

# Rhinebeck Annual Climate Progress Report 2020

Town and Village of Rhinebeck

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December 2020



# Upheaval Upon Upheaval

## **Weathering the COVID 19 Storm Whilst the Climate Crisis Gathers on the Horizon:**

**Rhinebeck needs to undertake a transition: to draw down our GHG emissions and become resilient to oncoming climate change. We must also protect our ecosystem and drinking water, as natural services that support our way of life, community, and economy. Our local government (Town and Village) have an important role to play in this, in government operations and policy, and in partnering with the community stakeholders such as the public libraries, school district and other groups.**

## INTRODUCTION

2020 has been an unprecedented year because of the COVID 19 pandemic. The pressing issues of the health and safety of our community took priority. Meanwhile, we carried on the work of our Joint Village/Town Environmental Committee and CSC Task Force, because we know that the climate crisis is also dire. We feel an urgent need to keep up momentum.

2020's pandemic foreshadowed a coming climate migration that our area will experience: we saw a booming housing market in Rhinebeck, as well-off New Yorkers fled "the City" and drove up house prices. The New York Times [reported](#) how climate change will vastly reshape where people live in the USA—with the Hudson Valley likely to see "climate refugees" in the coming decades. In 2019, our school system's greatest challenge was dwindling enrollment. With the migration from the City in 2020, we saw our greying demographic—still the most dominant segment of our population—be augmented by younger families, adding new students to the rolls. Whether these will be permanent moves remains to be seen.

The COVID crisis also drew our attention to food insecurity prompting us to consider how a shifting climate will impact our food systems. Our local food pantries at Church of the Messiah and Rhinebeck Reformed Church saw an uptick in clients many times over. Partnerships with local food community organizations such as Backyards to Table, the Community Gardens, and Farms2Tables brought in fresh local produce. Red Hook Responds worked extensively with local farmers and Red Hook restaurants to ensure unused food was diverted to the hungry. Rhinebeck Farmers' Market fully revamped their procedures and layout to great effect, providing people with outdoor, socially distanced fresh, locally-grown food. The local food community here was able to fill a nourishment gap. In the coming climate crisis, we need to bolster even broader support among the public for these farms and organizations, to ensure local food systems are resilient to storms, droughts, and other disruptions to seasonal cycles.

2020's pandemic also revealed inequalities along racial lines in America, with Black and brown populations being hardest hit. We need to consider how Rhinebeck—such a beautiful and healthful place to live—can be affordable and welcoming to all. Our eyes were opened to the concept of “green gentrification”—where the well-intentioned (and market-driven) renovation of old housing stock inflates housing prices. Our local government and community partners must work to make the climate transition affordable and equally accessible for the disadvantaged or vulnerable members of our community.

And so, 2020 provided time for introspection. And it tested our mettle when it came to prioritizing our work together. True, some of our 2020 work has been postponed because of COVID. However, our two groups—CSC Task Force and Joint Environmental Committee—kept meeting throughout 2020, using the time to get into a working group groove, do foundational planning, and actually launch new programs and actions in modified ways.

Looking at 2020 through the lens of the environment and climate change, we are proud to have the Village achieve a major milestone with the bronze certification status in the NY Climate Smart Communities program in March, after submitting our filing in January 2020.

To be blunt, because we are a small municipality, we need to position Rhinebeck as climate-forward/climate-innovative to leverage NY State grants for projects. The good news is the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, passed in 2019, signals that NY State is investing in this type of work. The goal of this CSC project is not only to “do the work” but also to give more weight to our standing in competitive grant opportunities for further CSC projects. However, because of the financial fallout of the COVID 19 pandemic, the CFA grant cycle has been postponed indefinitely. (The cycle is typically announced in May; grant submittal deadline in July, grantees announced in December.) We don't yet know the full financial picture and how it will impact the future of this work.

## **OUR PEOPLE POWER**

### ***Our volunteers and the structure of our work***

We have passionate and knowledgeable members of our community who volunteer their time to our climate and environment work and it is truly inspiring. A special thanks goes out to two high school students, Isabel “Scout” Pronto and Esther Murray, who are an integral part of our team. We also maintain fruitful relationships with Bard’s Center for Environmental Policy and Marist’s Environmental Science program.

From our elected official side, our climate and environmental work is largely driven by Mayor Gary Bassett and myself (Vanessa Bertozzi) first as Climate Smart Communities Task Force Coordinator (as of September 2019) and now also as Village Trustee (as of September 2020). On the Town side, Town Board Councilperson Josh Pulver leads, with 2020 Bard CEP Intern David Chernack joining as Sustainability Coordinator in 2021.

