

Climate Smart Rhinebeck

PE9: Public Engagement & Education Plan

Context & Goals

Background and Objectives of Rhinebeck Climate Smart Community (CSC)

The [Climate Smart Communities Certification Program](#) is a set of 100 actions, developed by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, that provides a transformational roadmap for municipalities. Under this program, our Village of Rhinebeck, together with participating communities across NY state, has committed to transitioning to zero carbon emissions, investing in community resilience, restoring ecosystems, building a more just, healthy and livable future, and doing our part within our region and beyond to contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation.

In 2010, the Rhinebeck Village Board, under Mayor Reardon, took the first step by passing a resolution to become a Climate Smart Community. Now, under Mayor Bassett, we are accelerating our efforts to make our village more sustainable. We want Rhinebeck's residents to be prepared to adapt to the now inevitable challenges of climate change and also to lead the charge in drawing down our carbon footprint. The Climate Smart Rhinebeck Task Force, established under the Rhinebeck CSC, is working to encourage, implement, and quantify the village's efforts to address the climate crisis.

Rhinebeck and Climate Change

Rhinebeck has a role to play in identifying solutions and taking action for 1) mitigating climate change, and 2) adapting to its inevitable consequences.

The village lies within a watershed that is critical to NY state, at the heart of NY State's most biologically diverse region (Hudson Valley Estuary), and plays an integral role in agriculture and food systems with a rich farm-to-table culinary tradition and 25 year old farmers' market. While not large in size, Rhinebeck is part of a collective effort [involving xxx] in which every community member and government action contributes to a wider impact. During the Drawdown Eco-Challenge alone we saw that, as a community we were able to save up to 7,000 pounds of carbon emissions in a three week period.

Nonetheless, Rhinebeck will also suffer from the repercussions of climate change including more extreme weather in the form of more frequent/longer heat waves, warmer winters and flooding, sea-level rise, invasive species, health impacts (e.g. tick-borne diseases), changes in ecosystems and habitat shifts (including viable crops), and so on.

Meeting these challenges will require a community wide response.

We are fortunate that Rhinebeck is a community rich in heritage. It benefits from proximity to NYC and to numerous higher educational institutions. We can claim within our area academics, artists and creatives, technologists and innovators, retailers, legislators and lawyers, educators, health professionals, religious leaders, environmentalists, farmers, restaurant and small business owners, and workers eager for employment in emerging fields, such as clean energy. We also have a significant retiree community that is passionate about volunteering.

The Village of Rhinebeck was incorporated in 1834 and exists within the Town of Rhinebeck, County of Dutchess, and State of New York. The Village functions as a jurisdiction of government separate from the Town of Rhinebeck and is governed by a Mayor and four Trustees. The Village covers 1.6 square miles and is home to 2657 residents. The Village operates a Justice Court, Police Department, Fire Department, and Street Department as well as Water Treatment and Wastewater Treatment Facilities. The Village of Rhinebeck enjoys a rich history and serves as the community center and hub of commerce within the Town.

Public Engagement as a Key to Success

In order to fully marshal the residents of Rhinebeck Village and those who work, go to school, spend time within it, and are part of its economic or environmental ecosystem, the Climate Smart Rhinebeck Task Force is developing a Public Education and Engagement Plan.

Foundations

In 2018-2019 the Rhinebeck community benefited from a number of educational and engagement opportunities where knowledge of the climate crisis, as well as of the implications for mitigation and adaptation, and a number of practical steps for taking action, were shared, and spaces for dialogue created across the community. This included events and discussions within the village government (e.g. Board and Environmental Committee meetings), schools (e.g. hosted by the Environmental Clubs), public library (e.g. Eco-challenge events), environmental groups (e.g. Omega Drawdown Learn), public festivals (e.g. Clean Energy Expo), consultations (e.g. CSC Task Force's community workshop on climate adaptation), and online platforms (e.g. Drawdown Eco-challenge website). See Appendix and PE9 Activities report filing for more details.

These interactions have enabled the Task Force to gain an initial understanding of community perceptions, concerns, interests, and priorities. They also have shown where there are gaps in participation, missing stakeholders and perspectives, and areas where further action is required. These are the basis for this plan.

