

# Minutes of the Putnam County Composting Task Force Meeting

## January 20, 2026

The seventh meeting of the Putnam County Composting Task Force was called to order at 11:01 a.m.

### Members Present

**In Person:** Ilona Campo, Savannah Usher, Shanna Siegel

**Teams:** Jen Lerner, Joe Montuori, Jean Bonhotal (NYCORE), Jesse Kerns (NYCORE)

### 1. **Review: August Meeting Minutes**

- No comments, questions, or concerns.  
**Recap:** The August meeting included discussion of a potential weigh-and-sort program with Stony Brook and possibly Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). Stony Brook offers a business waste audit, which could be incorporated into a joint educational campaign. The group discussed whether Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or Requests for Quotes (RFQs) would be necessary for weigh-and-sort activities if data collection is provided at no cost. The importance of clearly distinguishing terminology related to composting versus food scrap recycling was emphasized. DEC/DEP requirements and limitations were discussed, particularly those related to SEQRA. Barbara and Chris are currently working with the Law Department and WAC to amend the WAC easement. Jean noted she was not aware of any related updates but has received a request from WAC related to the East of Hudson Watershed (EOH) and will follow up.
- Jean suggested that SEQRA may not be required if the land is owned by the County. Ilona questioned whether SEQRA would still apply if the proposed site is the five acres behind the hay field at TFF outside of the WAC easement. Savannah shared feedback received from DEP regarding the potential siting of a composting facility, noting that new or modified solid waste management facilities within 300 feet of a watercourse or NYS-regulated wetland, or within 500 feet of a reservoir or related waterbody, require DEP review and approval of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). Due to the site's proximity to a stream leading to the reservoir, a SWPPP may be triggered. Savannah added that a SEQRA review would still be required prior to applying for facility registration, with the goal of completing registration before permitting. Ilona noted that in that case, SEQRA would likely need to be initiated or completed prior to applying for funding. In response to Jean's question about responsibility for the SEQRA process, Ilona clarified that she and Barbara would serve as the primary points of contact.

### 2. **Open Discussion:**

- **Review Planning Documents:** Ilona shared the Compost Facility Work Plan developed in collaboration with Savannah. There were no comments or questions. It was noted that during the August 2025 meeting, the group discussed 2026 as a year focused on planning, funding, and study applications, with 2027 targeted for the start of organics management implementation. Savannah confirmed that this timeline aligns with the phases outlined in the Local Solid Waste Management Plan (LSWMP). Savannah explained that full implementation of planning, data collection, major decision-making, and application review is expected to be completed by Fall 2026, allowing the project to move into Phase 2 at that time. The LSWMP has not yet been adopted and may not receive DEC approval until July 2026.