We have two bodies, which overlap in subject matter in many ways. To clarify: the Climate Smart Communities program is a NY State program requiring a municipality to work within their own level of government. That is why we have a Village CSC Task Force. The Town is now working to organize a sustainability coordinator to do the Town’s bronze filing. I anticipate close collaboration on the Town’s bronze filing.

Why do we also have a Joint Town/Village Environmental Committee? This committee’s responsibilities range wider than the prescribed work of the 100+ actions of the CSC program. For instance, CSC does not have actions related to pollution or drinking water quality, and so the Joint EC can take up these causes.

### **Rhinebeck Village Climate Smart Community Task Force**

Core members:

Vanessa Bertozzi (Chair)

Mayor Gary Bassett  
Matt Stinchcomb  
Scout Pronto Breslin  
Jennifer Breslin  
Mary Burns  
Corinna Borden  
Chantal Collins  
Nan Jackson  
Dorna Schroeter  
Liz Mazarella  
Kellianne Ticcony  
Kathy Dobson  
Carli Fraccarolli  
Ashley Gamell  
Yvette Rogers  
Michael Forlenza  
Esther Murray

We met at least once a month throughout 2020, meeting online because of COVID 19. Our Food Waste/Compost subcommittee would meet up outdoors, socially distanced.

### **Rhinebeck Joint Village/Town Environmental Committee**

As of June 2020, I have stepped into the Chair role and combined our monthly meeting with that of the CSC Task Force. This has enabled greater synergy across our two municipalities.

The Joint EC received a grant from The New World Foundation to offer a paid internship to Bard CEP graduate student, David Chernack. For the past six months, the work of the Joint EC has been to meet with David weekly.

## 2020 Progress

This chart shows the projects we're working on and their status. I've also included the CSC points for the Village's path to silver. We hope to see the Town progress in the CSC program in 2021.

Project	Progress	CSC points
<a href="#">Achieved Bronze</a>	+V	131
Annual Progress Report	+V/+T	4
Followed by ~200 on social media <a href="#">Instagram</a> & <a href="#">FB</a>	+V	
<a href="#">Webpages for Joint EC</a> & updates for CSC	+V/+T	
Sent 12 monthly Email newsletters (125 subscribers)	+V	
Improved Educational Signage on Big Belly Trash and Recycling Receptacles	+V	
<a href="#">Launched Energy Navigators</a>	+V/+T	5
Installed EV charging stations in Muni lot	+V	6
<a href="#">Resiliency Planning Tool</a>	+V	6
<a href="#">Climate Vulnerability Assessment</a>	+V/+T	6
Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy	Making progress (V)	4
<a href="#">Comprehensive Plan w/Sustainability Elements</a> (as addendum)	Maybe	18
CAPI GHG inventory	Postponed (V&T)	16

CAPI Climate Action Plan	Postponed (V&T)	12
Energy Benchmarking for Government Buildings	Postponed (V)	4
Organics Management	Planned (V)	12
Natural Resources Inventory	Proposed (V&T)	10
<a href="#">Reducing Road Salt</a>	In progress (V&T)	
Drinking water: Emergency Oil Spill Drill w/Coastguard	Postponed (V&T)	
Install sensor/monitoring system in Landsman Kill w/Marist	Postponed (V)	
Riparian buffer plantings s/Marist & Trees for Tribs	Postponed (V)	2
Fleet efficiency policy	2021 (V)	3
LED Streetlights	2021 (V&T)	6
<b>TOTAL CSC points path to silver</b>		<b>114</b>

We earned 131 with bronze. Need to get to 300 for silver/169 points needed. Our list is at 114.



**For a user-friendly summary of actions included in our bronze Climate Smart Communities filing, see this webpage:  
<https://www.climatesmartrhinebeck.org/our-bronze-certification>**

**We've summarized 2020 projects below into themes:  
Water, Energy, Resiliency, Reducing Waste & Emissions, and Policy.**

## **WATER**

*To protect our drinking water and move towards a beneficial relationship with our watershed and ecosystem.*

### **Salt Brine**

The Joint EC's Dan Shapley brought this issue to our attention. Overuse of road salt results in long term contamination of drinking water and the ecosystem. Using the salt brine technique to pre-treat roads reduces overall use of salt and lessens spread into ground and surface water. It's a win-win: our municipalities will save money on salt.

Mayor Gary Bassett, myself and Josh Pulver on the Town side worked closely with both Town and Village Highways departments to develop a pilot for Winter 2020/21. With support from the Town Board and Supervisor Spinzia, Town Highway Superintendent Bob Wyant successfully designed an in-house brine system and piloted a first run in mid-December 2020.

