

# MONROE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

December 18th, 2024

## In Attendance:

### EMC

At Large - Tom Dooley; EMC Chair

At Large- Haines Lockhart

At Large- Deb Muratore

Town of Chili - Larry Lazenby

Town of Gates - Charles Johnson

Town of Ogden – Bill Parkhurst

Town of Hamlin- Steve Rutherford

Town of Henrietta- Bill Santos

Village of Honeoye Falls – Andy Less

Town of Penfield – Cynette Cavaliere

Town of Perinton - Mark Gaul

Town of Pittsford- Caroline Kilmer

Town of Riga- Jennifer Balonek

Town of Rush – Beth Hoak

Town of Webster - Chuck Zlotkus

Ex Officio Alternate - Clement Chung; MCDES

Ex Officio Alternate – Starr O’Neil; MCDPH

Ex Officio Alternate – Steve Olufsen; Planning & Dvpt

Ex Officio Alternate – Yasmin Guevara; MCDES

MC Legislature Majority – Susan Hughes-Smith

MC Legislature Minority - Virginia McIntyre

Recording Secretary – Liz Kaptein

### Guests

Bob King – MCC

Mark McDermott – E. Rochester Parks Commission

Kate Kremer– FMCE

Hunter Reece- Churchville Chili HS

Patrick Gooch- MC Planning & Dvpt

Madison Quinn – MCDES Sustainability Coor.

## Meeting location:

- Monroe County Fleet Center, Building 1 Conference Room  
145 Paul Road, Rochester 14624

## Call to Order:

- Meeting was called to order at 4:00pm by Chairman Tom Dooley.

## Introductions:

- Introductions were made from all present

## Review of Minutes:

- Motion to approve October minutes by Starr O’Neil; seconded by Bill Santos. All in favor; approved.
- Motion to approve November minutes by Bill Santos; seconded by Bill Parkhurst. All in favor; approved.

**Meeting Topic(s):** Agricultural and Farmland Protection – Grow Monroe

- Patrick Gooch, MC Department of Planning & Development
- Bob King, MCC and Secretary to the Monroe County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board

An Agricultural District is an area of land that is prioritized for agricultural use by law, in an effort to preserve the socio-economic vitality of agriculture that is essential to the economic stability and growth of local communities and the state overall.

Agricultural districts only receive the benefits of these provisions if they meet criteria of a farm, in which the land has to be viable (at least 5 acres). Ag Districts are subject to local zoning laws and are used to determine if land is reasonable as Agricultural use, to avoid over-restriction.

The Monroe County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (MCAFPB) is meant to assist in protecting agriculture as a land use and doesn't supersede environmental conservation law, it is one of the few programs in the county that doesn't have to bend to the will of individual towns. Conservation easements will also be involved with the farmland protection board (to protect from unreasonable codes) to see if applications make sense for approval purposes.

Duties of the MCAFPB include:

- Advising the County's legislative body and work with the County Planning Board in relation to the proposed establishment, modification, continuation or termination of any agricultural district.
- Advising on the nature of farming and farm resources within any proposed Agricultural District Area.
- Review of Notice of Intent Filings as to the effect and reasonableness of proposed actions involving the advancement of public funds or acquisition of farmland in agricultural districts by governmental entities.
- Assessment and approval of County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans.

Links:

- [Monroe County Planning](#)
- [Monroe County AFPB](#)
- [1973 Farm Land Use Policy- Monroe County Comprehensive Plan - Phase 3](#)
- [1999 Monroe County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan](#)
- [2024 Monroe County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan Update](#)

Project schedule for 2024 Farmland Protection Plan- The best way to preserve farmland is to ensure that it's still profitable. Global nature of agriculture impacts agriculture here in Monroe County. MC Planning conducted Interviews with farmers, stakeholders and community members throughout year, hopefully results will be available within the first quarter of 2025.

Agricultural Lands - NYS recognized that we were losing farmland and created the Ag District program as an attempt to preserve farmland. It was designed to ensure businesses are viable while balancing agricultural use. The farmland use policy was the first effort from a planning perspective. Agricultural lands are the second most prevalent type of land cover in the County, with only 7,051 fewer acres than developed land. Most of the agricultural land is found around the periphery of the County.

Mineral Soil Groups (MSG) identify land that is suitable for farming. MSG 1-4 are considered the highest quality agricultural soils. New York State uses MSG Ratings in determining Agricultural Use Assessment values. Mineral soil groups, sustainability. Most of the county has quality soils due to glaciation (moving

of till). MSG are meant for assisting SEQR determinations and assessment, there is an increased interest in SEQR in the community, with 75 people attending the most recent training.

