

# Kirkland/Clinton Public Engagement and Education Plan



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## **I. Background and Objectives of Climate Smart Communities Task Force**

### **A. History of the Task Force:**

In Spring 2020, both the Village of Clinton and the Town of Kirkland adopted the New York Climate Smart Communities (CSC) pledge and began the process of becoming certified Climate Smart Communities. This process involves taking a number of specific actions aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions or other climate impacts and/or enhancing resiliency in the face of climate change.

Every community seeking certification under this program must establish a Climate Smart Communities Task Force. The Village of Clinton and Town of Kirkland chose to collaborate on this task, creating a joint Climate Smart Communities Task Force for Kirkland and Clinton (Task Force) from a community group focused on climate change and sustainability. This community group had been meeting and working on climate issues since September 2018. Originally focused on helping Clinton and Kirkland achieve Clean Energy Community (CEC) designations, this group asked the Town and Village to turn their attention to the Climate Smart Communities program after the CEC designations were achieved. The group officially changed its focus to the CSC process in March 2020 and was ready to take on the role of CSC Task Force when Kirkland and Clinton adopted the required CSC resolution and began the process of seeking certification. The CSC Task Force includes representatives from the Village and Town government and interested citizens who live or work in one of the municipalities.

Since its creation, the Task Force has been meeting regularly to discuss strategies for achieving Town and Village certification and to plan various activities. Meetings are open to all and meeting minutes are made available on-line. The Task Force recognizes that, without a more active outreach, education, and engagement process, the broader community may remain unaware of and uninvolved with this work. For that reason, developing and implementing a Community Engagement and Education Plan is a priority.

### **B. Climate Smart Community Achievements:**

The Town of Kirkland and Village of Clinton initially focused on municipal activities. By August 2020, both the Town and Village had conducted Energy Code Enforcement training, adopted the New York Unified Solar Permit process to streamline the application and review process for solar projects 25 kW or smaller in size, and upgraded the interior lighting in municipal buildings for greater energy efficiency.

In March 2021, the two municipalities revised and publicized their yard waste collection programs. The Village collects green waste from residences twice a month between March and November and delivers it to the Town facilities, where it is ground up

into wood chips/mulch for use by residents for free. The Town picks up green waste approximately once per month, as available workforce allows, and delivers it to the same site. Both programs move green waste out of landfills, where decomposition can add to greenhouse gas emissions, and redirect the waste to productive uses.

The Task Force also worked with the Village of Clinton on a pilot project to move food waste out of landfills. With financial support from the Village, the Task Force surveyed village residents to gauge willingness to participate in the composting project. Based on these responses, in October 2021, the Village established a six-month pilot program to subsidize the collection of food waste bi-weekly from up to 50 households in the Village via a local business called the Green Bucket Project. The collected waste was diverted to the Oneida Herkimer Solid Waste Authority, where it was converted into electricity via an anaerobic digester. The project was publicized with yard signs in front of the homes of many participants. In that six-month trial period, a total of 10,106.7 pounds of organic waste was diverted from landfills and converted to energy. The majority of participant households (35 of 50) opted to continue using this service after the pilot project and Village subsidy ended.



The Town of Kirkland is working to install a publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) charging station at the Clinton Arena, a public ice skating facility within easy walking distance of the Clinton Central School District with its playing fields, tennis courts, and playground; the Village Green and downtown business district with shopping and restaurants; a primary municipal building; and other community amenities such as the Jack Boynton Community Pool and the Kirkland Town Library. This project is being funded by NYSERDA and National Grid. It is currently on hold due to funding and equipment delays. The Town will move forward once these issues are resolved.

Finally, the Task Force working with the Town and Village created a Clinton Kirkland Vulnerability Assessment that was based, in part, on community input. In November 2020, the Clinton Kirkland Climate Smart Task Force organized a participatory meeting to discuss concerns about climate change impacts to our community. More than fifty people from Kirkland and Clinton attended the meeting, which was held on Zoom due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting participants identified flooding, impacts to agriculture, changes in biodiversity and species presence, impacts to winter weather, and public health impacts as primary climate-related concerns. This discussion determined the focus of the Vulnerability Assessment.

Using downscaled future climate projections for our region from the Fifth Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP5) under different Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) scenarios, the Vulnerability Assessment provides projected climate change information to help assess the impacts identified at the community meeting. The Vulnerability Assessment also evaluates the social vulnerability and potential challenges to Clinton and Kirkland's adaptive capacity through a demographic analysis of Clinton and Kirkland, community surveys, and interviews with community members. This report<sup>1</sup> was produced for the Clinton Kirkland Climate Smart Task Force by Hamilton College students in the course Fall 2020 ENVST 305 Climate Risk and Resilience. Report authors are: Prof. Aaron Strong, Gabrielle Buck, Lupita Cabanillas, Jay Carhart, Andrew Court, Ben Given, Emmy Goodwin, Asha Grossberndt, Amy Harff, Jason Kauppila, Francesca Lanni, Nina Merz, Eric Nahm, Ravena Pernanand, Nick Rutigliano, Sean Storr, Emma Stuart, and Gab Venne.