### **Hudson 7**

Mayor Gary Bassett is Chair of this seven municipality consortium. Town Supervisor Elizabeth Spinzia is also a member. In addition to advocating for the protection of drinking water, the group also focuses on disaster management. The Hudson 7 have developed a relationship with the Coastguard, and plans to do an emergency drill were in place, but were postponed due to COVID.

## **ENERGY**

*To transition to a more efficient system with renewable sources.*

### **EV Charging Stations**

In January 2020, the Village used NYSERDA grant money to install EV charging stations in the municipal parking lot. Because we were required to “use it or lose it” in January, we did the installation, and then—after waiting until warmer Spring weather (the paint job doesn’t work properly in freezing weather)—painted the new handicapped accessible parking spaces.

### **Energy Navigators**

In Fall 2020, two volunteers from the CSC TF and Joint EC were trained by Cornell Cooperative Extension to become Energy Navigators. In short, they’re trained to be able to consult \*for free\* 1:1 with any member of the Rhinebeck community in ways to save money and make their homes more efficient and powered by renewables. Despite COVID, we were able to launch the program with an online Info Session (attended by about 20 people) and web-based signup. Of utmost importance is the fact that our Energy Navigators are trained to know which income brackets are eligible for incentives and rebates—providing not just this free consulting service, but also guiding lower income members of our community to their best scenarios. This will be an ongoing program offered to any member of the Rhinebeck community.

## **RESILIENCY**

*To use nature-based solutions to adapt to irreversible oncoming climate change impacts that are most relevant to Rhinebeck: flooding, heat, and degradation of biodiversity.*

### **Study of the Landsman Kill**

Our collaboration with Marist College students proceeded January through May 2020, adapting to remote work when COVID restrictions sent the students home in the Spring. Nevertheless, the students produced planning

which will be taken up with 2021's capstone students. The computer programming and environmental science students focused on preparing the installation of a sensor in the Landsman Kill behind the Village Highway Garage. The environmental science and public policy students prepared for the [Trees for Tribs](#) planting and public outreach. A meeting was organized between the Marist students and Rhinebeck High School students to partner on future work.

### **Riparian Plantings**

Our Trees for Tribs riparian planting with our Marist collaborators had been scheduled for April 2020 but was canceled due to COVID. The DEC Trees for Tribs administrators said they could hold our plan, and we hope to be able to do it in Spring 2021.

### **Adaptation Workshop**

At Starr Library in January 2020, about 65 people attended a hands-on session to collaboratively brainstorm vulnerabilities and adaptation techniques. (This action was included in the Village's bronze filing.)

### **Community Resilience Building Workshop**

On February 13, 2020, Town and Village of Rhinebeck as well as Town and Village of Red Hook gathered together to knowledge-share and prioritize needed adaptations to climate change threats. Hudson River Watershed Alliance and the Nature Conservancy partnered to develop and facilitate a one-day workshop for municipalities, free of charge. The workshop attendees were limited to about 10 government employees and civic leaders from each municipality. The workshop focused on coastal flooding, drought, and inland flooding—which turned out to be the most pressing area for Rhinebeck Village. The workshop provided prioritization recommendations for projects as well as recommendations for funding sources.

### **Resiliency Planning Tool**

In October of 2020, Danielle Salisbury of Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County presented to the Village Board. Her report was the culmination of a process called the Resiliency Planning Tool, used to comb through Village policies and procedures. (And it was a very fine-toothed comb!) This work focused on the Village's ability to withstand climate-induced hazards. It teases out recommendations, for example, on how to update our Hazard Mitigation plan, Emergency plan, and lay groundwork for any preventative measures in the face of stormwater flooding. CCE was able to provide this service free of charge.

## **REDUCING WASTE & EMISSIONS**

### **CAPI Dutchess**

Both Town and Village were accepted as two of nine municipalities in Dutchess County to participate in a program led by Hudson Valley Regional Council and ICLEI. The goal of the program is to guide the cohort through a Greenhouse Gas Inventory process and create a climate action plan. Unfortunately, the project's funding has been delayed by the COVID financial crisis, but it should be starting in 2021.

