



Minutes – Friday, June 30, 2023
Video Conference
9 am to 11 am

Attending: Emily Phillips, Marie McRae, Susan Riley, Gerrie Wiley, Diane Cohen, Karim Beers, Alice Green, Chuck Geisler, Dave Bradley, David Kay, Guillermo Metz, Hilary Swartwood, Holly Hutchinson, Ingrid Zabel, Jack Wright, Jaden Beck, Janelle Bourgeois, Jon Jensen, Leigh Miller, Leon Porter, Margaret McCasland, Paul Moore, Susan Carson, Stephanie Redmond, Terry Carroll, Kristinko Mato, Joe Wilson, Nick Goldsmith, Anne Rhodes, Caitlin Cameron, Margaret Johnson, Tom Hirasuna, Peter Bardaglio

GYGB & Southern Tier Clean Energy Hub – Karim Beers

Karim Beers is the director of the Southern Tier Regional Clean Energy Hub. Previously, he served as the coordinator of Get Your GreenBack, which recently came to an end. Karim talked about lessons learned during his time with GYGB and the transition from GYGB to the Clean Energy Hub.

- Karim has been coordinating Get Your GreenBack Tompkins for the last 11 years – focusing on lessons learned regarding how to engage more people to help build sustainable, just future
- Goal of GYGB was to engage all 42,000 households and every business in county to take step to save energy and money in four areas: 1) food; 2) waste reduction; 3) home energy use; and 4) transportation
- Over last 11 years, we've done some things well and others not so well – many of projects begun by GYGB are continuing through other initiatives, mainly Southern Tier Clean Energy Hub
- GYGB always envisioned as initiative of limited duration – steering committee recently came to conclusion that time was right, given the emergence of the regional clean energy hub
- Original goal was elusive, but GYGB able to accomplish a lot working in partnership with others
- In area of food, GYGB established first community-supported agricultural distribution locations at Cornell, providing weekly supplies of farm fresh produce to two parts of campus
- With assistance of Friendship Donation Network and several plant nurseries, hundreds of vegetable and flower seedlings distributed through food pantries – also established hunting networking group connected experienced hunters with beginners
- In area of waste management, online directory of over 40 reuse stores put together and thousands of rack cards distributed directing people to website
- Collaborated with Finger Lakes ReUse center on a fix-it series for small appliances and lamps
- In transportation center, GYGB key supporter of Bike Walk Tompkins and Way2Go
- Energy sector received bulk of GYGB's attention during last several years, expanding to regional effort – over past five years, staff spoke to over 20,000 people about energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Supported 3,000 people while documenting 1,200 high impact energy projects such as home insulation, solar, and heat pumps, mostly in low to moderate income households
- Investment from these projects totaled \$9 million, of which \$6 million came from local, state, and federal grants
- Also built tiny home PowerHouse to provide people with hands on education regarding home energy efficiency, solar, and heat pumps
- Just some of accomplishments over last decade – in beginning believed it would be easy to mobilize thousand so people to take steps in area of food, waste, transportation, and energy
- First lesson learned was each of these areas came with its own set of obstacles and benefited from particular approach or solution
- Once this was understood, creative ideas emerged, such as marketing of reuse stores, drop off spots at workplaces for CSA produce, and free, personalized advising on home energy issues to navigate labyrinth of contractors, NYSERDA programs, and incentives available

- Became clear that bringing together people concerned about climate change and those focused on poverty and social justice was crucial to building larger, more diverse, and stronger movement that contributes to just transition
- Second lesson learned was importance of centering equity, not technology – too many times, technology placed at center of solution
- Seeing technology as making up whole picture has major shortcomings – to achieve sweeping changes needed, first need to build broad, diverse coalition but such coalition will not emerge with narrow focus on technology
- Need to cultivate inclusive values that think about everyone – not just technical fix
- More GYGB focused on equity such as access to local healthy food, clean energy, and clean energy jobs, the more it was able to engage larger numbers of people
- When equity and environment worked on together, we see powerful leadership emerge from those most vulnerable to and affected by climate change
- Focus on equity helps moderate tendency towards self-interest and excessive consumption
- State and federal governments investing so much around clean energy that if we don't think carefully about equity, these investments will just end up reinforcing current stratification
- Third lesson is around shift from individual to collective action – early focus of GYGB on individual steps – great starting point but have to go beyond individual household actions
- Have to broaden vision – individual steps good but not sufficient
- Energy navigator program provided opportunity for volunteers to engage in collective action
- Individual and social change are mutually reinforcing – the more changes we make in our own lives, the more committed and able we become to shift policy
- Self-interest and greed feed our current crises, and community and generosity will lead way out
- We need to build capacity for everyone to participate more effectively, but particularly for those who have historically been left behind by our educational system
- What would it look like to center our work around equity? How can we bring together environmental and social justice activists?