Beyond this initial work, the Village and Town through the Task Force have begun a more targeted process of community outreach and engagement related to both climate mitigation and climate adaptation issues. The specifics of that work are described in Section D below.

### **C. Climate Smart Community Objectives:**

The Town and Village intend to expand climate mitigation and adaptation work to a wider range of municipal programs and community-based actions. Because climate

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<sup>1</sup> Available on-line at <https://kirklandclintonclimatesmart.org/wp-content/uploads/CKVulnerabilityAssessment.pdf>

issues are inherently cross-border and connected, continued collaborative efforts on the local scale are necessary. Municipal leaders also recognize the value of broader collaborations. To that end, Kirkland and Clinton have become involved in state-sponsored climate change, sustainability, and energy-efficiency programs, including the Clean Energy Communities program, the Climate Smart Communities program, and the Oriskany Creek Basin Intermunicipal Commission.<sup>2</sup>

However, municipal actions alone will not be sufficient to avert the growing climate crisis. Increasing public understanding of climate change and equipping people with tools to reduce household emissions, build resiliency, and advocate for change on a global scale is critical. Building community understanding of and support for climate mitigation and adaptation work will also be important to ensuring community buy-in for future municipal actions that might be more costly or difficult to implement. To that end, the Town of Kirkland and Village of Clinton have included community engagement and education to their climate work. With this Plan, the Village and Town are establishing priorities for their education and outreach work, building a list of potential projects, choosing the priority projects for the initial post-plan round of work, and setting out the process for evaluating completed projects and updating this Plan.

#### **D. Prior and On-Going Community Engagement and Education Efforts:**

##### **(1) Vulnerability Assessment Public Input Meeting and On-Going Outreach:**

The CSC Task Force partnered with environmental studies students at Hamilton College to design, draft, and conduct public outreach around the Vulnerability Assessment for the local community described in Section I.B above. With background research complete, the Task Force worked with students to hold a community dialogue on climate impacts. This meeting was designed to both educate community members on likely climate impacts and to gather information about their experiences with and concerns around the local impacts of climate change.

The public input meeting was advertised through local news stories, social media posts, and via posters in key public gathering places, including the Kirkland Town Library, the municipal buildings, and businesses on the Village Green. In addition, to extend outreach beyond the “usual suspects” frequently seen at public meetings on environmental issues, each Task Force member was asked to discuss the meeting with at least two people who are not regularly involved in climate change work and extend a personal invitation to those people to attend.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ocgov.net/departments/planning/environment-and-water/oriskany-creek-commission/>

As discussed in Section I.B, *supra*, the public dialogue was held virtually on October 13, 2020. Hamilton College students gave brief presentations on the definition and causes of climate change along with key dimensions of climate vulnerability for our area. Participants then broke into small groups to discuss the potential climate change effects of greatest concern. Community input was also solicited through educational posters that summarized the public meeting presentations and provided a link to submit observations of and concerns about the local effects of climate. Posters were placed in high traffic areas, including the Kirkland Town Library, the Village of Clinton Building (Lombard Hall), and the Town of Kirkland Municipal Building. A total of 50 participants, including community members, Task Force members, and Hamilton College student facilitators participated in the on-line presentation and small group discussion. Additional comments were received after the event via our on-line comment portal.

The key concerns identified in the meeting and in subsequent comments were collated and added to the final Vulnerability Assessment report, which has been finalized and posted on the Climate Smart Communities Task Force website. Preliminary results were presented to the general public on November 19, 2022 via a Zoom presentation.

### **(2) Vulnerability Assessment High School Meeting:**

Several high school students, concerned about climate issues, attended the October 13, 2020 public meeting on the Vulnerability Assessment. Inspired by this process, these students, who were also active in the Clinton Senior High School LEAP (Leaders of Environmental Awareness and Protection) club, held their own public meeting on climate change and climate vulnerability aimed at high school students.

Students worked with a CSC Task Force member to design the meeting and outreach plan. Using a similar personal invitation approach to recruitment, the group recruited 12-15 students, who discussed their concerns regarding climate and climate vulnerability. These comments were submitted to the Task Force and were incorporated into the other public comments on issues of greatest concern to the Clinton community. The LEAP students also created an on-line survey, designed to gauge concern about and understanding of climate change. This survey was publicized within the high school via classroom announcements and made available to the broader community via flyers distributed at the Kirkland Town Library. In total, 305 high school students and an additional five community members submitted responses to the survey.