### **Food Waste Reduction/Composting**

With keen interest from members of our CSC Task Force, Mary Burns, Corinna Borden, Esther Murray, and Dorna Schroeter, as well as Mayor Bassett, we formed a subcommittee with this primary focus. The subcommittee researched various options during summer of 2020, considering the carbon footprint of hauling food waste, touring UCRRA and interviewing the owner of Ozone, a sustainability start-up in Red Hook that offers a residential composting subscription. In Fall 2020, we reached out to P2i (New York's Pollution Prevention Institute) which offers free consulting to municipalities. They will create a feasibility study with us, which we hope points to the direction of a pilot program in Summer 2021. The P2i feasibility study lays the groundwork for DEC grants for municipal composting programs. Meanwhile, Esther Murray, our high school student

CSC TF member, is meeting with the school district to see if a collaboration would be possible. The subcommittee is also working on educational webpages delving into food waste and composting.

### **Improved Educational Signage on Big Belly Trash and Recycling Receptacles**

Perhaps a small thing, but a thing accomplished! The CSC Task Force updated the labels on our public bins, encouraging people to “recycle right”.

## **POLICY**

### **Climate Comprehensive Review**

From June through December, the Joint Environmental Committee worked with Bard CEP graduate student David Chernack on a mammoth project to review all of the Village and Town’s policies and comprehensive plans. The goal was to glean which policy recommendations had been implemented, which hadn’t, and which—due to the age of the documents—hadn’t even been on the radar. David, working with the Joint EC, also developed a prioritization criteria. From this review, he also delivered a list of projects to both the Village and Town Boards. In mid December 2020, we engaged with the community on this work, through a survey and Zoom info session (about 50 people attended). Scout Pronto Breslin, our high school CSC TF member, provided inputs to the report from a youth perspective and has met with the school district Superintendent, and members of the High School Environmental Club, to discuss opportunities to engage young people and the school district in the Town and Village’s environmental work.

While the Town Comprehensive Plan (2009) is robust in many ways and isn’t in need of a complete overhaul right now, it did not even mention climate change—common for a document of its era. The Village Board should consider a comprehensive update to the Village’s Master Plan (1993). But the thrust of David’s project is wedded solely to environmental

and climate goals. From David's work, the JointTown/Village Environmental Committee encourages the Village and Town Boards to create and adopt addendums to their respective comprehensive plans—addendums that pull focus on climate and environmental recommendations for the new decade.

From the 50 responses to the survey as of December 2020, respondents gave this input:

Town issues:

- Protecting Rhinebeck's farmers and
- Increasing the acreage of protected land in Rhinebeck
- Protecting air and water quality

Village issues:

- Reducing waste and increasing opportunities for composting
- Supporting a green economy and green investment
- Protecting air and water quality

### **Environmental Purchasing Policy**

Per action [PE 3 of the Climate Smart Communities program](#), I'm working to revise the Village procurement policy to include environmental requirements and considerations. We hope to adopt this by Village Board resolution in early 2021.

## **Towards a More Connected Future**

**While we hope the challenges of COVID 19 pandemic subside, it has laid bare many systemic issues and reemphasized our need to connect and make meaningful change.**

**2021 will be packed with work, as we'll be swimming through the molasses of Zoom meetings and school children at home. We will have current projects plus postponed projects coming back, such as the CAPI project. We will need to manage the load and prioritize.**

**Village and Town collaboration is promising. Policies passed in one municipality can be taken up—if relevant—in the other. The Town's pursuit of CSC bronze should be encouraged, and the Village will support those efforts in whatever way possible.**

**Speaking of prioritization and collaboration, the end of David Chernack's Comprehensive Climate Review internship heralds a new beginning to engaging with the public. His work presented a list of recommendations and we heard from about 50 community members with their survey results (see section above for details), and we must hear from a broader swath of the community which ones they feel are most important to Rhinebeck's future. The prioritization matrix we developed will be our guide. The Town and Village Boards ultimately decide the best course of action.**

**One of the biggest hurdles—increased by the pandemic, but definitely pre-existing—is communication and engagement with a broader range of the public. We've redoubled our efforts in improving the usability of our websites and social media. In 2021, we will commit ourselves to proactive outreach. Post-COVID, we will strive for in-person events again and are identifying ways to create hybrid engagement opportunities in the meantime.**

**The Energy Navigators program is one such example. Connecting with the community with a composting pilot could be another.**

**COVID has stretched our creativity. The CSC Task Force/Joint Environmental Committee is going to partner in organizing community activities through the iNaturalist Wild Rhinebeck Community set up by Hudson Valley Wild, as a way to connect with students of all ages through nature based solutions—perhaps even contributing to a complete Natural Resources Inventory. (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/wild-rhinebeck>) Hudson Valley Wild is going to launch a Minecraft Challenge on a "green" future Rhinebeck and we hope the Town and Village Boards will support that as well. Both of these will involve an online component paired with getting out into nature and interacting with neighbors in a socially-distanced way—bridging online and office and fostering new connections.**

**Onward!**