

Politics & Government

Panel discusses drinking water challenges in New Paltz

by [Terence P. Ward](#) / February 9, 2018 / 4 comments



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rector and Deputy Mayor of the Village of New Paltz.; Adam Bosch, NYC DEP, Director of Public Affairs and Russell Urban-Mead, Vice President, Environmental Services, The Chazen Companies. (photo by Lauren Thomas)

The Hudson Valley is not a region which is short of water; up to 400 million gallons are siphoned away daily to meet the needs of New York City residents, yet there remains enough to supply agriculture, humans and wildlife. Nevertheless, water is a resource which must be managed and protected to ensure that this remains the case. That's the crux of what a variety of experts agreed during a public forum on campus called "Our Drinking Water Challenges: Infrastructure, Local Water and Protecting Open Space." The session included individual speakers and a panel discussion, after which panelists responded to questions from the audience.

The program was facilitated by members of the New Paltz Village Board of Trustees and the Benjamin Center. It was kicked off by Dr. Gerald Benjamin, who reminisced about the "illusion" in his youth that fresh water was a right — a perception he learned through world travels is not universal — and how recent water crises in Newburgh and Hoosick Falls in particular brought home how tenuous that right may be even closer to home. Sabrina Ty, CEO and president of the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation, followed Benjamin by speaking about the importance of investing in both infrastructure and protection; she detailed the billion-dollar-plus pot of funding for such projects available at the state level.

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Focusing on cost in particular, Yvonne Martinez of the state comptroller’s office said that it’s estimated that anywhere from \$22 to \$39 billion will be needed for water systems throughout the state over the next 20 years. “We have an issue here,” she said, one which “demands our full attention.” 939 governmental bodies have responsibility for water, and there are a number of common issues. They include water loss (a section of the Delaware Aqueduct to New York City slated for replacement is losing some 20 million gallons a day), contamination (not just chemical infiltration such as what’s happened in Newburgh, but also lead in old pipes, particular of concern in schools), natural disasters, vandalism and even cyber-attacks. Infrastructure statewide is aging, but being out of sight makes it politically inconvenient to address before problems crop up; deciding how to pay for needed upgrades is often controversial. Martinez recommended multi-year planning coupled with finding clear ways to tell the story of what’s at stake if nothing is done.

Forest ecologist Marilyn Wyman discussed the vital role forests play in water management, treatment and even creation. From the leaves of trees intercepting rain and reducing erosion, to the rich forest soils absorbing water and minimizing flooding, to the pollutants pulled out by trees either as nutrients or simply stored in the wood, forested lands are what make water management affordable. Fragmentation through building homes and roads may provide short-term benefits but results in long-term harm to the ability of forests to accomplish these tasks. Wyman also spoke of the “green lie,” the perception that this area is actually more forested than

it is because of how it appears from highways; in fact, forests in this region are not producing as many young trees, various species are vulnerable to invasive pests, and she expects that more droughts will be part of the future in the Hudson Valley.

The panel included Adam Bosch from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, Elisa Chae of the Hudson River Estuary Program, land steward Charlie Burgess from the Open Space Institute, Riverkeeper's Dan Shapley and hydrogeologist Russell Urban-Mead.

Urban-Mead once referred to the Hudson Valley as the "Saudi Arabia of water," and stressed that this can be as much a curse as a blessing if sufficient controls around development are not used to reduce its flow to avoid flooding and erosion and allow people in communities along the way to the Hudson to collect enough to drink. He himself has "micro-graded" his yard such that it floods to about an inch several times down the slope. It's enough to slow the flow, but doesn't impact his ability to mow.

Bosch touched upon the 50-year planning horizon undertaken in his department, which involves imagining climate change impacts and trying to head them off before they happen. He also noted that the New York City system was built on a "relatively blank slate" as rural lands were claimed via eminent domain to create reservoirs; new systems created today face more complex challenges. The New York City system nevertheless is drawing from a "living watershed," unlike municipal systems out west which have no human occupation therein.