Q&A

- Peter commented on role Kirby Edmunds played in GYGB and Building Bridges in centering concern about climate change around equity and justice
- Karim: Kirby one of founding members of GYGB steering committee – invaluable in guiding work of GYGB and providing personal support and advice
- One of programs Karim and Kirby worked on together was the Community Education Organizers (CEOs) – focused on identifying people from lower income backgrounds who were interested in making changes in their communities in any one of four areas GYGB was working on
- GYGB and Building Bridges partnered on recruiting, supporting, and offering training for CEOs – Kirby was fundamental to success of program
- Part of wisdom Kirby imparted: our relationships with each other as well as our relationship with the natural world need to change
- Chuck Geisler: Such an important observation that individual and collective actions are mutually reinforcing – really helped Chuck in thinking about his work on raising awareness around energy efficiency and mobile homes – has become increasingly collective and collaborative
- David Kay: How do you think differently about equity and coalition building as you move to a more regional approach with the Southern Tier Clean Energy Hub?
- Karim: Excited about potential in region for growing green jobs – who is going to benefit from infusion of money into this effort? Important to create opportunity for people who've been left behind to get good paying jobs and start their own businesses
- Finger Lakes ReUse Center has done fantastic job of illustrating how this can be done, meeting an important environmental need while providing people from marginalized communities with good paying employment
- Peter pointed to earlier essay that Karim and other folks wrote on energy and equity as providing great example of this approach: <https://www.tccpi.org/energy---equity.html>
- Peter: Believe that TCCPI's work can become more centered on equity by becoming policy advocates working in coalitions focused on issue of climate justice – TCCPI has become very active in last two years as participant in coalitions such as NY Renews, Renewable Heat Now, and Climate Can't Wait

- Good example of this is bill Assemblymember Anna Kelles and others are working on, the Gap Fund – would step in and make sure LMI households are brought up to standard that will then qualify them for important NYSEDA clean energy incentives
- Need to do more thinking like this about how we can make sure no one is left behind as we make energy transition

10-Year Solid Waste Management Plans (State and Local) – Diane Cohen

Diane Cohen, the executive director of Finger Lakes ReUse, Inc., provided an overview of these new draft plans and shared her perspective on them based on her 22 years in the sustainable materials management profession. In particular, the public comment period on the County's draft plan is open until August 7 so we'll be discussing what may be possible in the next 10 years.

