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FEATURED

Tompkins County and Town of Ithaca awarded 'Climate Smart' status

By Matt Butler Jun 21, 2017



DEC Region 7 Director Matthew Marko presents Climate Smart Community certifications to Sustainability Coordinator Nick Goldsmith and Town Supervisor Bill Goodman.
Photo by Matt Butler

Both Tompkins County and the Town of Ithaca were certified as Climate Smart Communities yesterday, a reward for efforts to reduce harmful gas emissions the county and town have undertaken.

Department of Environmental Conservation Region Seven Director Matthew Marko presented the certificates to Town of Ithaca Sustainability Coordinator Nick Goldsmith and Ithaca Town Supervisor Bill Goodman, against a backdrop of the Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center in Ithaca. They become the 12th and 14th Climate Smart Communities in New York, and the first two in the Southern Tier.

The Climate Smart Communities program was founded by Governor Andrew Cuomo. It entails customized pledges and goals that local governments must enact and then strive for, such as reducing operation emissions of the governments themselves, and influencing their communities to lower emissions from the public as well.

Marko congratulated town and county officials for their energy saving endeavors, and relayed Cuomo's pleasure that communities around New York were participating in the program and finding ways to confront climate change that are both realistic and significant.

"We've come a long way, there's so much more to do, but it's all about becoming stronger and more resilient for the future," Marko added.

Barabara Eckstrom, director of the Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management department, addressed the crowd about the county's current efforts and future initiatives that it will be jump-starting soon. The county was officially designated a Climate Smart Community in April.

Even before their official designation, Tompkins County was reaping the benefits of their toils. The county received a three year, \$355,000 from the state DEC in 2016 as part of the Climate Smart Communities Grant Awards to fund a new central food waste acceptance facility that will replace a storage space on the Solid Waste Center property. There are currently 11 drop-off food scrap spots in other locations around the county, collection thousands of pounds of food waste last year.

"We're serving as a model now for the rest of the state and other places in the country for a successful system to take in all the food scraps that we can," Eckstrom said.

It was also announced on the county's website that the county received a \$25,000 rebate after purchasing five plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

As for the Town of Ithaca, which joined the Climate Smart Initiative in 2009, Goodman said it will continue to work on reducing its negative environmental impacts, taking a shot at President Donald Trump's energy prerogatives in the process. In terms of community emissions, Goodman pledged that the town is going to strive to align with the Paris Climate Accord.

"We want to thank the state, Gov. Cuomo, the state legislature and all of state government for all of their leadership on climate issues," he said. "Especially in today's climate, with the absence of federal leadership, the role of the state and local governments is becoming much more important in combating climate change."

Goodman reiterated the town's commitment to cutting its government operations emissions by 30 percent in 2020, a number the seem

Goodman also announced a few specifics of the town's future sustainability plans, including utilizing a grant received from New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to work with five other Tompkins County municipalities to score homes based on their energy efficiency. The program, called Residential Energy Score Project, will hopefully "provide the housing market with a clear signal regarding the value of energy efficiency," Goodman said.

The Town of Ithaca, in conjunction with the city, is also researching a Green Building Policy Project (GBPP) with hopes of completing the study by early 2018. It is looking into mandates, guidelines, policies and incentivization strategies that can help developers of new construction better adhere to the sustainability goals of the city and the town.

Goldsmith, the Sustainability Coordinator with the City and Town of Ithaca who is also working on the GBPP, said the acknowledgment is a good reminder of the progress that has been made so far, but said there could be a more tangible effect of the Climate Smart designation as well: it bolsters applications for grants, which the town especially plans to seek from New York State and the federal government to help with their green efforts in the future.

