Monroe County Climate Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
via zoom
December 2, 2021 (3:30 – 5:00 p.m.)
Drafted: December 3, 2021
Approved: January 6, 2022

Members:, John Botelho, Fred Ancello, Matthew O'Connor, Michael Yudelson, Sue Hughes Smith, Kate Walker, Helen Frank, Mike Garland, Leah Wirley, Helen Frank
Absent: Karla Boyce, Liam Smith
Staff: Clement Chung, Tina Stevens, Joe VanKerkhove, Yasmin Guevera, Isabelle Haddad, Rochelle Bell, Yasmin Guevara
Guests: Robert d'abadie, Ram Shrivastava, Jayme Thomann, Helena Webster, Greg Bocenowski, Chris Robasco, Dimitri Liapitch

Welcome, Introduction and Announcements (Co-Chair O'Connor)

1. Meeting called to order at 3:33 P.M. by Co-Chair O'Connor.
2. Tina Stevens sent out the 2022 meeting dates to the committee. It was noted that a new zoom link will be utilized beginning in January and members should use the access link provided in the monthly email moving forward.
3. Co-Chair O'Connor congratulated members Legislator Michael Yudelson on his re-election to the 13th district of the Monroe County Legislature and Sue Hughes-Smith on her first election representing the Legislature's 14th district.
4. Legislators Boyce and Ancello have reached their term limits, and Co-Chair O'Connor thanked them for their service as a committee member. These positions and one student position will be filled by appointment by the Legislature when the new term begins in January.

Approval of Minutes (Co-Chair Yudelson):

1. Minutes from the October 7, 2021 meeting were unanimously approved. Motion by Fred Ancello; seconded by Matt O'Connor.

Legislative Update (County Legislator Yudelson):

1. Legislator Yudelson thanked legislators Boyce and Ancello for their commitment to the committee and their assistance in the County Legislature to assure passage of Open C-PACE and Climate Smart Communities legislation.
2. Committee appointees (Majority Leader, County Executive and Legislature President) will be determined when the Legislature reorganizes in January.

Climate Action Plan Update (Joe Vankerkhove / Jayme Thomann / Bergmann Associates):

1. Jayme Thomann from Bergmann Associates and Chris Robasco and Robert D'Abadie from Michael Baker gave an update on the Monroe County GHG Inventory:
   - Baseline (2019) Inventory and Business As Usual (BAU) use local data to populate the ICLEI ClearPath tool or populate calculation methods recommended by ICLEI
   - Forecasts are based on ICLEI default rates and assumptions
   - Assumes electricity is 100% renewable by 2030
     - Some residual electric emissions in 2031 (Fiscal Year vs. Calendar Year?)
   - Solid Waste Facilities remain under review
   - All sectors will be involved as goals are to be achieved

2. New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act):
   - 85% Reduction in GHG Emissions by 2050
   - 100% Zero-emission Electricity by 2040
   - 70% Renewable Energy by 2030
   - 9,000 MW of Offshore Wind by 2035
   - 3,000 MW of Energy Storage by 2030
   - 6,000 MW of Solar by 2025
   - 22 Million Tons of Carbon Reduction through Energy Efficiency and Electrification

3. Inventory / BAU Forecasts:

	Emissions MT CO2e			
Sector	**2019** ***(baseline)***	**2030**	**2040**	**2050**
Water Resource Recovery Facilities	9,225	3,617	3,441	3,441
Transit Fleet ***(support vehicles only)***	278	187	130	93
County Vehicle Fleet	3,017	2,066	1,470	1,086
Expressway Lighting and Traffic Signals	1,004	122	0	0
Buildings and Facilities	26,073	13,210	12,807	12,807
Solid Waste Facilities ***under further review***	---	---	---	---

4. Next Steps / Project Schedule:
   - Move ahead in all sectors (except Solid Waste) to develop broad goal to support the sectors with project identification
   - Matt O' Connor asked if landfills will be included in Phase 1. Michael D'abadie indicated that they were working with the different parties to make sure the values obtained are acceptable to all. There are meetings scheduled for discussions with all parties, specifically in the Solid Waste area.
   - Matt also asked about the committee's role reviewing Phase 1. Mike Garland said that it was important for the Committee to have eyes on it, as the Legislature is looking to the Committee for a recommendation. Matt also asked if there would be cost estimates in Phase 1. Mike Garland said wherever legitimate estimates could be obtained, they will be included.
   - Michael D'abadie stated that the reason for high numbers initially was the use of generic ICELI data. In consultation with county partners, it was found that local data was much more accurate and they would use local data wherever necessary to insure the most accurate representation.

