

NEW PALTZ | ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY COMMISSION

Cleaning up their act

Environmental Policy Commission's post-bag ban wish list includes greener Village Hall, municipal garbage pickup, Wallkill River pollution watch

by Frances Marion Platt

W HITHER THE VILLAGE of New Paltz's Environmental Policy Commission (EPC), now that its battle to ban the distribution of non-biodegradable plastic bags by downtown businesses has been won? "We still have work to do to land the ship on the bag ban," says Gian Starr, who joined the EPC when it was reformulated in April of 2014 and was the prime mover on that particular campaign. By March 1, Starr and the rest of the commission hope to place "as large as humanly possible an order" of heavy-duty reusable shopping bags, which will be distributed for free to

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village residents. They also plan to purchase a stock of paper or biodegradable cellulose bags in bulk to supply to village retail businesses as a goodwill gesture to help them adjust to the transition.

Funding for the purchase of the reusable bags is being raised through an Indiegogo campaign with a February 25 cutoff date. It is being organized by an ad hoc group of citizens, including several EPC members, under the aegis of Bag Free NPZ. Anyone who would like to contribute to the fundraising drive, which at presstime was about one-third of the way to its \$3,000 goal, can do so online at www.indiegogo.com/projects/bag-free-npz. At present the plan is for the bags to be plain, says Starr; but for future pressings, retailers might want to seize the advertising opportunity of having their logos printed on the bags.

Although the EPC meets monthly at Village Hall, its work is largely project-based, according to Dennis Young, and each member always has at least one "pet project" on the burner. Young joined up last



LAUREN THOMAS

The New Paltz Environmental Policy Commission (L-R): Gian Starr, Dennis Young, Don Kerr and Joanna Torres. Not pictured: Rachel Lagodka.

September in response to the news that the Village Board had decided to convert to natural gas heating for Village Hall. He quickly mustered up enough opposition to the concept of using fracking products in a municipality that had been among the first to outlaw fracking that the Village Board backed down, and is expected to commit to using more sustainable heating options once trustee Ariana Basco returns from a leave of absence.

"That was my main issue for 2014," Young says. "For 2015 I'm reviewing the requirements for ClimateSmart Communities certification. I'm also exploring the potential for a village-wide garbage contract, instead of having four trucks come down each street." One option might be for the village streets to be broken up into a grid, with trash hauling companies bidding to provide service to one quadrant each, possibly paid for by the village itself. "You'd think with the amount of taxes we pay, we'd be entitled to it," he says.

EPC chair Don Kerr takes the concept a step further: "We're looking at the idea of being able to do municipal trash pickup, where the village would own its own trucks... It's likely to take a year to figure out and put in place. People would be able to participate as their contracts [with the four trash haulers currently serving the village] run out."


As anyone knows who has attended a recent Village Board meeting where the issue of alternative water supplies during the Catskill Aqueduct shut-

down has been discussed, the state of the Wallkill River is Kerr's special area of concern on the EPC. "One of Don's earliest points of interest was to get signage on the river warning that it's not suitable for primary contact," Starr relates. "One of the things on our wish list is creating a coalition of communities along the Wallkill," which would work together to identify sources of pollution.

Kerr credits mayor Jason West with convening a group that is "meeting regularly" with representatives from organizations with an interest in the Wallkill, including Riverkeeper and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Out of these discussions have come plans for a conference on the future of the river, to be hosted by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz on April 23. More information about the conference will be announced once the speakers are lined up, says Kerr. "The idea is to get people from the entire Wallkill River area, including farmers from Black Dirt country. They're also inviting people from Sussex County, New Jersey, where the Wallkill rises."

Other projects currently on the EPC's docket, according to Young, are the research that Joanna Torres has been doing on solar versus LED streetlights, recently presented to the Village Board; and Rachel Lagodka's work to have the Millbrook Preserve "recognized and protected." Lagodka was deeply involved in efforts to protect the natural area when the Woodland Pond development was proposed during Mayor West's first term of office, and Young says, "She could tell you every beam that is there and where it makes its home." Long-term, the group has a mandate to create a land use audit: "an overarching overview of environmental resources" in the village, after which says Young, "the commission can become a board."

So there's more than enough work on the agenda to keep all the members of the EPC busy. Young says that they are seeking additional volunteers to help them with their research: "Anyone who thinks banning plastic bags is a good idea, anyone who thinks blocking the use of fracked gas is a good idea -- those are our folks." Village residents who think that they might like to get involved are invited to attend an EPC meeting on the last Tuesday of each month. ++



PUBLIC NOTICE

Ulster County Transportation Council

Michael P. Hein,
County Executive
Chairman

The Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC) is initiating a 15 Day public comment period on proposed amendments to the FFY 2014-2018 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the adoption of the SFY 2015/16 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

Details regarding the proposed amendments and the Draft UPWP can be viewed at the Council's office (address below) and are available at: <http://ulstercountyny.gov/planning/transportation>

Written comments may be sent to the Ulster County Transportation Council, c/o Brian Slack, 244 Fair Street, PO Box 1800, Kingston, NY 12402-1800 or emailed to bsla@co.ulster.ny.us. The public comment period ends Friday February 28th 2015 at 5:00pm

The UCTC Technical and Policy Committees are scheduled to meet **Wednesday March 11th, 2015 at 10:00 am** at the Ulster County College, Howard St. John Conference Room, Clinton Hall, Cottekill Road, Stone Ridge, NY to discuss public comments received and consider adopting the draft UPWP and proposed TIP amendments.

For additional information, please Call Dennis Doyle at (845) 340-3340