



Minutes – Friday, March 29, 2024
Video Conference
9 am to 11 am

Attending: Dave Bradley, Joe Wilson, Carol Chock, Dan Lamb, Aloja Airewele, Dawn Montanye, Diane Stefani, Gerri Wiley, Guillermo Metz, Hailley Delisle, Hyomi Eom, Ingrid Zabel, Jack Wright, Janelle Bourgeois, Keegan Young, Mike Straight, Neha Patankar, Ray Burger, Sarah Carson, Scott Doyle, Sheila Out, Terry Carroll, Tom Hirasuna, Brian Eden, Chris Skawski, Marie McRae, Olwen Huley, Marcel Lamb, Harrison Hensley, Jaden Beck, Hilary Swartwood, David Kay, Fernando de Aragón, Peter Bardaglio

The Cozy Basements Program – Jaden Beck

Jaden Beck, Clean Energy Project Associate of BlocPower, presented on the recently launched Cozy Basements weatherization program. This new initiative, started with Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County (CCETC), includes paid on-the-job training for up to 30 homes this year.

- BlocPower is the program manager for the Efficiency & Electrification Program with Ithaca Green New Deal
- Our goal is to fully decarbonize Ithaca’s buildings by 2030 by pursuing 3 core programs
- Efficiency & Electrification Program actions
 - Replace inefficient or fossil fuel-reliant equipment with modern, all-electric tech – address 40% of Ithaca’s GHG emissions
 - Provide financing, including low or no-money-down lease offers and no liens on buildings – accessibility provides scales, which lowers risks and costs
 - Train local community members for jobs in the green economy – benefit community and drive economic growth by creating 400+ new jobs
- BlocPower works with stakeholders
 - Government & public entities, private capital providers, local contractors, community, Fortune 500s & foundations
- Workforce development
 - Support the development of a new workforce to match the needs of the electrification program
 - Ensuring benefits are shared by all
 - Job readiness support & pathway development
 - Providing hands-on job training
 - Prioritizing climate justice communities
- Green Career Pathways

- Entry-level roles open doors to multiple career pathways
- Residential, commercial, energy auditing, engineer fields
- Cozy Basements program
 - Traditional classroom instruction with a critical hands-on component to round out a real job experience
 - Training and experience in basic weatherization through air-sealing, caulking, rim joist sealing
 - Access to network of green trades experiences and training
 - 3-4 weeks
 - \$20/hour
- Why Cozy Basements?
 - Trainee: core building science training, simple and safe installation, exposure to on-site, and client etiquette
 - Homeowner: reduced basement air leakage, more consistent indoor temperatures year-round, reduced moistures, lower energy consumption
- Jaden described the Cozy Basement addition as a convenient new way for people to gently explore state or local programs, providing a less intimidating entry point
- Example of participants
 - Keegan, Cozy Basement graduate, said they learned weatherization with BlocPower and are now efficiently collaborating as a team
 - Anthony, homeowner, commented that the work done made a real difference, maintaining a warm home despite a power outage after their service
- Cozy Basements trainees motivated by job stability, community involvement, environmental impact, and home efficiency learning
- Their career goals are stable community jobs, green energy professional advancement, and founding their own green businesses
- Who is qualified?
 - Homeowner in Tompkins County
 - Basement with uninsulated sill plate rim joist
 - Income-qualified based on EmPower + guidelines
- Enrollment at <http://ccetompkins.org/energy/cozy-basements>

Q&A

- Peter: How many homes have you provided job training for so far this year?
- Jaden: Around 8 or 10 projects so far
- Dave Bradley (chat): What if we don't have a basement?
- Jaden: The program currently specializes in basements, making it unsuitable for those without one, but there are plans to expand beyond basements in the future
- Dave (chat): Are air-to-air vents or heat exchangers necessary when a home becomes "too airtight"?
- Jaden: The program hasn't dealt with overly airtight homes yet, and installation of air-to-air vents or exchangers is a job for a professional contractor

- Margaret McCasland (chat): Do you have a way of addressing moisture if a basement has a dirt floor that is damp year round?
- Jaden: The program doesn't resolve existing moisture issues but can prevent worsening
- Damp basements might require a dehumidifier or manual water removal before the crew can work

Green Workforce Development in Tompkins County – Aloja Airewele

Aloja Airewele, Green Energy Workforce Training Center Coordinator at CCETC, heads up the Green Career Pathways Project (CPP) at CCETC as part of the Energy Warriors program. The CPP is a collaborative workforce training and employment connection program in Tompkins County that helps low-income individuals, returning citizens, veterans, and people from underserved (frontline communities) enter sustainable green jobs. Aloja discussed the opportunity for meaningful career pathways in the green economy, the work here in Tompkins County, and the ongoing challenges of recruitment and engagement with individuals from underserved communities.

- Aloja mentioned that he represents a team and not just himself, acknowledging colleagues from Cornell Cooperative Extension, including Don, Harrison, and Keegan
- Aloja referenced Moby Dick to stress the need for courage in tackling climate change, underscoring that facing the reality of the threat is more crucial than debating its existence
- Aloja said Energy Warriors Program aimed to provide participants with knowledge about environmental threats and opportunities, thus allowing them to contribute meaningfully to climate mitigation efforts while gaining valuable career skills
- The training program aims to include individuals of varying educational backgrounds and challenges, reflecting the diverse workforce they'll encounter
- The program includes detailed modules that educate participants on climate change, its causes, and the opportunities to use technology, finance, and social networks
- The excitement comes from having advanced green technology, prompting questions about why we can't shift away from fossil fuels
- These topics are discussed in training classes, which are part of a paid program that also provides certifications, supported by various community and private foundations
- This initiative, including ideas like Cozy Basements, emerges from collaborations with private entities that fund these transformative projects
- The training program includes a diverse range of participants who, upon completion, earn certifications like OSHA **ten** and skills in heat pump installation
- They follow a nationally recognized curriculum enhanced with specialized training in green and energy pathways from the Energy Warriors program
- The program teaches participants to manage their wealth beyond just money, using established knowledge and collective wisdom to shape the curriculum
- Participants are expected to excel when given opportunities, learning essential skills like teamwork and respect for diverse viewpoints through practical experiences
- This approach, which Aloja called “self-dignification” rather than soft skills, helps them function effectively as a cohesive group in the workforce
- In Tompkins County, various organizations collaborate to provide meaningful work opportunities