New Business:

1. Sue Hughes-Smith introduced Helena Webster, Greg Boczenowski and Mohini Sharma from Metro Justice, members of Rochester for Energy Democracy, a grassroots movement to replace RG&E with a public ratepayer cooperative.
2. The proposed utility will be:
   - Economically just by being not-for-profit. Necessities such as heat and electricity would be public goods instead of commodities that distant shareholders control to maximize their own profit.
   - Democratic and fair through governance by a rate-payer elected Board of Directors. This board will be composed of elected community representatives, appointed representatives of organized labor and appointed climate experts.
   - Green through a green energy mandate that requires 100% carbon free by 2040 in accordance with the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Details would be addressed in a feasibility study.
   - Committed to workers' rights and a just transition for energy workers, with provisions determined in partnership with local worker unions.
3. Benefits:
   - Lower rates: In a county that has one of the poorest cities in the country, more must be done to prioritize the needs of low-income residents by reducing their energy bills.
     - According to the American Public Power Association, on average, customers of publicly-owned utilities pay 13% less than those of private utilities. According to the US Energy Information Administration, public utilities were three times cheaper on average than private utilities in 2020.
     - In 2020, Fairport Electric, a municipal public utility charged 5.72 cents/kWH compared to RG&E's 12.61 cents/kWh.
     - A democratic public utility can implement a progressive rate structure in which the largest consumers of energy that burden the system the most also pay more than the everyday residential customer.
     - A public utility also means lower energy costs for public buildings, freeing up more funds to retain and hire critical staff as well as fund services.

4. A public utility is the fastest, most financially efficient, and most equitable way to meet the renewable energy goals necessary to halt climate change:
   - With a public utility, green energy will be mandated, with the removal of the inefficiency of profit providing funds.
     - RG&E guarantees its shareholders at least a 9% return on investment. From May 2019 - April 2020, RG&E reported $89 million in profit. Approximately half of that is invested in stocks, and it is unknown how the remainder is utilized.
     - A public utility would empower itself to invest ratepayer dollars into electrification infrastructure in the grid and homes. Funds could be directed into helping businesses and families weatherize their homes and transition to electric appliances and HVAC systems. To address climate change, residents must be able to use electricity for all of their needs while reducing their actual energy consumption – making energy efficiency crucial. In our opinion, RG&E is not prioritizing that at the scale and pace necessary.
     - Public utilities across the country have a proven track record of transitioning faster than their private counterparts and investing in their communities. According to the American Public Power Association, between 2005 and 2017, public utilities reduced their carbon dioxide emissions by 33 percent, resulting in nearly 40 percent of public power coming from non-carbon emitting sources, far outpacing private sector averages during the same period.
     - Public utilities in the United States also generate over 58 billion dollars in revenue each year, with an estimated two billion invested directly back into their communities through jobs, free and reduced energy costs for lower-income rate payers, and incentivizing demand-side energy reduction initiatives such as weatherizing old homes and installing heat pumps.
     - A public utility will also complement the CCA, a great first step toward reducing emissions. This public utility will interact with the CCA the same way RG&E does --it will manage and negotiate contracts for renewable energy for its subscribers.
     - By assuming control over the physical infrastructure which RG&E has struggled to maintain and prepare for climate instability, this would mean a more resilient grid that is capable of transporting higher volumes of electricity and addressing the economic justice issue of soaring delivery rates.
     - Also, unlike the CCA, a public utility can ensure that commercial and industrial customers are automatically a part of the rate-base when negotiating renewable energy contracts and that HEAP recipients also benefit from lower rates.
5. A public utility will provide a more reliable and resilient grid:
   - To maximize profit for its shareholders, private utilities forgo maintenance and upgrades on power lines for decades, resulting in dangerous outages like in Texas and deadly fires in California caused by Pacific Gas and Electric.
   - In 2017 and 2018, NYS fined RG&E for poor power outage management.
   - According to the American Public Power Association, public utilities average half the average outage time as their private counterparts—just 74 minutes per year compared to 136 minutes annually for customers of private utilities.
   - In 2014, Webster was ranked #1 for outage time in New York State, and a 1.5 mile strip of 49-year-old power lines were found to be non-functional.
   - Earlier this year residents in Irondequoit (including the Town Supervisor) spoke out regarding repeated outages occurring on days of *good* weather. This past summer, RG&E had a power outage in the Highland Park area during a heatwave.
   - A public utility that lacks a profit motive can insure that the grid is maintained to the highest possible standard, creating a more reliable and cost effective grid in urban and rural areas.
   - Also, having the electric side of the grid be reliable and consumer friendly that the majority of people prefer it is the only way to get rid of reliance on natural gas.
6. A greater investment in green energy, energy efficiency, and a resilient local grid means more jobs.
   - Investing in renewables creates jobs in construction and installation, operation and maintenance, manufacturing and engineering, project management and professional services. With public ownership, the community can ensure that these are good-paying union jobs.
     - According to NYSERDA's 2020 Clean Energy Industry Report, employment in clean energy grew by 16% from 2015 through 2019, which is three times faster than the overall employment growth rate in New York. In 2019, the clean energy industry in the state employed 163,754 people. A transition to a public utility would further increase the need for clean energy jobs, especially in the areas of energy efficiency, grid modernization and energy storage and renewable electric power generation.
     - Avangrid, RG&E's parent company, has moved nearly all of its call center and administrative jobs out of Monroe County to Maine and Connecticut. A local public utility would bring those jobs back to the region.
7. The first step is to commission a feasibility study to assess the technical, financial, and logistical feasibility of replacing RG&E with a public rate-payer cooperative.

