

City of Plattsburgh Climate Task Force

Minutes of May 26, 2022 Meeting

Location: City Hall and via Zoom

Task Force members in attendance: Rachelle Armstrong-Coordinator, City Councilor Elizabeth Gibbs-Ward 3, City Councilor Jennifer Tallon-Ward 4, Loretta Rietsema, Dr. Curt Gervich, Ph.D. (via Zoom), Susan Kelley, Maxwell Schaefer, Susan Levaque, Diana Wardell; Guest presenter, Erin Griffin-Climate Smart Communities Coordinator for the North Country. Several members of the public were in attendance. Absent were: Emma Stewart, Jacob Avery, Kristine Lutters, Tom Cosgro.

1. **Welcome and introductions:** R. Armstrong called the meeting to order at 3:34p.m. Task Force members introduced themselves. R. Armstrong highlighted results of an online survey of task force members previously given after reviewing material from both the NYS DEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Program and the NYSERDA Clean Energy Communities (CEC) program. Questions on the survey included:
 - a. What comes to mind when thinking about Plattsburgh's strongest assets?
 - b. What special skills, abilities and other strengths do you bring to the Task Force?
 - c. What Climate Smart Community (CSC) action speaks to you?Many positive City assets were mentioned and Task Force members collectively offer a broad spectrum of skills to the work of building a Climate Smart Community, an action and goal that resonated with many of the members. A copy of the compiled results of the questionnaire are attached. R. Rachelle spoke about the overlap of interests and goals and was appreciative of the variety of interests and skills that could be of service to the Task Force.
2. **Review NYS Climate Smart Communities Program:** R. Armstrong introduced E. Griffin, the newly assigned Regional Coordinator for the North Country. She works for the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), based in Saranac Lake, which covers the North Country. Her role is being the point-person for the CSC Program with whatever is needed: getting the Task Force up and running, applying for using CSC grants, assisting with some of the listed actions, and to be a liaison with the State CSC Program. PowerPoint slideshow includes a map indicating registered CSC communities – Plattsburgh is registered. First level is Bronze certification which requires 120 points. Currently, the only three communities that have achieved the Bronze level in the North Country are the Town and Village of Potsdam and the Village of Saranac Lake. The next level is Silver certification which requires 300 points. E. Griffin is the Coordinator for the Village of Saranac Lake CSC Task Force and has had the experience of working with the Village to achieve Bronze certification. There are many actions that help accumulate points, the program is very flexible with just a few mandatory actions. Copy of PowerPoint will be forwarded (attached).

Review City Resolution: R. Armstrong advised that the City of Plattsburgh and its residents are relying on the Task Force to bring leadership that promotes climate mitigation and adaptation. According to the founding resolution, Task Force is to assess the feasibility and/or status of action in the CSC certification program and act as an advisory board that

collaborates with the Mayor's Office to accomplish plans, programs and activities – and hopefully, to acquire grants. The Task Force will make recommendations to the Mayor's Office that at times may require Common Council approval.

