

## Water experts examine policy and infrastructure challenges



Two-hour discussion focused on infrastructure, open space

NEW PALTZ – A panel of water policy experts met at SUNY New Paltz Wednesday night to discuss municipal drinking water system challenges, focusing on mandated future infrastructure upgrades, and open space preservation.

“The front end is much better than the back end,” explained Dr. Gerald Benjamin, whose Benjamin Center college think-tank collaborated with the Village of New Paltz and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s Hudson River Estuary Program to host the public discussion.

“Keeping your water from being polluted is much cheaper, easier and better than dealing with it once it gets polluted,” Benjamin said, summarizing the two-hour seminar which featured expert speakers and a panel round table, followed by audience Q&A.

“That requires a sensitivity to where water comes from, and how nature protects and clears itself from pollution,” Benjamin said. “It is very expensive to return out water to the quality we sought and accomplished early on, and we have to find ways of getting that money, equitably with consideration for upstate needs as well as downstate.”

Among the speakers was Marilyn Wyman, issue leader for Natural Resources and the Environment at Cornell Cooperative Extension, whose presentation, “Forests and

Their Importance for Water Quality and Quantity,” addressed the benefits of sourcing water on protected land.

Representatives from the office of state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli also participated, highlighting a February 2017 report that identified \$40 billion in improvements needed statewide. The 2017 Clean Water Infrastructure Act, with \$2.5 billion in state grants, was briefed by Sabrina Ty, president and CEO of the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation.

“One thing New York City has always been good at is planning for the future of its water supply,” observed Adam Bosch, director of public affairs with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. “A lot of municipalities plan five or 10-year capital plans. We just finished a 50-year capital plan; the horizon has always been decades not years,” Bosch said.

New York City owns and operates 24 reservoirs, 60,000 linear feet of dams, 300 miles of aqueducts, and over 200 other facilities.

“The system was built to last the ages,” Bosch said. “It was compared to the great works of Rome, Egypt and Babylon. They were setting out to build the greatest water works in the history of the world, but that doesn’t mean it lasts forever without tender loving care.”

Other participating panelists included Charlie Burgess, land steward with the Open Space Institute; Elisa Chae, watershed specialist with the Hudson River Estuary Program; Dan Shapley, water quality program director with Riverkeeper; and Russell Urban-Mead, vice president for environmental services with the Chazen Companies. New Paltz Village Mayor Tim Rogerts and Town Supervisor Neil Bettez also spoke.

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