

Minutes of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force Meeting October 24, 2025

The October 24th meeting of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force was called to order at 10:32 a.m.

Attendees:

In Person: Ilona Campo, Joe Bellucci, Gary Redlon, Barbara Barosa, Matt Covucci

Microsoft Teams: Mary Lambert (HVRC), Shanna Siegel, Anne Campbell, Savannah Usher, Joe Montuori, Amy Sayegh

1. **Review: August Meeting Minutes**

- No comments, questions, or concerns
- **Recap:** Discussed Putnam On-Demand successes, Maybrook Bikeway Bridge #5 updates, NYSFOLA Lake Conference takeaways, CoRe grant award to CCE, Putnam County Fair takeaways, HREP assistance available, HVRC partnership, Transit Facility native landscaping and solar projects, NYS MOSS meetings, new Climate/Health section on PC CS website, and countywide disaster preparedness.

2. **Discussion: Climate Smart Activities Updates**

- **Community Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CCARP)** development with HVRC.
 - o Will earn us a potential 25 points under three Climate Smart action including: (1) PE7: Evaluate Policies for Climate Resilience (2) PE7: Climate Vulnerability Assessment (3) PE7: Climate Adaptation Plan.
 - o Mary Lambert, Climate Action Planning Manager with HVRC, gave a presentation on the project. She went over the background of the HVRC and the assistance they provide throughout the Mid-Hudson region. HVRC has completed past resilience and adaptation projects with the CAPI-Adapt program in which Westchester County, Dutchess County, and 16 other municipalities have participated. Although not in attendance, Mary introduced her colleague, Sofie diTomasso, who is the Climate Resilience and Adaptation Coordinator with HVRC and the point person for this project. Sofie and Mary will first evaluate current policies for climate resilience (including a Vision Statement component), then work on the Vulnerability Assessment, and finally, the Climate Adaptation Plan. The CCARP is comprised of these three action items and is required to be updated at least every 10 years and/or as needed (i.e. severe storm). Mary also mentioned recent [NYS Environmental Bond Act](#) funding becoming available. Lastly, Mary reviewed/clarified relevant terminology: vulnerability – determining top hazards, adaptation – the process of adjusting to climate change, resilience – coping with hazard events/patterns.
 - o Current CCARP progress: Adopted Reso. #213 of 2025, completed a draft of climate hazards, evaluated past policies for climate resilience, in the process of forming a Working Group, and beginning to initiate outreach and engagement via project announcements.
 - o Future timeline: Complete evaluation of past policies and initiate engagement and visioning in Nov. 2025, public survey in the Dec./Jan. time frame, draft plan and additional engagement in Winter/Spring 2026 (to be posted to CCARP website) and lastly adopt the CCARP in Summer 2026.
 - o Mary's project presentation will be uploaded to the CS [website](#) along with these meeting minutes.
 - o Seeking additional CCARP Working Group members from CSTF: Joe M. was solicited and is available/willing to join. Gary and Joe B. have also volunteered.
 - o Ilona asked if anyone knew of any other climate related events throughout the County. HVRC/Putnam County Planning were already planning on attending Sustainable Putnam's

Energy Fair scheduled for Oct. 30. Joe M. also mentioned that SP is considering organizing a Sustainable Home Show in which they invite contractors, community groups, residents, etc. to engage about home energy efficiency improvements in one convenient location. With a Spring 2026 time frame at the earliest, this could be a great opportunity to engage with residents about the CCARP project.

