TC CPI Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative

Minutes – Friday, January 30, 2026
Video Conference
9 am to 11 am

Attending: Gerri Wiley, Ingrid Zabel, Hailley Delisle, Sheila Out, Tom Hirasuna, Danielle Eiseman, Paul Moore, Brian Eden, Susan Riley, Terry Carroll, Dan Lamb, David Bradley, Dawn Montanye, Rebecca Evans, Joe Wilson, Alice Green, Evan Kurtz, Ray Burger, Guillermo Metz, Sara Carson, Gay Nicholson, Margaret McCasland, Peter Bardaglio

Communicating with the Public about Climate Change and Public Health Risks – Danielle Eiseman
Danielle Eiseman, associate director of the Cornell Health Impacts Core in the Department of Public & Ecosystem Health at Cornell University, discussed the challenges and opportunities involved in communicating with the public about climate change and public health risks.

Overview
Danielle Eisman from Cornell discussed the challenges and opportunities in communicating climate change and public health risks, emphasizing the need for tailored messages and community engagement. She highlighted the impact of climate change on air quality and health, citing local examples like the Canadian wildfires.

Danielle's Background and Research Focus
- Danielle outlined her background in communication and risk and crisis communication.
- She mentioned her work in workforce development, communication training, and strategic partnerships.
- Danielle's research focuses on climate change communication and community engagement.
- She highlighted her work on extreme heat, flooding, vector-borne diseases, and emergency management.

Public Health and Climate Change
- Danielle defined public health as the prevention, detection, and management of human health at the community and environmental levels.
- The primary goal is to promote, restore, or maintain health, while reducing burden on the health care system. focusing on environmental and community levels of human health.
- She discussed the challenges climate change posed to public health, including extreme weather events, changes in air quality, increases in diseases, and disrupted supply chains.
- Danielle emphasized the mental health stress caused by climate change and the interconnected impacts on health.

Challenges in Communicating Climate Change and Public Health
- Danielle explained the difficulty in communicating climate change risks to the public.
- She discussed the use of jargon and the lack of public involvement in decision-making processes.
- Danielle mentioned the success of European climate assemblies in involving the public in policy development.
- She underscored the need for tailored messages to specific audiences to improve communication effectiveness.

Segmentation and Communication Strategies
- Danielle introduced the concept of segmentation in communication to target specific audiences.
- She discussed the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and their annual survey.
- The survey identifies six segments of the American public based on their attitudes towards climate change: alarmed, concerned, cautious, disengaged, doubtful, and dismissive
- Danielle emphasized the importance of focusing on impacts that resonate with different groups.

Effective Communication Techniques
- Danielle shared examples of successful campaigns that use humor, storytelling, and games to engage the public.
- She discussed the importance of making messages credible, personal, and actionable.
- Danielle highlighted the role of social modeling and nudging in encouraging behavior change.
- She mentioned the need for systems and infrastructure to support effective communication.

Local Examples and Community Engagement
- Danielle provided examples of local initiatives in New Lebanon and Dryden to address climate change.
- She discussed the importance of engaging young people and community partners in climate action.
- Danielle emphasized the need for comprehensive plans and zoning codes to support climate-smart communities.
- She highlighted the success of local efforts in securing grants and implementing energy efficiency programs.

The Three Main Takeaways
- Communication alone won't lead to change; the systems and structures need to be in place.
- Focus on impacts that are personally relevant to your audience, as opposed to climate.
- Know and understand your audience, what is the 'so what' from their perspective? There are lots of ways to connect to the so what from their perspective.

TeraWulf and the Issue of Data Centers – Gay Nicholson
*Gay Nicholson, the president of Sustainable Finger Lakes provided an overview of the
TeraWulf controversy in Lansing and the larger issue of data centers and their contribution to
greenhouse gas emissions as well as other threats they pose to the environment.*

Overview
Gay Nicholson addressed the proposed 400-megawatt AI data center in Lansing, detailing the
legal and community opposition efforts, including a recent filing of the Article 78 lawsuit. The
discussion also covered the broader impacts of data centers on energy demand and the
environment, with calls for statewide legislation and community resilience. The fossil fuel
industry's campaign to roll back New York's renewable energy program was also noted. The
group emphasized the need for better public engagement in decision-making and planning
processes.

Introduction and Data Center Discussion
- Gay introduced the topic of data centers and their impact on energy demand and the
  environment.
- She provided a timeline of events leading to the proposal for a 400-megawatt AI
  hyperscale data center in Lansing.
- Gay discussed the formation of a local group, Finger Lakes Strong, to oppose the data
  center.
- She highlighted the involvement of various organizations and individuals in the
  opposition effort.

Legal and Political Challenges
- Gay outlined the legal challenges faced in opposing the data center, including the
  appeal to the Zoning Board of Appeals.
- She discussed the filing of an article 78 to appeal the Zoning Board's decision.
- Gay emphasized the importance of community support and the role of state and local
  elected officials.
- She highlighted the need for ongoing education and advocacy to prevent similar
  proposals in other communities.

Community Support and Future Plans
- Gay mentioned the formation of the New York State Fight Data Centers Alliance.
- She discusses the importance of statewide legislation to address the impacts of data
  centers.
- Gay highlighted the need for ongoing communication and education to keep the issue
  salient.
- She emphasized the role of young people and community partners in sustaining the
  opposition effort.
- Peter noted the importance of the multi-generational dimension in strengthening the
  network involved in pushing back on the data center.

Community Resilience and Resistance
- Gay observed that food sovereignty, local food systems, waste reduction, and circular
  economy are critical elements in strengthening local communities.

- She emphasized the need for collective ownership of essentials like food, energy, shelter, healthcare, and education in resisting growing authoritarianism.
- Peter pointed to the inspiring actions in Minneapolis-St. Paul to protect immigrant families from ICE raids as providing a model of self-organization for neighborhoods and communities.
- Gay criticized the right-wing framing of resistance as suspicious conspiracy.
- Brian agreed, commenting on the long-standing use of "outside agitators" to undermine public actions.

Fossil Fuel Industry's Campaign Against Renewables
- Brian drew attention to the fossil fuel industry's effort to roll back the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) and suspend the state's renewable energy program.
- New Yorkers for Affordable Energy and the US New York Propane Gas Association blame renewables for rising electricity costs.
- Brian called for a statewide effort to push back against the fossil fuel industry's campaign to mislead the public.
- The group discussed the impact of misinformation and the need for public engagement to counteract it.
- Peter emphasized the need for public involvement in commenting and then the public hearings to ensure thorough debate and decision-making.

The TeraWulf Initiative and Public Involvement
- Gay discussed the TeraWulf project and the lengthy process involved with the decision making process.
- When do we need to go to Syracuse to have a press conference and a demonstration outside the DEC?
- She emphasized the importance of public involvement in the planning board process to ensure all facts are considered.