	Spring 2026		Spring 2026	\$50,000-\$30,000 depends on category	20% Total Project Cost	Fall	2 years	https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/FRFAInstructions	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r9/workingtogether/grants/?cid=FEPRD88819	1) Mitigate Forest Insect and Disease Impacts; 2) Reduce Runoff from Degraded Sites through Green Infrastructure; 3) Restore and Connect Coastal and Riparian Forest Habitats	
NYSDEC	Invasive Species Grant	Local government	Summer 2026		Spring 2026	\$11,000 - \$100,000	20% Total Project Cost				https://extapps.dec.ny.gov/docs/land_forests_pdf/rfaigrantround3.pdf	Early detection/rapid response - HWA at JP Nicely	
Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance	Water Quality Implementation grants	Municipal	Fall 2026			Up to \$15,000	Recommended				https://www3.erie.gov/environment/lake-erie-watershed-protection-alliance	Priority water quality improvement or protection projects and water-related climate resiliency projects in the Niagara River/Lake Erie Watershed.	
US Dept of Homeland Security	Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program	Fire Company	Fall 2026		Spring 2026	Up to \$1 million	5-10% (depending on population of service area)	Fall	2 years	https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/FRFAInstructions	https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/assistance-grants	Fire Trucks and Equipment	

Project priorities:

1. Parks, trails, preserves, restoration, invasives
2. Highway dept upgrades, Town Court Security
3. Recreation - Accessible Sports Diamonds
4. Climate Smart Community - Geothermal Implementation, Envelope Improvement
5. Water Quality - Salt Barn reconstruction
6. Fire Truck