- 3. Task Force Organization:** R. Armstrong advised that the Task Force must take minutes-it is part of the responsibility as a City Task Force, and it is integral for getting credit for being a CSC Task Force - minutes of two meetings are required to be published to achieve points in the certification program. She also advised the Task Force would be well-served by having a media outreach point-person and a Timekeeper. R. Armstrong advised the Task Force already has two City Council liaisons. She also asked how the Task Force would like to make decisions: consensus, take a vote with majority rules or other method? Does the Task Force want to utilize the roles of officers?
- a. Regarding required Minutes, R. Armstrong asked if the Task Force wanted to rotate the responsibility or have one person designated as the Notetaker? E. Gibbs suggested having one person responsible for taking minutes, based on her experience. Other members voiced agreement. R. Armstrong asked for a volunteer to be the designated Notetaker. D. Wardell volunteered and was designated.
 - b. Regarding Media Outreach, R. Armstrong stated she would assume responsibility for the role and asked for a volunteer to assist with outreach work – to include press releases. Councilor E. Gibbs volunteered and was designated. E. Griffin made a suggestion based on her experience in Saranac Lake to involve local high school students with helping to get Task Force news and activities out to the public. It was a win-win in Saranac Lake, as it helped high school students learn about local government and helped with getting the message out to a wider audience (with the SLHS Green Team utilizing its Instagram account). M. Schaefer-PHS Green Team responded he would be happy to engage local high school students. L. Rietsema agreed with the use of social media to communicate with the public and she volunteered to create and maintain an Instagram account for the Task Force. R. Armstrong mentioned the City also maintains a Facebook page – which is managed by Courtney Meisenheimer-Community Engagement Coordinator (meisenheimerc@cityofplattsburgh-ny.gov) that could be helpful. R. Armstrong advised that the Task Force previously had a page on the City's Web site, which is not functioning at this time, but could and should be reactivated and utilized. D. Wardell made the suggestion that all postings first be cleared by the Media Outreach point person (R. Armstrong) and when needed, with consultation with assistant (Councilor E. Gibbs).
 - c. Regarding Liaisons to City Council, Councilor E. Gibbs advised that she and colleague, Councilor J. Tallon, as liaisons to City Council, would take responsibility for writing resolutions when such action is needed and to keep Council informed of Task Force activity.
 - d. Regarding role of Timekeeper, Susan Kelley volunteered and was designated.
 - e. Regarding decision-making, R. Armstrong feels due to the small size of the Task Force, a consensus approach should be possible. This doesn't mean a member may always agree. A member can disagree, but can live with it and assent to the will of the majority, then

consensus can be reached. S. Kelley voiced she is in favor of a consensus approach and other members were in agreement.

- 4. What Plattsburgh Has Accomplished So Far:** R. Armstrong provided a 4-page spreadsheet of CSC Actions, Requirements, Points, and Status (link to be forwarded to members). Document attached.
- a. (PE 1.2 CSC Task Force and PE 1.3 CSC Coordinator) Everything is in place to achieve the (re)start-up of the Task Force with a designated Coordinator to earn 30 points towards CSC Bronze certification.
 - b. (PE 2.1 GHG Inventory) Grant was awarded, needed to produce the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory to earn 16 points.
 - c. (PE 3.24) Clarification on Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Policy needs to include efficiency standards. City is currently eligible for 2 of the 4 points possible. If/when work is done with management of organic items-will add a point. Forest Stewardship involves paper products. City does have a section indicating purchase of recycled paper.
 - d. (PE 3.10) Fleet Efficiency Policy Inventory – needs clarification. City policy quoted the goals that EPA published, but needs a percentage target to achieve over two and five years.
 - e. (PE 3.20) Need photos to document Recycling in Government Buildings – assessing what offices are onboard.
 - f. (PE 5.9) Recycling at Public Events – City had one event, in December 2019 and had recycling available. Can possibly work this up for Mayor’s Cup. Goal is to establish recycling program in public places, parks, City beach, any place that is City property—to have recycling receptacles next to trash receptacles.
 - g. (PE 3.15 LED Street Lights) City did file for CEC accreditation and earned 12 points – for replacement of Cobra and decorative lights with LED lights. E. Griffin offered clarification between CEC - Clean Energy Communities) and CSC – Climate Smart Communities. The CEC is a State program through NYSERDA, the CSC Program is an inter-agency program run through DEC. CEC has much fewer actions and they are called “high impact” actions because they all have big reductions in greenhouse gasses. Also there is more grant funding attached to CEC actions. Plattsburgh needs only one more high impact action to get \$5000 in grant money. The two programs work together, but there is a difference. R. Armstrong did send out the CSC-CEC Crosswalk document that shows how the two programs overlap.
 - h. (PE 4.4) Check with MLD head, Bill Treacy to see if the City can get Renewable Energy Certification (credits for 2019) since the city purchases hydro-electric.
 - i. (PE 4.7) Power Purchasing Agreements need clarification-in the interest of time, update was tabled.
 - j. (PE 6.11) Alternative Fuel Infrastructure – points ready to be collected for the two charging stations newly installed at the City Beach. (Previously installed charging stations at City Hall in January 2021 – were no longer eligible in the round the current application was made.) Councilor E. Gibbs mentioned that two charging stations were installed at the Farmers Market. R. Armstrong will check with Nancy Bernstein-NYSERDA CEC Regional Coordinator to see if these are eligible for points in this round.