- The plan is to implement organics management over a five-year timeframe, with full implementation anticipated by 2030 across three phases, which Savannah will share. Jean asked whether the timeline could be accelerated. Savannah advised against moving faster, noting that while the County will not mandate organics management programs (as this is not yet required by the State), individual towns and municipalities are free to initiate their own efforts. Examples include existing programs in Putnam Valley and Philipstown.
- Joe shared that Putnam Valley is moving forward with a volunteer-led community composting drop-off program and is also piloting interim projects, such as food scrap drop-off at the [PV Grange](#) for transport to a local farm for animal feed. He added that schools are beginning to participate by collecting uneaten food for redistribution. Joe noted that he is not aware of similar efforts currently underway in Carmel, though there is interest in forming a local group in 2026.
- Savannah stated that from the County's perspective, there are plans to meet with town supervisors and other stakeholders to help promote and support town-level programs. Encouraging municipalities to implement their own programs would allow the County to focus on the feasibility and development of a centralized facility.
- Ilona clarified that the intent is to develop tandem programs, with towns and villages able to scale initiatives to their needs while the County concentrates on facility creation and feasibility. For context, Ilona noted that the LSWMP was released for public comment in December and has since been submitted to DEC, with approval anticipated by July.
- **Identify Focus Group:** It was noted that Putnam Valley and Philipstown already have established working groups. Joe shared that Kent's Climate Smart Task Force (CSTF) has discussed food scrap collection and is in the process of completing a land transfer or trade. Once finalized, the Town Council has agreed to use the site as a food scrap drop-off location. Ilona asked Joe to share any relevant contacts; Joe identified Anne Campbell, who also serves on the PC CSTF.
- Savannah emphasized the importance of including a diversity of perspectives in the focus group, noting that for every environmentally engaged participant, there should be representation from individuals who may be less supportive or less familiar with the benefits of organics management. Jean agreed, adding that all viewpoints are important. Shanna noted that participation from less environmentally engaged individuals may require incentives. Savannah suggested promotional items or equipment as possible options, though it is unclear how these could be funded through a DEC grant.
- Savannah encouraged the Task Force to suggest additional discussion topics that could be valuable for the focus group. Joe referenced a [survey](#) developed by Sustainable Putnam (SP), which he previously shared with Savannah. Jen added that CCE also conducted a [survey](#) in approximately 2024 to identify barriers to participation and said she would share the link. Ilona encouraged members to share any relevant resources by replying to the meeting invitation email.
- The group expressed interest in convening the focus group (ideally within the next 60 days ) prior to a presentation to the County Executive. Savannah added that town supervisors could also be included in the focus group. Jean asked whether a broader public meeting or roundtable discussion should be held to capture both supportive and opposing viewpoints. Shanna advised that while public forums are important, their timing is critical. She recommended focusing first on smaller, targeted focus groups that can be publicly promoted and require registration, rather than hosting a large public forum. Based on experience with other socially sensitive topics, she emphasized the need for robust education and outreach prior to broader public engagement. Savannah added that during the LSWMP public comment period, feedback was received only from environmentally focused individuals, and no opposition was expressed, limiting the range of perspectives. Shanna noted that opposition typically emerges once specific actions or locations are proposed. She suggested holding a public meeting after a formal site is selected and once CE and the Legislature are engaged. Jean supported the approach of allowing towns to operate independent programs. Savannah recommended including town representatives in the focus group, as well as meeting with them individually.

- Jen added that one goal of the focus group should be to identify residents for whom composting at home is not feasible and who may prefer access to centralized collection locations.
- Jean recommended beginning to explore collection strategies, such as drop-off stations associated with community gardens or farmers markets, noting the need for an interim solution to manage materials prior to establishment of a facility. Joe shared that Putnam Valley has already implemented a small-scale program at the [Tompkins Corners Cultural Center farmers market](#), where food scraps are collected and managed by a volunteer farmer who uses acceptable materials as chicken feed and monitors the collection bin for contaminants.
- Jean noted that similar collection models have existed in New York City for several decades and emphasized the importance of considering transportation and permitting requirements when moving material offsite, including collection and hauling logistics.
- **Action Items:** Members will share relevant contacts for potential focus group participants. The group will explore appropriate incentives to encourage participation from individuals who may be less environmentally focused, such as promotional items, compostable bags, countertop collection bins refreshments, etc.
- **Compost Facility Site Selection:** Ilona shared a preliminary list of potential sites, including associated pros and cons. Tilly Foster Farm was identified as the primary County-owned location. Considerations include maintaining controlled, non-public access and addressing potential dumping concerns due to highway proximity, which may be mitigated since the site is sufficiently set back.
- While the Putnam County Correctional Facility does not currently operate a composting program, Jean noted that approximately 47–48 correctional facilities process their own food scraps. Ilona added that [CompostED](#) in Westchester operates a composting site directly across from a correctional facility, providing a comparable example.
- Jean suggested Veterans' Memorial Park as a potential community drop-off location. The group discussed whether local farms should be included as potential sites, with Rider Farm mentioned as a possible option and Pleasant View Farm in Brewster ruled out.
- Another potential site discussed was a privately owned property in the Town of Southeast affiliated with [Lawton Adams](#), who operates a food scrap recycling and yard waste composting operation in Westchester. While the property is currently zoned residential and not properly zoned for composting, it has been recognized by the DEC as a composting facility and was among the first in the State designated as an invasive species composting site. Savannah noted her working relationship with the Southeast Town Supervisor and offered to explore this option further, which could potentially reduce County operational responsibility. Jean also referenced an existing composting operation run by Duffy Layton, which processes various organic materials, including horse manure.
- Shanna emphasized the value of maintaining a list that includes both County-owned and privately owned properties, noting that pursuing private sites would require an RFP process. She added that understanding the level of interest from private operators early on would help guide next steps. Savannah suggested sharing the LSWMP implementation schedule with potential private partners to assess alignment and interest.
- **Weigh and sort program:** The group revisited the weigh-and-sort program discussed at the previous meeting. Potential partners include Stony Brook, CCE, and resources such as an [EPA toolkit](#), as noted by Vicki. CCE currently lacks the capacity to conduct a weigh-and-sort program unless grant funding is secured to hire staff. Jean noted that CCE has previously implemented similar programs in school settings using grant funding, which helped raise awareness of waste generation.
- Jean shared that weigh-and-sort programs are most effective at the middle school level, with opportunities at high schools through agriculture or environmental programs. She noted that [established models](#) and [fact sheets](#) are available and will be shared as follow-up materials. Jean also introduced Jesse Kerns, noting the transition from the Cornell Waste Management Institute to the New York Center for Organics Recycling and Education (NYCORE).
- Jen raised the question of program goals, specifically whether the primary purpose is education and outreach or data collection. Particularly, are we trying to establish something unique about Putnam