8. The second step would be to organize a referendum. This referendum will form the new public utility that RG&E is legally mandated to sell to. From there, the new public utility and RG&E will have to negotiate a buy-out price.
   - It is undecided to first attempt a referendum in the City of Rochester, and then attempt to gradually takeover the remainder of RG&E's territory in Monroe County, or initially attempt to take over the entire county.
   - Initial conversations with other public utility efforts across the country and the Public Utility Law Project have recommended that from a technical and financial standpoint, the larger the better because it reduces the points of interconnection between different grid systems.
   - From a political standpoint, Metro Justice wants to make sure they wage a fight that they can win. At the end of the day, they don't have the information they need to make an informed decision until a feasibility study is undertaken.
   - The aim is to assume all of RG&E's service territory within Monroe County, so buy-in from County Government is crucial.
   - Accomplishing this goal will take a unified community, and the list of partners continues to grow.
   - The ask is that the County partner with the City to jointly fund and run the process for a feasibility study, using an RFP written by our team.
   - In the opinion of Rochester for Energy Democracy, a public utility is the practical and right thing to do to meet climate goals and provide for the community.
9. There was discussing about delivery rates, cost structure, urban vs. rural delivery layered markets, NYPA, a state bill that would allow NYPA to supply power to municipalities and their effect on pricing.
10. Proposed timeline: first step is to find funding for feasibility study. RFP should be finished in January and the group hopes to work with the City and County purchasing departments to issue the RFP and obtain a contract. Once that is complete, a referendum could be mobilized in 2023.
11. Sue Hughes-Smith asked the Legislators on the Committee the possibility of funding a feasibility study. Mike Yudelson said the normal path is to seek input and support for the advocacy work done from various constituencies, to familiarize people with the concept and see if it would work. Mike suggested this as a topic of discussion for the Legislature's Environment and Public Works committee. There would also need to be education done to bring elected officials up to speed on the project, with projects vetted by County employees who are professionals in their field before they are presented to the administration.
12. Sue asked if the Climate Committee was in a position to make a recommendation to the Administration regarding this proposal. Mike Yudelson referred to comments received earlier from the Legislature that they would prefer one comprehensive document with the completed Climate Action Plan with all recommendations / proposals than many smaller ones. Fred Ancello stated that a referral through the Administration could be an appropriate step.

Public Forum:

1. A letter was received from Pat Wartinger, the Chairperson of Color Henrietta Green, asking the County to use their Build Back Better ARPA funding to establish food compost sites.
   - Mike Garland and Yasmin Guevara commented that food waste composting is a component of both Phase 1 (County facilities) and Phase 2 of the Climate Action Plan
   - County remains a partner with the City of Rochester, who is conducting a pilot compost program
   - Consultant is currently evaluating the opportunity for an ideal pilot organics collection
   - County is expert at leaf composting, but taking on food waste/anerobic digestion is more complex
   - Letter suggested Avion Drive location; that site is not available for food composting due to proximity to the airport (food compost attracts birds, which hinder aviation)
   - Henrietta does not currently have a leaf compost program. Leaf compost provides the necessary bulk for food waste composting and would be a great start

Next meeting is Thursday, January 6, 2022 at 3:30. Location will be sent one week prior.
Motion to adjourn by John Botelho; second by Matt O'Connor. Meeting adjourned at 4:50 PM.