- k. (PE 8.6) Farmers' Market – City allows our local Farmers' Market to take place at Durkee Street lot. E. Griffin advised all V/Saranac Lake had to do was to show the park use permit. She advised all that is needed to accomplish this action is to show how the municipality supports the Farmers' Market and attach any documentation.
- l. (PE 9.4) Website on Climate Action page on City's Website needs to be re-activated to earn points.

What Is in Progress:

- a. (PE 2.5 Gov't Climate Action Plan and PE 6.1 Comprehensive Plan with Sustainability Elements) C. Gervich sits on the Comprehensive Plan Planning Committee. It is still being worked on and discussed – it's been in development these past eighteen months or so but a draft has just been released to the public. He stated the Plan is mostly focused on the Zoning Code update and Land Use issues. Although sustainability is included, it is not a major focus. E. Griffin advised that for the CSC action involves four different required criteria-that must be shown in the Comprehensive Plan and then once you have those four, there's also sub-categories and if you can show a piece of the action accomplished, there's a tiered level of points, depending on how many components you have in the plan. It's a matter of knowing the categories and searching through the document to see what's in there, what is already integrated. C. Gervich added in light of the description, the Plan definitely provides a vision of how the community wants to grow over the next ten to twenty years and recommends steps to achieve it. Although part of the vision mentions opportunities for the community to balance the "Three Es of Sustainability" he remarked there is not much about Equity and the Economic piece is mostly about business and economic development. E. Griffin asked if the Plan is open for comments. C. Gervich thought so, the Plan has not been finalized – it's still in draft version. E. Griffin stated it would be a powerful thing for the Task Force to do – to make suggestions to revise the Plan based on the CSC Program. R. Armstrong asked how the draft Plan can be accessed. C. Gervich will check the City's Website.
- b. (PE 6.1) Complete Streets Policy – Councilor E. Gibbs advised the policy passed last year on Council. R. Armstrong asked for a copy of the certified resolution and policy (worth 4 points). E. Griffin suggested that as long as the Zoning Code is being reviewed, it's a good time to consider potential actions of Smart-Growth Policy (reviewing Zoning Code and Land Use Code and ascertaining how many Smart-Growth principles show up in the Codes). Are there things missing that could be added?
- c. (PE 6.8 Green Parking Lot Policies) Part of the long-term Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). R. Armstrong advised several new parking lots installed over last few years and remarked that such a policy would have been beneficial to apply.
- d. (PE 6.10 Planning for Biking and Walking) Part of the City's long-term Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). R. Armstrong asked Councilors J. Tallon and E. Gibbs about any current plans or updates. L. Rietsema participated in several public comment sessions regarding the draft comprehensive plan. E. Griffin advised of a separate action – regarding Biking/Walking Infrastructure that involves several components has most likely already been accomplished. Components include: expand/improve bike or walking

- paths/sidewalks; improve bike parking; improve bike/pedestrian signage (sharrows would be an example); or develop a bike sharing program.
- e. (PE 6.19 Zoning to Protect Natural Areas) Part of the City's long-term Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP).
 - f. (PE 1.5 National or Regional Climate Program) E. Griffin advised this is already accomplished because of the City's participation in the Clean Energies Community program..
 - g. (PE 10.3) Demonstrate cooperation with neighboring communities and relevant agencies – will need to document by way of meeting minutes, MOUs and/or progress reports.

Reviewing what has been accomplished so far and what is in progress, R. Armstrong concluded that, once finalized and filed with the state, the City might earn 60 points, and would be half-way towards meeting its goal of Bronze Certification by the DEC-sponsored Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Program.