- **Native Landscaping project at the Transit Facility:** The Planning Dept. is currently coordinating with CCE and the Parks Dept./DPW to kick off this project. Once all requirements have been met, this will hopefully earn us at least three CS points towards the Water-Smart Landscaping action. We have begun mapping out the space in mind for the project and have identified native species that we'd like to plant. During internal discussions, Jen L. mentioned ordering extra seedlings of the native species when they start ordering for the upcoming Spring Seedling Sale. As far as a timeline, Parks has already begun prepping the beds (mulching, applying vinegar for Mugwort), our next step is to order the plants, then we plan to plant in late Spring to coincide with Seedling Sale and/or Earth Day. Given that our budget is less than \$5,000, Jen L. suggested looking into S&W monies (yearly Part C money in the amount of \$6,000) to fund the project, Joe B. agreed.
- **Transit Facility Solar project updates:** Gary gave a status update that we are now just waiting to go out to bid (Purchasing Dept.). Joe B. added that the bid process should take 2-2.5 months, and Gary said depending on the results, we could install as early as Winter 2025/2026.
- **Solar Carport at DBS:** Gary gave a status update that design plans are now complete. Joe B. added that this project is part of the larger comprehensive parking lot improvement project at DBS. Gary added that he has a contractor in mind, but that ideally we can piggyback off of Westchester's bid for installation. Barbara asked if there was a timeline for installation because the state released its yearly MEP (transit) funding application that she would like to apply to electric vehicles, however, we need the chargers first. Joe B. answered that once the project goes out to bid, they'll have a better idea of a timeline.
- **Vactor and Vacall Trucks:** The Planning Dept. applied to repurpose an EPA Community Grant in order to purchase four vehicles: two Vactor trucks (storm drain vacuuming), and two Vacall Street Sweeper trucks which clear leaves from stormwater drains. These vehicles will not only help us meet our MS4 Program requirements, but they will also be a community resource. Joe B. added that DPW is already getting requests from the towns to borrow the vehicles.
- **Electric Golf Carts:** DPW is in the planning stage of constructing a new storage barn at the Putnam County Golf Course (Mahopac). The new barn will feature EV/PV charging stations for the proposed electric golf cart fleet conversion (80ish carts). They are currently soliciting architectural proposals for the structure itself. Only a portion of the design phase is funded right now, Ilona will look into potential NYSERDA funding opportunities. Gary added that they will not be fast chargers, and that they are also looking to remove 48,000sqft of impervious surface at the golf course. Ilona proposed asking Eleanor, HVRC, at their upcoming meeting if there is/will be NYSERDA funding available for this type of project.

3. Discussion: Recent Webinars/Meeting Takeaways

- **PCAHV [Webinar](#) – Municipally Owned Solar:** This webinar from August 2025 gave an overview of Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) which are “programs that allow local governments to procure power on behalf of their residents, businesses, and municipal accounts from an alternative supplier while still receiving transmission and distribution service from their existing utility provider.” ([Source](#)) [Municipal Solar Partners](#) is a “nonprofit solar development firm that partners with municipalities to build municipally owned projects that maximize financial and social benefits to the community.” The webinar presenters discussed how municipal ownership generally returns financial benefits directly to the community while alternatively, private/for-profit developers often control renewables to maximize their profits. One of the presenters also mentioned that startups are starting to develop [transparent solar](#)

[panels](#) which have multiple applications. Perhaps these new solar panels or CCA are something we can consider implementing as a community.

