

Minutes of the Putnam County Climate Smart Task Force Meeting April 12, 2024

The April 2024 meeting of the Putnam County Climate Smart task force was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

Members Present

In Person: Ilona Campo, Barbara Barosa, Neal Tomann, Jennifer Caruso, Joe Bellucci, Joe Montuori, Gary Redlon

Microsoft Teams: Amy Sayegh, Anne Campbell, Eleanor Peck, Max Garfinkle

1. **Review of February Meeting Minutes**

No comments

2. **Review Final Climate Smart Application**

- Putnam's final application was submitted on 3/5/24.
- Ilona presented the final application on the Climate Smart portal. We are requesting a total of 174 points (120 needed for bronze), 3 priority items, and 9/12 pledge elements.
- Eleanor informed Ilona that they do a team based review (a combo of 7 different agencies).
- Will get applicant notification by May 24 at the latest.
- Kent submitted for CS certification this round.

3. **Discussion: Website Updates**

- Ilona did an overhaul of the current website information expanding on what Lauri Taylor previously included.
- New sections include: About, CS Actions, Ongoing Projects, What Can You Do?, Our Partners, NRIs, EV Charging Station Locator.
- Most CS priority items that were submitted as part of Putnam's application are listed under the CS Actions tab for public viewing.
- Ilona noted that if any county employees know of other ongoing energy/climate-related projects, please let her know and she will include those.
- Next [HHWD](#) is May 4th.
- Barbara mentioned that there is a statewide brush burning ban in effect from March 16 through May 14. Anne concurred that they do this every year at this time as high winds and organic material from last year has dried out.
- Ilona noted that if anybody had anything else to add to the What You Can Do section, please let her know.
- Anne mentioned that Sustainable Putnam has a great website as well, Ilona concurred that she included links to their site where applicable.
- Barbara suggested adding the towns to the Our Partners tab (Philipstown and Kent primarily). Joe suggested adding Friends of the great Swamp (FROGS) and the Putnam County Land Trust. Ilona suggested adding the East of Hudson Watershed.
- Ilona will update the website to include Kent's final NRI, the updated version is included on Kent's Conservation Advisory Committee webpage.
- Anne made a comment about coordinating with the towns, for example she didn't know that the Kent Town Hall and Library were designated cooling centers. There's a lot we can learn by talking to one another.
- **Action:** Ilona will work with Brian (IT) to develop a "news reel" of sorts to include on the updated PCCS website. Ilona will include Sustainable Putnam's events as well as other environmental events on the town and county scale.

4. Discussion: Community Solar Campaign

- Joe M. gave a brief explanation about Community Solar Campaigns. Residents are encouraged to enroll in a Community Solar program (different than an ESCO other than the utility) that allows the residents to partner with solar farms that have available arrays. The solar credit then appears on the monthly electric bill as a separate line item. Discounts typically range from 5-25%, mostly 10% or a few dollars per month. No downside, no fees, no charge, it's part of NYS energy policy. It encourages solar providers to produce more solar farms.
- Barabara noted that she forwarded the campaign information over to the Law Dept. and Risk Management who are currently reviewing.
- Eleanor noted that she has worked with other counties that have been wary of working with private businesses. A Community Solar Campaign can be problematic in terms of procurement; however, it is possible to run a vendor neutral campaign. Specifically, NYSEG and [Central Hudson](#) (CH is more user friendly) both have pages that help folks sign up directly to Community Solar. Eleanor suggested that the County point interested residents directly towards utility provider websites or choose the Sustainable Putnam route.
- Anne asked Eleanor how many vendors are available for Putnam County at this time as Kent has previously had problems with capacity. Eleanor responded that the market can be tricky, the vendors are very willing to partner when they have space, but they try and fill as fast as possible (another good reason to make it vendor neutral campaign). Kent was apprehensive about choosing one provider for this reason. There should be a couple openings at any given time within the NYSEG territory. Joe M. mentioned the [EnergySage](#) website (a third-party brokering company) which shows all the open arrays within the utility territory at any given time. Joe also noted that there is often customer confusion with these campaigns, he has previously spent hours explaining the benefits to interested residents, as such, EnergySage may prevent this issue going forward.
- Ilona asked Eleanor if there is an instance where the demand is greater than the supply for available solar farms, yes you can be added to a waitlist. Spaces come and go all the time, however, sometimes the companies sell all their capacity at once (to NYSERDA for instance). Anne said she got about 50 people enrolled for Kent's first Community Solar campaign, but it took them a long time to connect to an available farm.
- Barbara asked if there was a minimum number of enrollees to qualify for the program. Yes, 25min 250max for large municipalities. Eleanor also noted that there are grants associated with the campaign's tiers/number of enrollees. 25 enrollees = \$15,000 grant. Ilona asked how long it would realistically take to get to that number, Eleanor responded that it varies depending on capacity. Anne said it did not take long to get 50 in Kent their first time. Joe added that the more publicity the better. Putnam Valley got 90 sign ups in just a few weeks and signed up 15-20 municipal accounts (Kent did the same).
- Eleanor added that anybody who signs up for another town's campaign can also count towards the County's as they're all municipal residents. You can essentially double dip so long as **both municipalities have active campaigns**. Again, she highly suggested promoting a vendor neutral campaign. Anne also noted that when a municipality signs up, that's considered a high-impact item. **All sign ups must be during an active campaign**. Anne mentioned coordinating publicity at a countywide level, i.e. promoting links to the utility providers websites rather than Sustainable Putnam's. If PowerMarket runs out of capacity, Sustainable Putnam will have to go out to bid again.
- The ultimate approach may be vendor neutral. **You cannot start counting sign-ups until after a scoping document is approved (1-2 week turnaround time)**.
- Side note: Kent can count new sign ups from 6/1/23 onwards.
- Anne asked Joe M. if he could explain how to identify savings on the utility bills. Joe noted that NYSEG's verbiage is terrible, on their bills community solar credits are identified as a CDG (distributed generation) Stack Rate. This verbiage can be a misleading drawback for new

