

Minutes of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force Meeting August 1, 2025

The August 1st meeting of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

Attendees:

In Person: Ilona Campo, Joseph Bellucci, Gary Redlon, Barbara Barosa, Savannah Usher, Maya Rosner (Intern), Victoria DiLonardo, Shanna Siegel

Microsoft Teams: Eleanor Peck, Jennifer Caruso

1. Review: April Meeting Minutes

- No comments, questions, or concerns
- **Recap:** Discussed Climate Solutions Summit from March 2025, waste stream tours, HVRC's Climate Action Cohort, CCE's climate battery greenhouse, previous events (Earth Day/Land Trust Gala), awards from the County Exec./NYS Assembly/US Congress, and Kent's Natural Resource Inventory/Biodiversity Assessment with HVRC grant.

2. Discussion: Recent Activities

- The Putnam On-Demand Microtransit service started May 12th, 2025. We are seeing nearly quadruple the ridership compared to the fixed route that the service replaced. The service is more expensive to run, however, some of those costs are offset from NYS transportation funds (STOA).
- Maybrook Bikeway II Phase A (Bridge #5) construction is underway and is expected to be completed by Fall 2025. The bridge is located behind Lia Honda in Brewster and is considered the "missing link" for that portion of the bikeway.
- **NYSFOLA Lake Conference takeaways:** The event was hosted by CCE with support from the County's S&WCD on June 13th, 2025. The stormwater management presentation gave a good reminder that what you often don't see in stormwater is oil/grease, fertilizer, pesticides, road salt, nitrogen & phosphorus, bacteria, etc. The northeast has seen a 70% increase in heavy rainfall since 1958. There is a fine/blurry line between wastewater and stormwater which is often overlooked. Lake communities frequently run community engagement/education days. Barbara mentioned one of her takeaways was that within the lake community that the event took place, China Pond, as part of their mandatory HOA fees for roughly 200-300 homes, they pay for septic pump-outs on a three year basis. Shanna said that three years is the minimum requirement and that the residents typically pump their systems out more frequently than that. She also mentioned that lake communities often apply for grants in order for people to upgrade their systems. Ilona presented the [DEC's Environmental Resource Mapper](#) as a useful resource. The presentation on harmful algal blooms (HABs) clarified that blue-green algae is cyanobacteria that can take two forms – unicellular (pea shaped) and benthic (cotton candy shaped). HABs have been around for some 3.5 million years but increased nutrient pollution has led to a massive increase nationwide. The last presentation on global lake trends made a point that climate change is making lakes less blue and more brown-green in color.
- CCE was awarded the Community Reforestation (CoRe) grant in the amount of \$300k over the course of five years for a 15 year project life. The project will partner with the County as the project location is at Tilly Foster Farm and will consist of restoring one acre of forest into a biodiverse, native species forest with a deer enclosure fence as precaution. Data will be collected by veterans over the course of the 15 year observation period.
- Ilona set up and manned a table for the PC Climate Smart program at the Health Department's tent for the annual County Fair on July 26th and 27th at Veterans' Memorial Park. Overall, the feedback was positive and there was great turnout even with the Sunday rain. Attendees were

very interested to learn about the resources that the County has available, particularly within the Health Dept. Unsurprisingly, the majority of attendees were unfamiliar with the County's CS program, but they were appreciative of the information provided and the native seed packs were a hit.

- Barbara, Neal, and Ilona met with the Hudson River Estuary Program (HREP) who gave an overview of the applicable resources they have available and expressed interest in collaborating with the County on future projects. They have a new [funding finder](#) that is very useful in narrowing down available grant programs. They offer assistance in culvert assessments, dam removals, stream buffers, etc. Barbara also mentioned that they offered staff assistance for dam removal projects (Scott Cuppett, Watershed Coordinator) who will follow up to set up a meeting in September. HREP also mentioned that Cold Spring will be working on a Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan with funding from HREP. Lastly, HREP offers presentations and technical assistance to interested municipalities.
- Putnam County, through the CS program, will work with the Hudson Valley Regional Council (HVRC) to develop a Community Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CCARP) at no cost. HVRC will take the lead in drafting the Plan and Putnam County will take on the public engagement/community outreach component of it as well as providing input. The Plan will pull a lot of material from the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan (maintained by the Bureau of Emergency Services) which is due for an update by June 2026. The Plan will get us points for three CS actions and the County Executive is already in support. The Resolution to partner with HVRC in drafting the Plan will go for full legislative approval in September.