- **PCAHV [Webinar](#) – Fire Ecology of the Northeast:** This webinar from September 2025 focused on northeast U.S. fire ecology which is characterized by humidity and lightning being the main cause of natural ignition. The presenter gave an overview about how this region in particular has seen a significant increase in wildfire activity within the last few years. There was on average eight times more land burned in Canada (Quebec region) in June 2025 alone. He also outlined historic fire management practices like the Native American's slash-and-burn technique which was often utilized to encourage less dense forests that were easier to walk through and yielded more post-burn fruit and vegetation which encouraged more grazing by native game (i.e. more hunting opportunities). When Europeans arrived during colonial times, there was an explosion of fire on the land that was mostly a result of sparks from railroads igniting vegetation. It was also around this time that pyrophobia became more widespread, which is why the European settlers were more hesitant to prescribe burns resulting in more dense forests. Climate change is also a factor in more frequent fire activity in the northeast due to an increase in droughts and heat waves. There is more of an incentive for fire management practices now because forests are getting so dense and leading to a surge in tick populations (high surface area to volume ratio) which in turn leads to a spread in infectious diseases. Some modern solutions include repeated burning in alignment with historic fire frequency and fire control surrogates such as livestock grazing, mechanical thinning (Gary added logging also helps), chipping wood, and chemical thinning. Responsible fire management can also encourage biodiversity within a region. A crucial question at the end of the webinar was "who makes the decisions to prescribe the controlled fires?" and the presenter answered that it is most often state agencies and occasionally private contractors, however, there is a huge liability factor along with a lack of resources (human and equipment).
- **CBD [Webinar](#) – Simplifying the Holidays:** This webinar from September 2025 addressed how there is 23% more household waste generated in December than any other month of the year, thus 91% of survey respondents wish the holidays were less materialistic. Ilona encouraged the group to visit the Simplifying the Holidays [website](#), and the So Kind Registry [website](#) to get ideas for less materialistic gifts. The webinar also encouraged organizing sustainable gift wrapping events in which communities secure a space for residents/neighbors to wrap gifts using recycled/upcycled materials like burlap, ribbons, extra fabric, etc. Other gift alternative ideas included book swaps, swapping seedlings/pollinator seed mixes, gifts of experience, gifts of time, gifts of charitable donations, etc. Keep these in mind for the upcoming holiday season!
- **PCAHV [Webinar](#) – The Ecological Benefits of Natural Burial:** Presented by Suzanne Kelly, a green burial advocate and pioneer of the [Natural Burial Ground at the Town of Rhinebeck Cemetery](#), this webinar gave a brief overview of the green burial process. Natural, or green, burial is a way of caring for the dead that promotes the natural decomposition of the body with minimal environmental impact and without the use of embalming, modern caskets, burial vaults, etc. Barbara questioned whether this was legal in NY, Ilona clarified that yes, legislation was recently passed which legalized human composting and traditional green burials in NY. The [Green Burial Council](#) is a nonprofit environmental certification and education organization that sets standards for natural burial in North America. Suzanne added, and another participant verified, that green burial plots can be hard to implement as there are often land resource/use concerns from agencies such as land trusts. The relatively new movement started in 1998 and abides by the Green Burial Council's standards which are based off of a three tiered system – hybrid, natural, and conservation (20+ acres). Natural burials often entail unembalmed bodies being wrapped in shrouds or other compostable materials and a more hands-on participation process for the families/loved ones. There are also different costs structures associated with

green burials. For example, the Town of Rhinebeck offers fee structures for town residents, county residents, and outsiders. Green burials also tend to be a more cost effective alternative to traditional burials. Ilona suggested that if anyone is interested in learning more, to check out the webinar link and/or read Suzanne Kelly's book [Greening Death](#).

- **Most recent NY MOSS meeting:** September's Meeting of Sustainability Staff (MOSS) was structured as more of an open discussion about municipally installed EV chargers. Statewide municipal leaders talked about their varying experiences like the preference of hourly vs kW hour rates, utility pole mounted curbside charging, different fee structures, what companies they do/do not recommend etc. The core concept of these meetings is to be able to use other municipalities as models and ask for their recommendations/feedback. Ilona reiterated that other municipalities can be a practical tools when it comes time for Putnam County to explore more EV options. Westchester County may be particularly good to consult with.