enrollees (something to keep in mind). Greg questioned whether he could sign up for community solar if he already has panels installed on his roof, essentially no that would be double dipping.

- Barbara asked how the County should enroll its municipal accounts, Joe M. answered that every building that has a meter would need a separate account/subscription.
- Joe M. noted that they can't change the discount rate either, it's 10% for the life of the solar farm but the amount will change with the current kWh rate (peak vs off-peak etc.). Joe added that there is no penalty to pull out of the program, but to keep in mind that it can take around 60 days to enroll/pull out.
- Again, this is part of NYSERDA's CEC program, a less intensive program than the NYS CSC program but a greater focus on clean energy projects and increased opportunities for grants. They award stars (1-5) as opposed to bronze or silver status.
- Ilona mentioned that the County is Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) certified, no one knows for sure, but this may have been something Lauri did back in 2020, this counts towards CEC points/grants.
- **Action:** The County will internally discuss a vendor neutral option for a Community Solar Campaign, then proceed with the scoping document if feasible.

5. Other Business / Comments

- Ilona presented Sustainable Putnam's list of upcoming events. PCCS and S&W got invited to the Earth Day Fair at Boscobel, however, the County does not have anything to promote at this time. Joe M. will be attending the event on behalf of SP. They will be conducting a mini repair café, providing free residential home energy consultations, and promoting SP's programs concurrently with the farmer's market.
- Later during Earth Week, Joe M. will be conducting walk-in clean energy clinics at the Mahopac Library.
- Anne mentioned that Kent will also be hosting a town clean up day on 4/20/24. Interested residents can pick up supplies at the Police Dept. after 9am. Flyer/press release to follow.
- Ilona will include Kent's, Philipstown's, and Sustainable Putnam events on the County's website.
- Ilona is interested in restarting a composting program. The Health Dept. had composting bins for the departments years ago. How can we start this at a municipal level?
- Anne suggested partnering with Joe M. and maybe coordinating a curb side pickup program. Philipstown's drop off program may be a good model to follow as a pilot. Anne said there is typically push back about vermin, odors, staffing, space, etc. A countywide process would most likely consist of community drop off at a central location, then procuring a carting company to transfer the organic material to an out-of-county facility. Joe mentioned that Philipstown selected a carting company and signed a \$10,000/year contract. Philipstown also sells [starter kits](#) for \$20 which are required to participate in the town's food scrap recycling. The kits are available at the Philipstown Recycling Center Office.
- Barbara mentioned that Parks Dept. may have sold compost bins years ago.
- Anne mentioned that she got a compost bin from the Health Dept. years ago.
- **Action:** Ilona will reach out to Shawn and Chris Ruthven to see if their departments still offer bins to residents.
- **Action:** Explore on a municipal level first then spread countywide depending on success.

Meeting adjourned at 10:50 AM