- Finger Lakes for Youth offers training in customer relations and material reuse, while TST BOCES provides heat pump training and GED completion
- This collaborative effort helps maximize resources and scale up training to meet the demand for skilled workers needed to decarbonize homes in Ithaca
- Our program's work is challenging, particularly in meaningful recruitment – participants have highlighted the complexities involved
- A major issue is the skepticism within impacted communities, who feel they've been used in the past for research or personal gains of others, leading to distrust in new initiatives
- In overcoming recruitment challenges, I rely on personal integrity and genuine connections
- It's crucial that our efforts provide tangible opportunities, not just training
- Offering on-the-job training and diverse career options ensures participants are not left hanging - your continued support is invaluable
- We value your diverse connections and welcome your ideas. In community engagement – setting aside ego is key—it's not about us, but about serving the community

Q&A

- Peter thanked Aloja for his engaging storytelling and insightful points, highlighting the importance of integrity in collaborative work
- Peter: How much is the wider school district, including the Ithaca City School District, engaged in programs like New Roots and Energy Warriors?
- Aloja: We're exploring collaboration with the wider school district, tapping into programs like New Roots for environmental education and workforce training
- I'm excited about expanding energy assessment initiatives to schools district-wide, especially with Senator Schumer's support
- Let's focus on building our collective capacity and seeking support from influential community members to enhance collaboration
- Fernando de Aragón (chat): How are participants selected for the training?
- Aloja: Participants are selected through various outreach methods and an online application process on our website
- We screen applicants to ensure alignment with program goals and community needs
- While we aim to diversify cohorts, we're particularly interested in engaging women, indigenous individuals, youth, and career changers
- As capacity grows, we're open to broader outreach and presentations to expand participation opportunities
- Peter mentioned that we could utilize folks in this group who provide leadership in their own groups, sectors, and communities
- Hyomi Eom (chat): What are the outcomes of trainees connecting with jobs after training? And how satisfied are the trainees?
- Keegan Young: The training was fulfilling - it covered both familiar and new environmental concepts, and exploring green career options was enlightening
- The hands-on weatherization projects in the community felt impactful
- Harrison: The training was impactful, blending my passion for environmental issues with new insights

- Doing hands-on weatherization work in the community felt especially rewarding, knowing we were making a difference
- Marcel Lamb (chat): Are you already familiar with NYSERDA's OJT program for green energy jobs?
- Alojja: We're looking to scale up from Cozy Basement to Cozy Homes, leveraging our team's expertise and connections through the Southern Tier Clean Energy Hub
- Our aim is to expand beyond rim joist work to full home weatherization - need assistance to make that happen
- Jaden: It's crucial to address the barriers we face – potential funding opportunity, NYSERDA PON 3982
- Despite its promise of \$8,000 per new hire for on-the-job training, the paperwork is excessively burdensome
- Marcel: I've worked with them before, having helped over 50 people apply, and it's straightforward once you've done it - I'm available to guide you through the process
- Jaden: Regardless of the paperwork or program structure, a significant challenge we've faced is that many contractors require workers to have a driver's license
- Marcel: We usually just need an ID and proof of residence, so asking for a driver's license seems excessive - I'm happy to step in and advocate for them
- Transitioning from training to employment with a business could be streamlined – any businesses face hurdles, they can contact me for assistance
- Carol Chock: It would appear to be a suitable fit for you and the Tompkins County Workforce Development
- Alojja: The county has been supportive, with Rich John as the liaison to the Career Pathways Project
- There's another collaboration with Cornell's Office for Sustainability for training resources & exploration of solar energy avenues
- The collective efforts of individuals, including advocates like David Kay and Brian Eden, have contributed to progress despite occasional uncertainties and challenges
- Carol: Tompkins County Workforce Development could greatly benefit from your perspective and advocacy for the participants
- Brian Eden: Alojja's role is challenging, and many would walk away once they realize its complexity - kudos to him for persevering and handling it all with care
- Peter noted the importance of recognizing challenges - despite facing opposition from the fossil fuel industry, grassroots efforts like ours offer a hopeful path forward in our communities
- Alojja compared collective action to strengthening a basket with water, emphasizing the significance of individual contributions
- He stressed the unstoppable shift towards renewable energy and advocated for proactive engagement
- Peter acknowledged the challenge of fighting for change, particularly in influencing state-level policy
- Brian underscored the ongoing struggle for resources in disadvantaged communities, expressing hope for positive outcomes in current negotiations
- Peter: Despite having a Democratic governor and majority in the legislature, progress is stalling due to the immense influence of the fossil fuel industry
- It's frustrating and challenging to fight against this imbalance, but we must engage and bring about real change

- David Kay offered his appreciation for the Cooperative Extension's efforts and acknowledged the challenges they face in addressing climate issues
- He emphasized their local work's significance, noting its potential to inspire broader action beyond Tompkins County
- Mike Straight: We should focus more on energy efficiency – also asked about DIY energy projects
- Aloja: While our main focus is workforce training, we're open to supporting DIY energy initiatives if feasible
- Brian noted in chat that the County Legislature passed a resolution supporting a climate package of 8 key bills in Albany