4. Discussion: Other Business / Comments

- **Sustainable Putnam's upcoming events:**
 - o Electric House Party: Oct. 26, 2pm, at Joe's house!
 - o Home Energy Fair: Oct. 30, 4:30-6:30pm, Brewster Public Library
 - o Green Drinks: Nov. 5, 5:30-7:30, Panchos & Gringos (Putnam Valley)
 - o Kent Repair Café: Nov. 16, 12-3pm, Arts on the Lake
 - o Mahopac Repair Café: Dec. 13, 10:30-1:30, Mahopac Middle School
 - o Winter Solstice Celebration: Dec. 13, 4-6pm, Tompkins Corners Cultural Center
- **NPR Episode – [How AI Impacts the Environment](#):** This 20 minute episode explores the reasons behind the sudden surge in demand for AI. The speaker explains that an international "AI arms race" is underway, with the United States striving to keep pace with China. One of the most controversial aspects of this rapid growth is the dramatic increase in energy requirements. AI began booming around 2017 and has expanded exponentially in recent years. For example, Meta is planning a data center comparable in size to New York City, one that could consume more energy than an entire city and would need to operate continuously. Gary added a point about nuclear energy sources, noting their potential relevance as energy demands rise. The central question raised by the episode is how society will power these massive data centers. The speaker summarized that the overarching rationale for pursuing AI is the belief that, if developed effectively, it could help address climate change. However, they also cited case studies showing that coal plants previously slated for decommissioning are being revived to meet the growing energy needs of data centers. Gary also emphasized another significant concern: cooling systems. He referenced a case where liquid helium is used to cool a facility, posing considerable safety risks because helium can expand to 700 times its volume—essentially creating an explosive hazard. The episode further highlighted how major tech companies sometimes use alternative names to avoid public scrutiny or bypass local consent requirements. While many data centers were initially developed in northern Virginia, expansions are now moving into states with substantial fossil-fuel-based energy capacity, such as Ohio and Texas. Finally, the episode noted that as industries feel pressure to keep up with AI trends, many are justifying increased energy consumption by pointing to gains in efficiency. Ilona closed with a reminder to remain mindful of the energy implications the next time you perform an AI-powered search.
- **NPR Special Series – [Hurricane Katrina 20 Years Later](#):** In recognition of Hurricane Katrina's 20th anniversary, Ilona encouraged the Task Force to watch the Hulu documentary *Hurricane Katrina: Race Against Time*, which offers detailed insight into how the storm's aftermath became such a catastrophic event. She noted that although severe flooding and levee failures had been predicted decades earlier, residents were not instructed to evacuate until the morning the storm made landfall. The Army Corps of Engineers had also failed to fully account for the structural vulnerabilities the city could face during an extreme weather event. Ilona

urged Task Force members to either watch the documentary or explore more of NPR's Special Series for additional context. Many of the articles feature firsthand accounts from displaced residents who, even 20 years later, are still recovering. The dire conditions of makeshift emergency shelters, like the Superdome, became places of extreme discomfort and suffering (overflowing toilets, lack of access to clean water, food, showers, overcrowding, heightened tension, etc.). Both the Special Series and the documentary emphasized how local, state, and federal agencies struggled to coordinate preparedness, respond quickly, and deliver effective assistance. Ilona concluded by noting that, as a Climate Smart Task Force and as community leaders, we have an opportunity to lead by example should another natural disaster strike our communities. This underscores the importance of climate adaptation and emergency preparedness at the local level—whether in recent events like Texas' 2025 flooding or past disasters such as Katrina—so that we can mitigate impacts wherever possible.

- **Southeast Public Hearing:** *See [news article](#)* Joe M. reported that he spoke at the Town of Southeast's public hearing in September regarding their proposed solar legislation. He noted the irony of the town considering limits on utility-scale solar projects even though one such project currently under construction will be grandfathered in. At the same time, he pointed out that there is no prohibition on data centers, despite the presence of a [large data center](#) on Pugsley Road near Tilly Foster Farm—one that significantly dwarfs both the farm and the nearby Home Depot shopping center. Joe emphasized that one of the town's stated reasons for restricting solar development is to prevent clear-cutting, yet the land for the data center was itself clear-cut. Ilona thanked him for raising this issue and mentioned that she had also seen the related newspaper article. As Joe suggested in that article, agrivoltaics could be a strong alternative approach. Gary added a comment noting that capping landfills and using solar carports are additional strategies worth considering.
- Ilona and Savannah will work together to organize another Composting Task Force meeting soon.

Next meeting tentatively scheduled for the end of January 2026.

Meeting adjourned at 11:23 a.m.