3. **Discussion: Future Actions/Partnerships**

- We will be adding an organics management component to the newly updated Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) which Savannah is currently working on. More discussion to follow in the subsequent Composting Meeting.
- In order to get points for the Water Smart Landscaping CS action item, the Planning Dept. will be partnering with CCE and the Parks Dept. to add some native plants around the County's Transit Facility. Ilona will follow up again soon.
- We have received final design plans for the Transit Facility solar array project. There were some adjustments to the original project scope which allow for more panels and a slightly bigger output. Joe asked if we wanted to explore incorporating the system into SolarEdge (the monitoring software), the plan is yes. We have our own SolarEdge account for the other county arrays, but Ameresco may be the account admin. Ilona now has access in SolarEdge to see how much output each individual module is producing, she will work on getting Gary the same access as well.
- Barbara asked Gary for an update on the Transit Facility's EV charging station. We can pay for engineering design and then purchase the materials through OGS contracts. The plan is to use the same company, CT Male, for design. The TF EV charger project will likely run concurrently as the Donald B. Smith Gov't Campus (DBS) solar carport project, both of which will open up the gateway to converting the County's fleet to EVs. MEP funding will cover the Transit Facility's project and DASNY funds will cover the solar carport project at DBS.
- Gary made a valid point that it is often easier and cheaper to opt for new construction projects in lieu of building retrofits.
- Ilona is now participating in and attending monthly NYS Meeting of Sustainability Staff (MOSS) meetings which is a platform for statewide municipal sustainability/environmental staff to get together and discuss best practices, events, programs, etc. Staff concluded that the NYSEDA CEC process is less daunting than the DEC CSC program as there are fewer, more achievable high-impact action items. Senator Hareckham attended the first meeting and gave some reoccurring advice to substitute sustainability language with key words like "air quality"

and “public health” because the public tends to be more receptive to that language. He also mentioned that there are PFAS grants available for municipalities that get their water from reservoirs. Shanna suggested having another meeting about PFAS and what the County’s role can be because the Health Department’s response can be challenging as everything typically falls to the State which can understandably confuse and concern residents. It was mentioned that Cold Spring and Carmel could potentially benefit from these grants. 35% of DEC funding comes from congressional (federal) appropriations which is something to keep in mind for future availability. Reoccurring funding is also available for failing septic systems, but again, we are restricted in response as a county. Shanna added that this helps drive the conversation around PFAS in that even if you implement removal systems and filters, it will still be hard to escape in our everyday lives as a plastic centered society which brings education to the forefront.

4. **Discussion: Other Business/Comments**

- Ilona created a listserv called PutnamClimatePartners@putnamcountyny.gov for local climate leaders within the County to share resources, best practices, local events, questions, grant opportunities, etc. If you would like access or know of other leaders to add, please contact Ilona.
- Ilona and Vicki collaborated to add the Climate and Health addition to the [CS website](#). The addition outlines the interconnectedness of health and climate change.
- Ilona discussed an NPR article she came across called [Why knowing your neighbors can be an important climate solution](#). The article covered a case study of the Earthaven Ecovillage in western North Carolina which demonstrated remarkable resilience during Hurricane Helene by relying on its design around permaculture, renewable energy backups, food self-sufficiency, and tools for rapid recovery. This highlights how strong social cohesion, neighbors knowing one another and pooling resources, serves as a vital climate-change adaptation strategy. After all, your community is typically the first to respond in the event of large scale natural disasters.
- Shanna brought up the former Disaster Preparedness Task Force (est. 2001?) which was renamed to Disaster Preparedness and Community Resilience. The DPCR committee tried to encourage participation from local municipalities and businesses so that they could get together and educate people on how to work together as a community. Shanna said they are trying to get another small group together to discuss what preparedness and recovery look like at the County level and then determining what we should presently be doing. She highlighted the importance of internal connections within county government.
- Barbara brought up the MS4 program too and the importance of maintaining storm drains even at the homeowner and business level.
- Vicki mentioned a Community Resilience Coalition that stemmed from the DPTF that was very well attended but fell off during Covid.
- Shanna will send Barbara and Ilona the invite to the Family Assistance Center Training meeting which was created to discuss what the County’s response would look like in terms of long and short-term recovery to emergency events.
- CCE guided hikes series continues at Sugarloaf Hill Trail on August 16th, at the Mount Nimham Fire Tower trail on Sept. 20th, and finally at the Dennytown region of Fahnestock State Park on October 18th. Sign-ups are available on CCE’s [website](#).
- Sustainable Putnam has another [Repair Café](#) scheduled for September 13th in Mahopac.

Meeting adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

Next Meeting Tentatively Scheduled for Fall 2025.