5. **Opportunities and Priorities**

- a. R. Armstrong emphasized there is potential for getting many actions done and opened the topic of opportunities and priorities for the Task Force.
- b. E. Griffin, while working as the Coordinator for the V/Saranac Lake CSC Task Force, shared its initial priorities: The short-term goal was to assess what had already been accomplished that would count towards certification (which took some months) and the long-term goal was to become certified.
- c. C. Gervich led the discussion and agreed there are many actions going on in the City from various parts (departments) of the City. The hope is to have the Task Force help identify some priorities, which would go into short, medium and long-range planning. He mentioned SUNY Plattsburgh has a new strategic plan and part of the plan is stronger engagement with the City of Plattsburgh and other North Country communities-especially around sustainability issues. One plan for increased engagement is placing SUNY students in local businesses and government offices as interns working on sustainability work. R. Armstrong asked how he sees that engagement in terms of short term, medium and long-range goals for the Task Force? C. Gervich replied that initially, there are short term windows of opportunity for students – students assisting the Task Force with note taking, organizing emails, communicating with SUNY staff – to access resources. C. Gervich also discussed our community's falling short in the equity space related to sustainability and described the "Three E's of Sustainability" - the Environment [Ecology], Economy, and Equity. Regarding the City's natural environment, the fact the City utilizes 100 percent renewable energy is a leading strength. Similarly, although there is always more work to do around economic development, C. Gervich added that between the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, and the City, there is satisfactory work being done in that space. However, according to C. Gervich, the community hasn't done a lot of work in the Equity space so he suggested equity be an area of some focus. L. Rietsema asked what would Equity look like? C. Gervich replied he sees three areas that could be focused on and added a fourth at the end.

- i. Firstly, C. Gervich is aware of the interest and concern by some members on the Task Force and some in the high school (PHS) and college (SUNY) communities regarding food and the food system. Parts of the City are designated as “food deserts” by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Especially now with high inflation, healthy produce is becoming more expensive. C. Gervich felt there is room for food justice work to do through food shelves, restaurants, and through the Farmers’ Market, Community Gardens, and organizations focused on composting. R. Armstrong asked more broadly about potential opportunities and a member of the public attending the meeting identified herself as Jennifer Perry, member of the not-for-profit, Compost for Good (CfG), and offered to collaborate. She currently runs the composting program for food services at SUNY Plattsburgh. She has a team of students who pick up post-consumer food waste at several of the dining halls on campus which is composted off-site then redistributed when it’s usable compost. C. Gervich stated that more work could be done with local restaurants and community gardens. He pointed out the City’s biggest employers are the hospital (CVPH), school district (PCSD), and SUNY and partnering with them would have a large impact.
- ii. Secondly, in regards to Equity, C. Gervich sees economic equity - raising middle class opportunities and moving more people to the middle class, as a potential focus. Thirty percent of area residents are designated as falling below the poverty line according to recent statistics.
- iii. Thirdly, C. Gervich stated it would be interesting to look at population, to discover who’s moving into Plattsburgh and who’s moving out of Plattsburgh and ways to increase population in a way that addresses equity. He added there are numerous small communities across America that are finding refugees and immigrants as a valuable way to increase population. Also, over time, resettling refugees turns into not only a way of increasing population, but resettlement increases diversity, brings new perspectives and new businesses to the community.
- iv. Lastly, C. Gervich added a fourth opportunity to focus on: low-income housing.

In response to C. Gervich’s discussion of Equity, E. Griffin offered an additional idea regarding equity that might tie more directly to CSC actions. Where are there bike lanes, sidewalks? Do they line up with different economic classes of neighborhoods? It would be helpful to evaluate access to natural spaces, street trees, green spaces, those things that help neighborhoods with resilience to heat (perhaps a good student project). C. Gervich replied that SUNY has done some of this data collection in small ways with various classes, but not necessarily in larger ways and perhaps not up to professional standards. He emphasized if internships were formalized, the work could be bumped up to those higher standards. S. Levaque, who works in the Plattsburgh City School District, stated the District has collected data over time and may be a resource. She advised that fifty percent of students in the City School District are classified as “homeless” because they may be living with a relative, living in transient circumstances (motels, campgrounds) or other reasons. These students qualify under federal standards as homeless because they don’t have secure homes. She added the student population at the elementary level is extremely transient (approximately 40%).