The Goal of the Farmland Protection plan is to retain farmland for agricultural purposes by assisting in succession/transition plans to ensure transfer of farmland to other farmers, promoting voluntary easements (Genesee Land Trust, Genesee Valley Conservancy, Town of Penfield, Town of Perinton). Partner programs with voluntary easements for 'Purchase of Development Rights' because well-drained, flat soil is prime for all development, this is why the balance between conservation and development is so important.

### Environmental Protection Component

The intent of the updated Farmland Protection Plan is to protect soil and water resources, minimize greenhouse gas emissions, and adapt to climate change impacts. It also aims to manage best practices for runoff and nutrients into surface water.

Every 5 years USDA analyzes what Agricultural trends are happening in the county such as general sales and production. Animal products down 48% and Maple syrup down 100%, as cost has gone up significantly. Total production acres decreased- likely due to lack of support to maintain economic viability. To change this it is important to encourage appropriate zoning and advocate for federal labor policies that benefit farms as well as increases in funding and technical assistance to farms.

Expanding and enhancing opportunities to increase direct-to-consumer sales and Agritourism are crucial to provide opportunities for farms to have income that allows stability- Eat local, buy local. It is also important to improve opportunities to develop Agricultural infrastructure like processing, storage, aggregation and distribution business markets as they make it easier and less costly to get to consumers- this also applies to organic waste composting opportunities.

The Farmland Protection Plan also incorporates public appreciation of agriculture, such as education for local decision makers about farming business, promotion of youth education, encouragement of public education. People who are exposed to farming young are more likely to pursue it as they get older.

Hobby farms are not the same as commercial farms. If it's not in an Ag district, the town is the authority/decision-making body. There has been an increase in mixed use areas locally such as wedding barns and wool barns, and those can't be the primary land use to be considered a farm. Many solar projects are trying to get established on the periphery of Ag land to get passive income. Utilizing solar farms to give a break to soil is not a common occurrence in Monroe County, and it is imperative that we keep land workable/worked to keep Ag use.

### Questions:

*Is there anything being done to promote community gardens in schools?*

- No, but there is a portion of the plan to address Urban Ag and community gardens, but it is a small portion and it's primarily handled by Cornell Co-op Extension.

### Elections (conducted by Bill Santos, Chair of Nominating Committee)

- Motion to elect At Large Members Tom Dooley, Deb Muratore, Mark McDermott, and Haines Lockhart for 2025-2026 term by Steve Rutherford, seconded by Mark Gaul.
  - Discussion - Mark is a member of the East Rochester Tree Board and Town Board. East Rochester does not have a Conservation Board or Advisory Board. This At Large spot is to have a municipal representative for East Rochester.
  - All in favor; approved

- Nomination for Tom Dooley as EMC Chairperson for 2025-2026 term – Motioned to approve by Starr O’Neil and seconded by Steve Rutherford
  - Discussion: Starr highly recommends Tom based off excellent previous work and guidance.
  - All in favor, no abstentions; approved
- Vice Chair - No Interest Expressed. Position continues to be vacant.
- EMC Members to Executive Committee (3 available slots)
  - Nomination for Caroline Kilmer; Motion to approve by Tom Dooley, seconded by Bill Santos - All in favor; approved
  - No interest for other 2 vacancies
- Nomination for Bill Santos to be EMC Representative to Planning Committee; Motion to approve by Starr O’Neil, seconded by Bill Parkhurst and Mark Gaul. All in favor, approved.
- Nomination for Haines Lockhart to be EMC Representative to Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC); Motion to approve by Steve Rutherford, seconded by Bill Parkhurst. All in favor, approved.

**Vote on Updating Rules of Operation to include Student members for Pilot Program**

- Executive Committee recommended updating of the Rules of Operation to include the following text:
 

*“The Student Membership Pilot Program shall run from September 2024 – June 2025. Three Monroe County High Schools (Gates-Chili, Churchville-Chili, and West Irondequoit) have volunteered to participate in order to increase student membership on the Council and to help plan for the intended implementation of a new student/youth EMC committee. During the Pilot Program, each of the three participating schools will hold one designated At-Large Membership spot on the council. Students from each school will collectively share a single vote. When casting the school’s vote, student representatives must reach a consensus or follow a majority decision.”*
- Motion to approve by Larry Lazenby, seconded by Charles Johnson.
- Discussion:
  - Pilot program will only run until the end of the 2025 school year. Until that time, the Nominating Committee, with help of pilot students, will work on developing the new youth/student committee, which is anticipated to start in September 2025. With a youth/student committee, there will no longer be a need for the pilot program. This amendment to the Rules of Operation is to recognize the students in the pilot program working on this endeavor.
  - Special thanks to Larry, Charles, and Tom for their efforts, commitment, and interest in getting students on the EMC.
- All in favor of amending Rules of Operation as written above; approved.