Principles and Goals

The goals of the Public Education and Engagement Plan (PEEP) are to:

- Build common understanding: define baseline and build deepened understanding of scope of climate issues and urgency of needed actions.
- Build widespread ownership and social cohesion: create a common vision of our future, generate commitment of different stakeholders and create opportunities for cross-community and collective action.
- Build sustained action and momentum: Mobilize community to take concrete actions that are innovative or build on good practices, create incentives for action, and report on progress and impact.

Activities undertaken under the PEEP will be guided by a number of principles:

- Participatory and inclusive: engage all stakeholders in the community, paying attention to those typically under-represented, and those that are dis-engaged.
- Leverage: build on existing programs, initiatives and resources and engage people where they are, allowing them to take action in line with their interests, expertise, or areas of responsibility, including creative sectors.
- Iterative and forward looking: continue to expand and re-calibrate strategy and take a forward looking, anticipatory approach.
- Whole person: recognize that climate change is also about values, behavior and has a mental health component.
- Whole ecosystem: recognize that the natural ecosystem is to be valued, is part of the climate solution, and will require adaptive measures.

The following outlines the Public Engagement and Education Plan development process for 2020 and includes elements to be elaborated. Its implementation will be aligned to annually identified priorities and subject to available resources.

Participatory Strategy Development and Monitoring

Establishing the Mandate

The village government will formally establish a community education and engagement program through a resolution, executive order or MOU in Q1 of 2020.

Focusing on Foundational Work

In 2020, the CSC Task Force will focus on three major areas which will inform our future actions and set us up for success:

1. Mitigation - Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory: We will be part of a 9 municipality CAPI project. This will serve as a foundational piece of our mitigation work. We plan to

engage with community partners in such effort, with a view to encouraging them to also undertake their own GHG emissions inventory (school district, Northern Dutchess Hospital, Dutchess Fairgrounds, etc) or at the very least partner with us in learning about the process to inform that future work.

2. Adaptation - Resiliency Planning: We will also be working with the Cornell Cooperative Extension on our resiliency planning. This work will start in early 2020 with a combination of municipal staff, Environmental Committees and community stakeholder workshops.
3. Engagement: While engagement strategies will be informed by the two areas above, we also want to make space for the passions of our community stakeholders to lead the charge through interest-based sub-task forces.

Community Engagement

As noted, this plan reflects a range of consultations and conversations with community members that have taken place to date. This is an iterative process that seeks to position Rhinebeck in the near and long term as a CSC and will involve further and ongoing definition of our public engagement strategy.

Longer Term Visioning Session

We believe that embedding climate change into the larger context of community concerns is a powerful means to bind us all together. Our intention is to work at the intersection of climate change and social justice, the future of work, education and health. The official kick-off of PEEP community engagement will be with a visioning session of what we want Rhinebeck to be and where we want it to go in the coming decades as a sustainable and thriving community. This will introduce forward-looking, collective visioning, develop shared understanding and values that underlie the initiative, identify concrete ways forward on how to engage and tap into connected efforts (recognizing that not all work will be under the CSC umbrella, nor sit entirely within the boundaries of the village). It will also help to create a more robust baseline assessment of understanding, beliefs and perceptions around climate change and sustainability, and provide an overarching introduction to climate mitigation, adaptation, causes and potential impacts for Rhinebeck and beyond. Identifying effective messaging should be a key outcome of the visioning session and worked on with communications experts.

This will take place in Q1 2020.

Community Asset Mapping

Our January 9, 2020 Adaptation workshop will begin to map our community stakeholders, most climate change-vulnerable members. This is the beginning of a process of outreach and engagement as we introduce CSC program and Task Force to these stakeholders and listen to their perspectives. We plan to use our website to promote climate-related initiatives from these partners and collaborate with them where appropriate. We also hope this will lead to relationships where volunteers start interest-based sub-task forces.

Public Education and Engagement Integration into Broader Rhinebeck Climate Plan

The PEEP will be integrated into and align with the Rhinebeck Climate Strategy and Action Plan that will be developed in the near future, as called for under [PE2 Action: Community Climate Action Plan](#) and [PE10 Action: Updates to Strategies & Plans](#).

It will also reflect and take advantage of regional public engagement and educational opportunities, especially those that address “trans-boundary” issues such as ecosystem conservation and restoration, and public health. This aspect of the PEEP will also support [PE10 Action: Partnerships with Other Entities](#) and [PE1 Action: National/Regional Climate Program](#).

