

TOMPKINS COUNTY ENERGY TASK FORCE
Friday, April 19, 2019
Human Services Building, 320 W. State/MLK JR, Ithaca, NY 14850
Final Minutes

Attendance

Member		Member		Staff	
Sharon Anderson	P	Bob Howarth	E	Katie Borgella	P
Martha Armstrong	E	Tim Mount	P	Darby Kiley	P
Cliff Babson	A	Martha Robertson	P	Kristin McCarthy	P
Fernando de Aragón	P	Brice Smith	P		
Brian Eden	P	Jennifer Tavares	P		
Todd Fox	A	Irene Weiser	P		
Nick Goldsmith	P	Gordon Woodcock	E		
Curt Gooch	A	Sarah Zemanick	E		

Guests – Jose Lozano, Sara Hess, Gabrielle Hullrider, Guillermo Metz, Roxanne Battey, Joe Wilson

Welcome – Chair Sharon Anderson called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

Comments from the Public: Round 1 – None

Agenda Review/Changes – None

Approval of March 15, 2019 minutes – **Action:** Martha Robertson moved approval of the March 2019 draft minutes. Fernando de Aragón seconded the motion, which was passed by the members present. Irene Weiser abstained.

Presentation: Biochar as a carbon sequestration tool – Johannes Lehmann, Cornell School of Integrative Plant Science

Sharon introduced guest speaker Johannes Lehmann, professor of soil biogeochemistry and soil fertility management at Cornell. Much of his research focuses on biochar systems, specifically their ability to enrich soil and sequester carbon, thus reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. His lab at Cornell has an experimental slow pyrolysis kiln, through which they have run various scenarios using different materials to produce biochar. In most cases net balance was negative showing a reduction in GHG emissions. The kiln is used for research purposes only. At the moment, Cornell has no plans for a biochar reactor to supply energy to campus.

Johannes gave an overview of the history of biochar, by no means a new energy system – it was key to the creation of the “terra preta” (black earth) that supported agriculture in the Amazon for over 1,000 years – but a rediscovered one, and the processes and components involved in its life cycle. The latter include biomass (dedicated feedstock, agricultural waste, urban waste); production technology (energy capture, gasification, fast/slow pyrolysis); and soil application (farming system, climate, soil characteristics).

Members asked questions on “tar cracking,” “pyrolysis vs. incineration vs. gasification,” and the potential of industrial-scale biochar reactors for use with CAFOs and waste treatment plants, as well as other related topics. According to Johannes, companies are starting to produce such reactors and might be receptive to leasing equipment for pilot projects as a way to enter the market. Another research initiative he mentioned, sponsored by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, involves using dairy manure biochar as a value-added phosphorous fertilizer for potting soil mixes. Guest Jose Lozano shared three green energy initiatives his team at the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility is currently working on: a biochar pilot, which is scheduled to start this year with the help of Johannes’ team at Cornell; a co-generation project using an anaerobic digester; and another involving the recovery of thermal energy from effluent. The City Harbor development will use energy from the effluent to heat and cool buildings.

A copy of Johannes’ presentation can be found on the Energy Task Force webpage.

Energy Strategy Update– Darby Kiley

Focus group discussions are wrapping up. All the ideas generated during these discussions will be compiled and then whittled down using the evaluation tool designed by the Cadmus Group. Darby will present the resulting list of culled action items at the May ETF meeting. As work progresses, she will likely have substantial updates for the July and October meetings, too.

Policy Committee (Update on CCA, Clean Energy Action Plan, PACE)

No PACE update until the County and City provided with the local law. Irene Weiser spoke with Bob Fishman (Energize NY) at NY-GEO 2019. Capital providers will assume responsibility for financing PACE projects, including providing bookkeeping, which will hopefully get more municipalities involved. This move will likely make the process more competitive, but credit history may be an issue. Discussions are ongoing in regards to potential projects for NYSERDA’s Clean Energy Action Plan. Brian Eden emphasized the need to have “boots on the ground” in Lansing. A scope of work and budget will need to be put together once a project is chosen.

Member Announcements

- New York City passed the Climate Mobilization Act.
- New York Solar Energy Industries Association is hosting its annual conference May 6th in Albany.
- Brian and Irene spoke with engineers in charge of new NYSDOT facility by airport about using geothermal and other renewable energies in lieu of propane.
- Keep It Cool, Tompkins! and Sustainable Tompkins are partnering on a “sustainable refrigeration” summit. Jennifer Tavares will share more details when she has them.

Comments from Public Round 2 – None

Adjournment – Chair Sharon Anderson adjourned the meeting at 10:27 am.