**Committee Reports:**

- **Program and Presentations**
  - Joint meeting with Recycling Advisory Committee at the January meeting.
    - Different day, time, and location (Thursday 1/9 at 3pm, Fleet Building 11, Training Room 115)

- Topic will be Community Solid Waste Collections and pilot program success stories, presented by Yasmin Guevera and Theo Maxi. Jeff Myer will give RAC overview.
  - There are still openings for speakers during the year.
  - Potluck in May
- **Nominating and Community Liaison**
  - Most municipalities have submitted their nominations for 2025-2026 term. Still waiting on Mendon, Irondequoit, Sweden, and Rochester
  - Next committee meeting is Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> from 4-5pm. In person with zoom option. Will be mostly discussing student/youth EMC committee. All are welcome to attend
- **Natural Resources**
  - Submitted request to GIS to update layers for EMC App. This was completed
  - Sending out Doodle poll to determine January committee meeting
    - Will review new layers
    - Need to develop a “how to” guide – how to use it and what to use it for
  - Will be potentially presenting to the EMC in the spring to show how to use resource inventory
  - Still looking for Committee Chair

#### **Monroe County Staff Reports:**

- Steve Olufsen, Planning & Dvpt – Land Use/SEQR training in October went well and were highly attended. Steve will reach out when next round of training is available (likely in spring).
- Madison Quinn, DES Sustainability - 2025 Budget passed and Sustainability Program will have a new hire - a sustainability engineer (not literal engineer) to assist in working on the County Adaptation and Resilience Plan.
- Yasmin Guevara, DES Solid Waste - [Organics Management Plan](#): moving on to the public engagement portion. Handed out flyers of surveys for residents and businesses. They will be printing some for farmers as well. Yasmin will be presenting on this plan at the next EMC meeting.
- Starr O’Neil DPH - Part of new budget that passed was the EMC budget. We will have funds for joining NYSACC, and for possible awards, training, and presentation money. Total amount requested was approved, this is significant as we haven’t had a budget for at least a decade. Starr also thanked Bill Santos and Haines Lockhart for getting their committees to where they are.

#### **Other Business/Announcements**

- Work Plan – Executive Committee has drafted a 2025 work plan to help set goals for the upcoming year. The draft will be sent out shortly to members seeking their input. Will be looking to finalize at the next Executive Committee Meeting in January

#### **Privilege of the Floor**

- Deb Muratore – Was wondering if anyone from the group knew more about the mailers that some Monroe County residents received regarding lead in pipes.
  - Starr noted that all Drinking Water Systems (big ones in Monroe County are MCWA and the Rochester Water Bureau) were required under the new EPA Lead and Copper Rule to

develop an inventory what drinking water pipes are throughout their systems. For any residences or buildings were identified with either leaded or galvanized steel piping, or if they were unknown, then they had to notify the resident of the possibility of lead in their drinking water. EPA is giving a lot of funding to water systems to replace their leaded pipes. While lead in drinking water has been a significant issue in other parts of the country (e.g. Flint, MI), lead from water is not considered a significant source of lead poisoning in Monroe County. To date, there has never been a case of elevated lead poisoning from the water in Monroe County. Some background - Water has to be sitting for a period of time to leach from piping.

- You can request water testing from your drinking water system. 15ppb (parts per billion) is the current action level for lead in water.
- Kate Kremer, Federation of Monroe County Environmentalists (FMCE)
  - MCE meetings are always open to the public and the EMC was invited to attend. Next three meetings occur 7-9pm on 1/27, 2/24, 3/24. Email [fmce.org@gmail.com](mailto:fmce.org@gmail.com) to request zoom link. Topics include local land use, water, renewable energy, invasive species, parks
  - New NYSDEC grant of \$15M available for urban trees. Municipalities are eligible. There is an informational webinar being held Thursday 1/9 from 10am-12pm. <https://dec.ny.gov/news/press-releases/2024/12/dec-announces-15-million-in-new-grant-funding-for-community-reforestation>
  - Grant applications are due 3/12/2025 by 2pm

**Adjourn:**

- Meeting was adjourned at 5:31 by Tom Dooley. Motioned to approve by Starr O'Neil and seconded by Cynette Cavaliere.