Annual Review

An overarching report on progress across all areas of the CSC PEs, as well as additional sustainability efforts will be provided to the community on an annual basis. It will address successful approaches, gaps and new opportunities and recalibration. It will be a celebration of effort and achievements.

In line with [PE10 Action: Annual Progress Report](#), there should be an annual review of progress in implementation of the plan with the community, as well as mechanisms for ongoing feedback (see social media and task force below).

Engagement Areas

The following are education and engagement areas, within which actions will be prioritized, and then developed and expanded. Activities already exist across all of these engagement areas and will continue to be strengthened. (See Appendix for a list of current and future activities). For groups that have limited mobility, English language skills, or face other barriers, multiple avenues will be pursued (e.g. partnering with elderly outreach groups, Culture Connect, etc). Family friendly events and resources will also be a priority.

Public Education & Outreach

Annual Events

A number of community wide large-scale annual events take place in Rhinebeck. Some are already focused on issues of sustainability (to varying degrees) and others present opportunities for “greening”: 1) in terms of their organization/logistics; 2) by mainstreaming sustainability content in the event or as a side event; or 3) by serving as an outreach opportunity (e.g. CSC sponsored table). An annual Earth Day/Sustainability Day Event may be considered as well.

Educational / Workshop Series and Stand-Alone Events and Trainings

The CSC will sponsor or support a series of educational events and/or workshops on PE items. This could include a series sponsored by a group, on particular themes, or stand-alone

educational events. More in depth training and capacity development should be provided to people tasked with technical work of the CSC (e.g. energy audits, natural resource inventory, climate communications, etc), including municipal staff. Locations commonly used for such events have included the Village Hall, the schools, and Starr Library.

Special Campaigns and Initiatives

Campaigns will be instituted to raise awareness or to encourage behavior change within the community.

Recognition

Mechanisms for recognizing outstanding contributions to sustainability by individuals, teachers/classrooms, businesses and organizations will be created. An example of this is a visible badge or sticker (virtual and analogue) that is given for certain levels of effort and commitment.

Outreach and Guidance

The CSC has established a website as a primary point of information and resources, and as a vehicle for engagement with the community of Rhinebeck, including how to participate in climate mitigation and adaptation priority actions. <https://www.climatesmartrhinebeck.org>

Engage with community members at public events, through social media and website, community newsletters, or columns in local publications (e.g. Living Rhinebeck).

Create resources for community members on how to take action and where to learn more about sustainability and climate.

Maintain calendar of events and opportunities for individuals to get involved.

Thematic Task Forces and Project Teams

In order to maximize engagement within the community, Task Forces will be put in place around major PE areas and sustainability topics of community interest. These will comprise community members, experts, organizations and other stakeholders. Task Forces will take on work around PE Items (they will align but may not directly mirror the main PE areas), provide advice and policy input to the CSC Task Force and Village Government. For example, Task Forces could be established on Energy, Nature-Based Solutions, Food Systems, Materials and Waste, Transportation, Streetscapes, etc. Giving community members a direct role in implementation increases ownership of the CSC initiative. Task Forces should also identify needs for knowledge, training and resources to undertake work.

Public Engagement Strategy Management

Leadership

Our Climate Smart Community efforts are led by our Climate Smart Community Task Force and the office of the Village Mayor. We present regular CSC updates to the Village Board at their monthly meetings. We extend out through relationships with other municipal entities (see section below).

The CFC Task Force will engage with a wide range of stakeholders and partners in the community as implementers and advisors. Some of these include:

Youth Engagement

Youth are an important constituency as it is their future that will be most impacted by the climate crisis and they can have an important influence within their families. Young people in the community have already shown active engagement around climate and sustainability through strikes, volunteering and organization of campaigns, educational events and projects. The CSC Task Force will create additional opportunities for youth leadership, participation and civic engagement. In addition, youth led or focused organizations will be engaged in the CSC process. These include: Hudson Valley Wild; 4H; Culture Connect; Club Interact and so on. Initiatives identified where youth may take a leading role include a watershed project and a tree mapping project in the village.