- Idea for reuse center came from Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste under Barb Eckstrom – included in County's 10-year solid waste management plan in 1998 – Finger Lakes ReUse Center got underway IN 2008
- Park Foundation early funder and Cornell Cooperative Extension – Tompkins County was fiscal sponsor
- Comments on NYS solid waste management plan due 6/29 – CR0WD also submitted comments with focus on circular economy, too
- County 10-year draft plan released last week – open for comments until August 7
- Both documents talk about circular economy – exciting that they are highlighting this approach
- Circular economy based on three principles:
 - 1) Eliminate waste and pollution
 - 2) Circulate products and materials (at their highest value)
 - 3) Regenerate nature
- CR0WD's definition: "circular economy a regenerative and restorative system by design that keeps components and materials at their highest utility and value, distinguishing between biological and technical metabolisms"
- According to Felix Heisel at Cornell's Circular Construction Lab, next to reducing waste, reuse is the most immediate and effective circular economy materials management strategy
- Finger Lakes ReUse Center's mission: "to enhance community, economy, and environment through reuse" – 501(c)3 that takes strong business approach – a social enterprise
- Founding goals: "to reduce waste, relieve poverty, and teach skills through reuse activities"
- Vision: "a just, resilient, and waste-free world that values people and resources"
- Lots of data in NYS draft plan – 80 pp. plan with over 500 pp. of appendices – most of it from 2018
- State generated 42.2 million tons of waste in 2018 – recycling rate increased 43% in 2018
- Construction and demolition debris made up 46% of waste in 2018 – no data on how much of waste going into landfills and incinerators is actually reusable
- Built environment produces 40% of GHG emissions
- 43.3 million tons of waste equal to disposing 24 million SUVs annually – 135,00 tons per day or 77,000 SUVs per day in NYS
- So much more valuable material in waste stream than anyone talks about – average value per ton peaked in 2021 at about \$185 and then dropped to just under \$70 in 2022
- Materials sold to local markets through ReUse Centers in Tompkins County totals more than \$2,000 per ton – why don't we set up systems to capture more of this value?
- Ripple effect of Finger Lakes ReUse operations:
 - \$6.5 million in employee wages from 2019 to 2022 – 85 employees
 - Generated nearly \$9 million in annual revenue and paid \$346,000 in county sales tax between 2018 and 2022
 - Diverted almost 10 million tons from landfill during same period
- Direct impacts of Finger Lakes ReUse:
 - \$2.4 million in sales in 2022
 - 45,000 drop off donations in 2022
 - 750,000 items returned to local use in 2022
 - 20% business growth each year for the past 10 years
 - Now employing 80+ living wage employees, 10 apprentices, and 10 youth workers

- Growth driven by public engagement – overwhelmed by enormous volume of stuff people are bringing us – need help in figuring out how to handle it
- Key takeaways from the NYS solid waste management plan:
 - 10 year plan, acts as a guide for funding, local plans, and policy
 - Legislative Action (included 3 highlighted actions)
 - Broad packaging and paper product legislation – adopts Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) approach targeting generators
 - Expand and amend food donations and food scraps recycling
 - Require a per ton disposal disincentive surcharge on all waste landfilled or combusted in NYS and all waste generated in NYS being sent for landfilling or combustion out of state to provide financial support for reduction, reuse, and recycling projects
 - Extensive research and excellent resource (2018 data) by County
 - Local Planning Units defined: A county, two or more counties acting jointly, a local government agency or authority established pursuant to State Law for the purposes of managing solid waste...that the NYSDEC determines to be capable of implementing a regional waste management program. In order for a county to be a planning unit, it must include all cities, towns, and villages within its borders.
 - Appendices are rich with data and information
 - State plan history
 - NYS solid waste generation and waste imported
 - Local and regional materials management and planning unit summaries
 - Focus on Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) and Potential Environmental Justice Area impacts (PEJA) – opportunities for enterprise startups
- NYS exports 30% of total waste generated to other states -- about 46% of the total waste imported to NYS in 2018 was MSW (municipal solid waste), 36% was construction & demolition debris, 18% was industrial waste, and the remaining 1% was biosolids
- Would make more sense to retrieve valuable materials for reuse and prioritize local economy
- 8 landfills and 2 incinerators in DEC Region 7, which includes Tompkins County – 83% of MSW generated in Region 7 in 2018 processed or disposed of within region and 17% of exported -- 54% of the C&D debris generated in region was disposed of or processed within region
- In 2018 in Tompkins County:
 - 91% of Tompkins County waste exported, primarily to Region 8 (84%) and Region 9 (7%) – Region 8 landfill in Ontario County slated to close in 2028
 - Will stop taking out-of-county waste so Tompkins County some thinking to do to address that problem
 - 87,200 tons were sent to landfill or combustion facilities
 - C&D accounted for 15% of total waste, and none was recovered
- NYS made recycling mandatory in 1992 – how could it take same approach to reuse, which has even greater local economic and environmental benefit?
- Finger Lakes ReUse recommended actions for NYS draft management plan
 - Review definition of “solid waste” – reuse continues to be undervalued and relatively absent from existing government planning priorities and funding structures
 - Transform and expand “waste” collection methods – increase focus on how activity of reuse (and its supporting infrastructure) is absolutely central and essential to reducing waste and supporting a circular economy
 - Define Community ReUse Centers or reuse-specific facilities/hubs handling greater than (# TBD) tons per year as a part of materials management system – understand breadth of engagement activity of reuse can bring to Sustainable Materials Management efforts
 - Note how public engagement and concern combined with large, diverse workforce and enterprise ecosystem can effectively help facilitate this effort
 - Recognize role and partnership CRCs can provide in diversion of hazardous and toxic materials that persist in current waste stream
 - Add mattress recycling and expanding reuse infrastructure as explicit action items
 - Add Deconstruction as a definition
 - Add Salvage as a definition
 - Clarify definition of circular economy