While home rule is celebrated in New York, Shapley said that it is a "fundamental challenge" to protecting water sources. The Newburgh supply was polluted due to activities at a military base outside of the city, for example. Only by protecting water sources wherever they may be will water be assured to remain safe. Urban-Mead noted that there is a model town aquifer ordinance, but attempts to pass state protections have met with stiff resistance.

The state funding was lauded, but Governor Cuomo's insistence on making it com-

petitive was likened to the *Hunger Games*, which is by no means a novel comparison. Panelists appeared far more comfortable with competition than President Trump's apparent desire to privatize infrastructure in order to improve it. "I don't really understand how that could be a solution," remarked New Paltz Mayor Tim Rogers.

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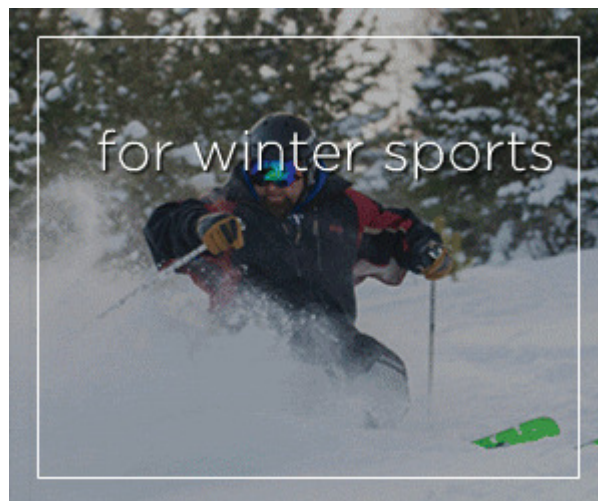
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New Paltz Oy February 9, 2018 at 10:32 am

This item fails to clearly point out that New Paltz and many of our 'self-entitled' neighbors have dragged their feet at an excruciatingly slow pace to deal with ANY of our local water issues except to whine and complain and block every solution that's been brought to the table. (Just as people who don't own property feel they are 'entitled' to use that property for their own leisure and pleasure...while not paying a penny or contributing to its upkeep. Ya'll know what I'm talking about. If it annoys you, then you prove I hit a nerve. Own it.)

And once and for all – please stop making “New York City” the big bad devil here – without NYC 90% of the Hudson Valley’s population, tax revenue, employment, housing stock, businesses would not exist. We are PART OF THE NYC METRO AREA AND WE ALL SHARE THE SAME RESOURCES – JUST LIKE ANY METROPOLITAN REGION ON THE PLANET. Just to be clear. You don't live in remote Montana. You don't live on mountain top in Idaho. YOU LIVE IN THE NYC METRO AREA AND YOU ENJOY COUNTLESS BENEFITS. Just keep that in the front of your mind. IT IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

New Paltz's failure to plan is the ISSUE here.



Duck Soup February 9, 2018 at 3:47 pm

What's the difference between a water-tank and a think-tank?

I don't know: I'm thinking

I still say delivery water trucks from the resort lake for sale at 25 cents a gallon and nobody takes a bath



Funkie Gunkie February 9, 2018 at 4:14 pm

It's hard to understand why this is an issue in a town that has very high taxes and just increased them by 8% this year alone. Poor leadership and lack of foresight because in reality the population is mostly students and second home owners who don't understand what is really happening. A select few with thier own agendas aren't doing anything that actually benefits the taxpayers. Not to mention tax exempt not for profits pull away 40% of tax revenue and own a bit too much land in the first place.



Bill as ger February 9, 2018 at 7:34 pm

It's not hard to understands if you can read a tax bill and the assessment roll? Do you observe the difference between the property class lines. One to the other? Show up at a town board meeting and ask the tax collector that question the assessor doesn't write the tax bills nor edit them for that matter more later. If you are not on the agenda then you are on the menu. Get on the agenda and it's part of the public record

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