Another suggestion, made by Councilor J. Tallon, was to expand community gardens, perhaps waiving the cost of the plot for low-income gardeners. M. Schaefer agreed that community gardens should be expanded, and more land should be designated. Regarding the Bailey Avenue Community Garden, M. Schaefer commented the plots are so small as to exist more as a hobby than a potential source of food. R. Armstrong asked E. Griffin if making or expanding community gardens available to low-income residents was included in the CSC Program. E. Griffin replied there is an action, Policies for Local Food Systems, that accrues some (not many) points for community gardens. She explained there are more actions around composting and food scrap processing, and less around growing food in community gardens. C. Gervich advised that in the City of Plattsburgh, community gardens require a special use permit. There is no right to garden in any zone without a permit. This regulation presents an obstacle to establishing more community gardens.

6. Short, Medium, and Long Term Goals

- a. R. Armstrong asked if members had ideas for short-term goals and suggested the Task Force set the following goal: To follow up and tie up the loose ends involved in the “In Progress” actions (should result in approximately 63 points). Some delegation of tasks may be needed (doing research, asking pertinent questions).
- b. The Task Force (individual members or as a group) should make comments as appropriate to the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program – posted on the City Website: <https://www.cityofplattsburgh-ny.gov/index.php/department/community-development/lwrp-comprehensive-plan-zoning-update>, and to make pertinent comments on the draft Comprehensive Plan which is not available on the public Website at this time, but which C. Gervich has access to.
- c. L. Rietsema advised she just created an Instagram account for the Task Force: under the name of “plattcsc” and searchable by Plattsburgh Climate Smart Community (worth 3 points).
- d. E. Griffin suggested that the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory and the Climate Action Plan be a goal because a grant (\$30,000) was received in 2020 to pay consultant fees for these actions. E. Griffin offered to assist in finding contractors. Councilor E. Gibbs advised the City has a company under City contract to write grants and wondered if they might be used to write grants if needed. R. Armstrong asked how long a consultant would need to accomplish these items. E. Griffin will inquire. C. Gervich stated that GHG Inventories are not something the college has done, however, there is a new Director of Facilities that does have GHG Inventory experience and there are students interested in learning how to inventory GHG. The college could also assist with the Climate Action Plan. He recommended the City look first to SUNY Plattsburgh and to the high school to do the work together rather than outsourcing the GHG Inventory. C. Gervich proposed as much work as we can accomplish locally, with local community members doing the work together, is valuable. Due to time running short to weigh advantages and disadvantages of both approaches, R. Armstrong summarized that accomplishing the GHG Inventory the most expedient way versus the most community-building, inclusive way will need to be further discussed via email leading up to the next meeting.

- e. R. Armstrong proposed that the City's Climate Task Force's tentative medium-range goal was to get certified by January, 2023. Bronze certification requires 120 CSC points. E. Griffin clarified that the months of January, April, July provide three certification "windows."

7. Future Meetings

- a. R. Armstrong discussed using a poll to determine a set day and time during the fourth week of the month for the monthly Task Force meetings (input is needed from all members). L. Rietsema suggested setting just next month's meeting for now. Later afternoon was deemed best for most members and all present agreed to meet next on Wednesday, June 22, 2022 at 5:00 pm at City Hall.
- b. L. Rietsema requested that no paper be used. R. Armstrong asked if the Task Force could agree that no documents will be printed up to give out to potential attendees so as not to waste paper. All present agreed.
- c. Task Force members were thanked for their participation and the meeting was adjourned by R. Armstrong at 3:34 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by designated Notetaker, Diana Wardell.