- Recognizing massive inefficiencies in how waste is currently transported, imported, and exported, support development of efficient network of reuse material exchanges and hubs, where local markets are prioritized, then regional, then statewide/out-of-state
- Economics will contribute to this logic, but an intentional mapping of this system will help vastly improve efficiencies and reduce impacts in terms of cost and energy used to transport marketable materials commingled with waste to various waste destinations
- Here is the [link to our comments](#) on the NYS Solid Waste Management Plan Draft
- Public meeting on draft local plan: July 11, 2023 at 5:30 pm in BorgWarner Room at Tompkins County Public Library
- Diane would love to get help with drafting comments – how can we as community support County Recycling and Materials Management Dept. to maintain its leadership role in NYS?
- If interested contact Diane at diane@fingerlakesreuse.org

Q&A

- Peter: State appears to put concept of circular economy at center of plan, but vagueness of language about how to implement this concept is concerning
- Diane: Waste management is huge mess – part of reason it doesn't get more attention is because problem is so overwhelming
- Need to build much better catchment systems to retrieve reusable materials, taking enterprise approach – how to do so largely absent from state plan – need more state investment in this industry to move it to next level
- Opportunity in local plan to commit to steps that could move us forward in manageable way and create local enterprises and create good paying jobs
- Reuse should be brought more formally into materials management system – Diane is reaching out to large waste handlers to see if there is different way to operate their businesses
- Anne Rhodes: Tompkins County is focusing on cleaning up “what’s right in front of us” – it’s creating a model that’s rippling out across the state
- Peter: One of big disappointments of last state legislative session was inability to get package reduction act across finish line – what do you think chance of its success in next session?
- Diane: Producer responsibility has to happen but so much resistance to it – took years to get 5 cents bottle deposit law passed
- Would rather figure out ways to set up local entrepreneurial systems that have immediate local return and generate sales taxes and jobs, as well as a positive environmental impact
- Doesn't want Finger Lakes ReUse to be only one in reuse business – wants to see other businesses created that are successful – capacity issues are holding us back
- Local government is making enormous investment in recycling and some of that should be directed to reuse – labor intensive but generates far more revenue than commodities recycling – could transform way we handle materials
- Should see it as source of wealth and opportunity – huge economic development potential – really interested in reframing how things are collected and processed
- David Kay: How do we use the system that exists to push at the margins? Agrees with Anne that things here have potential for resonance beyond our community
- We all wish we had magic wand we could wave to bring about truly transformative change at systems level, but we need to focus on pragmatic change we can bring about within the system while pushing envelope
- Karim: Reuse materials are there and market is there, but what's lacking is capacity – see similar situation with social enterprises involving clean energy – there's work to be done, contractors booking out months ahead to install heat pump systems, market is there, and incentives are there, but it's capacity to support emergence of these social enterprises that's main challenge – the obstacle is on the administrative side, someone who can structure and manage things and them set up and under way
- Peter: Hope that discussions around 10-year solid waste management plan will lead to concrete outcomes

State Legislative Session Roundup – Peter

- We had some big wins in this session, including the All-Electric Buildings Act and Build Public Renewables Act

- But also some real disappointments – even as State Senate moved on some very forward-looking bills as part of implementing Climate Action Council plan and CLCPA Act of 2019
- Lack of leadership at top in General Assembly – bills blocked from going to floor for vote by the Speaker
- We just have to keep working on these bills – bills introduced this year still remain live next year – so bills passed by Senate need to be taken up next time
- Knowing Assemblymember Kelles will be in Albany pushing climate and clean energy issues forward should give us hope
- TCCPI will continue to be involved in statewide NY Renews, Renewable Heat Now, and Climate Can't Wait coalitions
- Stay tuned for more emails as we move into fall about actions we can take collectively – keep in mind that Governor's executive budget is set by October