

Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission

February 19, 2026

Zoom Video Conferencing

MINUTES

Present: Skip Arthur, Carole Furman, Stephen Shafer, Linda Armour, Ken Goldberg, Mary O'Donnell, Elizabeth Shafer, Mike Harkavy, Leslie Surprenant, Ann Peters, Bill Barr, Nicole Roskos, Kathleen Gray, Mike Ivino, Stepanie Bassler

Approval of January 15, 2025 Minutes

Approved after a motion by Carole and a second.

County Zero Waste Implementation Plan/UCRRA Waste Proposal

Ann Peters provided an update on the county's Zero Waste Implementation Plan. Ann explained that the Ulster County Legislature allocated \$10,000 for further development of the Zero Waste Implementation Plan. An RFP has been issued and responded to, and a consulting group is under contract. The consultant is not implementing the plan yet, but rather refining and completing it so that it becomes operational and realistic for Ulster County's conditions.

Ann referenced Resolution 451 from 2019, which had been labeled as the Zero Waste Implementation Plan, and clarified that the Resolution expressed intent and outlined goals, but the detailed implementation mechanics were never fully built out. The current RFP is intended to operationalize that intent into something workable.

A separate but related discussion involved 'Green the Scene', an Executive-led initiative that previously supplied compostable materials to events. Ann explained that the county determined events needed more than materials, they needed planning assistance. As a result, the county is considering hiring an event-focused zero waste planner. This initiative is separate from the Zero Waste Implementation Plan, though potentially complementary.

There was also discussion of Marc Rider of the Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency and his exploration of gasification through a partnership with a company referred to as Global. Some CAC members were concerned about whether a gasification solution would conflict with composting goals under the Zero Waste plan. Ann reported that composting could continue; contaminated organic materials and unavoidable waste streams would still provide sufficient feedstock for gasification without undermining compost diversion goals.

Ann also reported that the County Department of Environment is interested in visiting all municipal CACs to better understand their priorities and possibly create information-sharing mechanisms across municipalities. Skip confirmed that Saugerties does not currently have a formal inter-CAC communication vehicle.

CSTF - CCAP update

Mary led the discussion regarding the draft Community Climate Action Plan, specifically transportation-emissions reduction aims. She explained that transportation accounts for approximately 55% of Saugerties' greenhouse gas emissions. Previously, the CAC had agreed to only target emissions from Saugerties-based vehicles, which would amount to roughly a 4% reduction of total emissions from the Transportation Sector. Mary suggested that the plan also aim to reduce emissions from the non-Saugerties based vehicles by 20% by 2040.

Her proposal relied on advocacy rather than direct municipal control. She suggested coordinated advocacy and support for federal, state and county initiatives, policies and programs that help reduce emissions such as the New York State Truck Voucher Program.

Stephen Shafer questioned what "advocacy" would concretely mean, suggesting Town Board letters to state and county legislators. Mary confirmed that formal advocacy from both the town government and community members would be appropriate strategies.

Stephanie Bassler raised a separate concern: whether the Northeast Solite industrial plant might be a more significant emissions source. Mary clarified that Solite accounts for 17% of town emissions, making it the second largest contributor after transportation. The plan includes reduction targets for Solite emissions.

Mike raised the idea of pushing for electric school buses. Linda noted that NYSERDA's \$500 million New York School Bus Incentive Program exists and is available to both public school districts and contracted bus operators. Mary emphasized that while the school district is a separate jurisdiction, town advocacy could still play a role.

Ultimately, the CAC voted to also include that the plan aim to reduce emissions 20% from the non-Saugerties based vehicle-by 2040.

Draft Tree Preservation Local Law

Nicole Roskos introduced a draft tree protection law developed over several years.

The draft emerged from concerns about large-scale clear-cutting in development areas, including near Grant D. Morse Elementary School and Pine Lane, as well as potential development at Winston Farm. The goal is to preserve tree canopies as Saugerties grows.

The proposal would require permits for removing trees over 12 inches diameter at breast height and establish special protection categories such as "heritage" and "specimen" trees. There would be exemptions for smaller parcels and provisions for hazardous trees.

Discussion centered heavily on practical implications for private property owners. Skip requested clarification on the quarter-acre threshold language and application requirements. Linda asked how it would affect small residential lots and trees near property lines. Stephen raised ecological

valuation questions, including species distinctions such as invasive Norway maples. Leslie noted that Norway maple is officially designated invasive in New York State.

Nicole and Leslie emphasized that the draft is flexible and invited written feedback with proposed solutions rather than general objections. There was recognition that public perception and private property rights concerns would require careful communication before presenting the draft to the town board.

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

Stephen summarized a letter from opponents alleging that developers would profit unfairly and that BESS is a “sideshow” rather than central to renewable transition. He argued that BESS is integral to grid stability and that pricing is regulated through the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO), which prevents price gouging.

Mike Ivino, speaking as Fire Commissioner, described coordination efforts with emergency responders. He convened fire and emergency personnel meetings to discuss emergency response plans. Current best practice for lithium-ion battery fires is containment and allowing the unit to burn out under monitored conditions. He rejected claims that BESS would impose large financial burdens on emergency services.

Mike also explained that the applicant would proceed under a Special Use Permit (SUP) while the town simultaneously develops a zoning amendment specific to BESS. Workshops with the Planning Board, Town Engineer, Town Planner, and NYSERDA representatives are being organized. Stephanie Bassler emphasized the importance of public transparency and is working to create a dedicated town webpage with documentation, educational materials, and a meeting calendar.

Taxation was discussed. Because BESS is a relatively new technology, assessment models are still evolving. The developer proposed a PILOT agreement during the initial period while assessments are clarified. A community benefit package was also mentioned, potentially totaling several million dollars over the project’s life.

The CAC discussed broader grid benefits, including peak shaving, price stabilization, avoiding costly transmission upgrades, and reducing reliance on gas-fired peaker plants. Members stressed the importance of understanding NYISO’s real-time pricing model to explain how BESS functions economically.

The Nexamp solar project, approximately 22 acres and located near the Thruway corridor, will return to the Planning Board with visual simulations showing impact from various viewpoints.

The conversation concluded after extended discussion of BESS process transparency, solar siting, and future CAC representation at planning workshops. Members emphasized the need for informed engagement, public education, and maintaining credibility in the face of community skepticism.

Additional Announcements

Linda reminded members that the Repair Café, postponed due to weather, is rescheduled for March 7 at the Senior Center.

A public “BESS and Beer” information session hosted by New York Citizens for Clean Power will take place February 25 at the Blue Duck on Hurley Avenue.

Adjournment

The motion carried at 7:20 p.m.

Prepared by: Kevin Freeman, Secretary