County's waste or are we trying to bring awareness? Savannah responded that the County's primary need is data collection to determine the volume of organics generated by different departments in order to inform facility sizing. Educational components could be expanded later and offered at additional locations.

- Jen noted that education and outreach align more closely with CCE's core mission and capacity, which typically operates at a smaller scale than countywide data collection. Composting and waste management outreach are among CCE's top priorities for 2026. CCE also collects annual data on participation among residents and businesses in Putnam County and is willing to share this information. CCE expressed willingness to assist more directly in school or after-school settings.
- Savannah added that Stony Brook may include an educational component in its final report. [Green Chimneys' Clearpool campus](#) was cited as an example, having conducted cafeteria weigh-and-sort programs for several years. Jean noted that Green Chimneys has a long-standing composting program, supported in part by its on-site farm.
- The group acknowledged that the County may need to develop its own weigh-and-sort structure to collect the specific data required to determine facility capacity. Savannah mentioned that the Health Dept. will also be hosting a Summer PILOT intern who may assist with weigh-and-sort efforts alongside a County employee. Jen suggested conducting pilots at senior centers or friendship centers using volunteers, noting that the process can be labor-intensive and unpleasant.
- Shanna emphasized that a multi-step approach may be necessary and questioned whether Putnam County's waste stream differs significantly from others. While Stony Brook has been considered for a waste characterization study, challenges remain, as transfer facilities receiving the County's waste have not been willing to allow use of their sites. Alternative arrangements would require agreements with haulers and DEC approval, even for County purposes.
- Shanna also noted that pre-sorting by participants would be necessary to reduce the burden on volunteers. Jean added that existing data already provides useful benchmarks, including an estimated average of approximately four pounds of food waste per-person per day (with seasonal variation) and approximately one pound per person per day in correctional facilities. Shanna asked how these figures might translate to workplace settings, noting that the model under consideration is not intended to reflect typical household generation rates and that senior centers may vary.
- See [NYSDEC Registration Form For A Solid Waste Management Facility](#)

### 3. Discussion: Other Business/Comments

- Members were asked to review the Compost Facility Work Plan draft and provide any additions or edits by the second week of February.
- **Action items:** Review the Work Plan, Jen and Joe to share relevant survey materials, Jean to send the step-by-step procedures used in school based programs, members to provide contact information for any additional town-level working groups or points of contact, and Jean will also follow up on WAC's request.
- The next meeting is planned for late February 2026; Joe may participate virtually.
- Upcoming CSTF meeting on January 30<sup>th</sup> and upcoming CCARP workshop on February 9<sup>th</sup>.
- **Optional Read:** A [case study](#) of the large-scale Staten Island Compost Facility, which operates atop a retired landfill and examines food waste statistics and operational challenges at scale. It was noted that this facility is not a viable model for Putnam County due to its size; more comparable local facilities, such as [CRP](#), were referenced. According to Jean, the Staten Island facility utilizes a forced-air system with four to six extended bays and automated windrow turners, resembling a biosolids operation initiated during the COVID period.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.