Schools

The School district represents an opportunity to advance sustainability through multiple avenues. The school's Environmental Clubs and select teachers have been advocating for a sustainable school and have taken action particularly around reuse and recycling. There is considerable interest in energy audits, tree planting (including for watersheds on campus), gardens (food and habitat), composting, biking to school and anti-idling, healthy campus (in and outdoor pollution), and many other issues. Amongst the opportunities are: Green/Sustainable School initiatives (many of these components align with CSC PEs), hiring of the new Superintendent (CSC, youth and other community members have lobbied the School Board to include a demonstrated commitment to sustainability in their hiring criteria), passing a Sustainability Resolution with the School Board, integrating sustainability and climate into the curricula and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) particularly looking into developing an elective on sustainability, teacher professional development, giving independent credits to students who are deeply involved in sustainability work, emphasis on green jobs in college and career advice, and mainstreaming sustainability in other clubs, classes and activities.

Municipal

We partner with entities including the Town of Rhinebeck's Conservation Advisory Board, Joint Village/Town Environmental Committee, the Streetscape Committee, the Tree Commission. We

are also a founding member of the Hudson 7, a coalition of the seven municipalities in the mid-Hudson region that draw drinking water from the Hudson River. In all, 106,000 people rely on drinking water drawn from intakes and processed at five treatment facilities, in Poughkeepsie, Hyde Park, Lloyd, Port Ewen, and Rhinebeck.

Businesses

The largest employer in our area is Northern Dutchess Hospital. Dutchess County Fairgrounds is a huge draw from around the area. The Mayor has regular meetings with these two players and has a relationship with our local Chamber of Commerce. Our community also has pride and support for supporting local small businesses (construction and landscaping, retail, financial services, real estate) and independent restaurants and hospitality offerings.

Conservation Organizations

Riverkeeper, Scenic Hudson, Hudsonia, DEC HVREP.

Community Based Organizations

Starr Public Library, Rhinebeck Science Foundation, Rhinebeck Aging at Home, Culture Connect, Rotary Club, Club Interact, informal educators, religious institutions, arts and culture organizations.

Regional Partners

We will continue to forge relationships with other CSC communities and the Dutchess County Cornell Cooperative Extension, regional partners like Sustainable Hudson Valley, Omega Institute.

Appendix Illustrative Public Engagement Events

Please see the website for more details on some of the PE9 actions listed below.

Annual Events

The following are illustrative – a more comprehensive account will be done through the asset mapping exercise.

Event	Sustainability Focused	Mainstream	Exists / Organizer
Annual Earth Day (or similar)	x		Planned (PTSO & RCSD Environmental Clubs)
World Wildlife Day	Yes – Different animal each year. Film festival, educational content, action.		X (Hudson Valley Wild - HVW)
Arbor Day	X		X
Town Parades (Memorial Day, Halloween, Xmas tree lighting)		Green, Outreach Table or side initiative	
Festivals (Sinterklass, PorchFest)	Sinterklass: HVW education around honored animal	PF: Green & Outreach Sint: Green	
Dutchess County Fairgrounds (multiple themes -> food and agriculture = food systems and land use; antiques = reuse/reduce, etc)		Green, Content	

Educational Workshops and Series

Existing Illustrative Activities: Starr Library held a series of talks on the climate crisis in March 2019; Rhinebeck High School holds talks for the school and broader community; Clean Energy Expo 2019; Repair Cafes; Food Waste talk at library.

Campaigns and Special Initiatives

Existing Illustrative Activities: Drawdown Eco Challenge (April 2019), Plastics Eco-Challenge (July 2019), Bike-to-School (RCSD 2018,2019), Last Straw (plastics in restaurants, 2019), Biomimicry Youth Design Challenge (focused on climate change, specifically adaptation to flooding). Other campaigns proposed have included Meatless Mondays (as part of a sustainable school cafeteria), Fast Fashion (student clothes swap), Art for Climate showcased around the village (e.g. greenpatriotposters.org), Storytelling.

Outreach and Guidance

Existing Illustrative Activities: CSC Website. Resources were collected for the Drawdown Eco-Challenge and additional ones were shared by team participants covering topics like food, transport, land use, energy, etc. The Clean Energy Expo produced a guide to clean living also available on the CSC website. The Rhinebeck Conservation Advisory Board has resources on native planting. Hudson Valley Wild (Rhinebeck based) has resources on conservation, biodiversity and nature-based solutions for climate.