### **(3) Electric Car Show:**

In June 2021 and June 2022, with the direct support of the Town and Village, the Task Force recruited electric and plug-in hybrid car owners to display their vehicles at the Clinton Fire Department's Cruise-In. This annual show typically hosts historic or restored cars and draws hundreds of car enthusiasts. In 2021 and 2022, the Clinton Fire



Department designated a specific area for electric cars. Visitors could view a range of clean energy vehicle options and ask questions of car owners. Task Force members created posters and handouts on the environmental benefits of electric cars, purchase and operating costs, the availability of tax subsidies, charging infrastructure, and more.

The collaboration between the Fire Department and the Task Force provides a model for effectively expanding the reach of educational efforts on climate change. For the Fire Department, the novel decision to include electric cars generated additional media attention, potentially drawing more visitors to the car show. For the Task Force, the car show attendees constituted a new audience not likely to attend meetings or activities solely focused on environmental and climate-change issues.



Electric Car Show (2021)  
Photo Credit: Sally Carman, CSC Task Force

#### **(4) Community Tabling/Information Distribution:**

CSC Task Force members have regularly staffed an information table at the weekly Farmers' Market in Clinton since 2021. The Village worked with the Task Force to provide the necessary insurance for tabling efforts in 2023. The Task Force also staffed an informational table at the Clinton Arts and Music Festival in 2021 and 2022. During these tabling events, Task Force members answered questions about the Town, Village, and Task Force's climate-related work; shared information on clean energy and energy conservation, including data on potential savings from roof-top solar; promoted climate-related events happening in the Town or Village; and distributed informational materials, including Task Force brochures, flyers on native plants and pollinators, and information on the community Heat Smart Campaign. Visitors could also buy books (at cost) on

combating climate change through food production, selection, and preparation or choose from an array of giveaways, including paper straws, compostable bags, and free seeds. In 2023, the Task Force raffled off three native trees and a battery-powered lawnmower donated by members. Sixty-five people entered this raffle and at least ten people asked to be added to the Task Force’s mailing list.



Tabling at the Farmers’ Market 2023      Photo Credit: Sally Carman, CSC Task Force

### **(5) Climate Smart Community Website:**

In Fall 2020, the CSC Task Force created a website<sup>3</sup> to keep the public informed about the climate work being done in the community, public engagement opportunities, and regional and national news related to climate change. The website provides an easily accessible and up-to-date report on Town and Village progress toward certification, CSC Task Force projects, and CSC Task Force monthly meetings. Both Kirkland and Clinton link to the CSC Task Force website from their municipal websites.

## **II. Principles and Goals of Public Engagement and Education**

The Town of Kirkland and Village of Clinton recognize the critical importance of expanding their climate change work to the general public. Without strong public support,

<sup>3</sup> <https://kirklandclintonclimatesmart.org/>

local, state, and federal initiatives to reduce climate change inducing emissions or to invest in resiliency measures may be difficult to adopt or implement, particularly once inexpensive or simpler projects, such as switching to energy-efficient lighting or publicizing and streamlining existing green waste management programs, have been completed. Personal or household level changes are also a critical component of a holistic climate response. Increasing public understanding of climate change, developing a shared understanding of the problems and potential solutions, and building community support requires a commitment to on-going education and engagement.

Specifically, Kirkland and Clinton will focus on expanding community understanding of climate change; developing a shared vision of a thriving, sustainable, and resilient community; and identifying positive actions that community members can take to reduce emissions or build resilience. The Community Engagement and Education plan will maximize public involvement by providing multiple methods and levels of engagement; drawing previously disengaged or disempowered groups into the conversation; prioritizing projects that take advantage of the skills, interests, and partnerships of the Task Force, the Town, and the Village; and building on existing work. Potential outreach opportunities will be assessed and prioritized based on their potential to meet one or more of the following criteria.

#### **A. Educate/Expand Understanding of Climate Change (Mitigation and Adaptation)**

While the majority of Americans recognize that climate change is a significant issue and that government action is required to combat it, a recent Pew survey showed widely varying understanding of the local impacts of climate change and of its causes based on geography. According to a 2020 Pew Research survey, 63% of Americans overall believe that climate change is affecting their communities a great deal or some. People living within 25 miles of a coastline were much more likely to see a great deal or some climate change impacts in their communities (70%) with a particular emphasis on rising sea levels and eroding coastlines. Only 57% of respondents who lived inland by 300 miles or more saw a great deal of or some climate change impacts within their communities.<sup>4</sup> As a non-coastal community, additional outreach and education may be useful in helping the public make connections between climate change and its local impacts.

Details of a public education campaign for Kirkland and Clinton will be dependent, in part, on our developing understanding of community knowledge of and attitude toward climate change, including the surveys discussed below, information gathered from community conversations on climate-related issues, and on-going informal assessments conducted in conjunction with education and outreach campaigns. Based on the data already collected and general trends in climate change attitudes in our region, we

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center (June 23, 2020). *Two-Thirds of Americans Think Government Should Do More on Climate*. Available on-line at <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/06/23/two-thirds-of-americans-think-government-should-do-more-on-climate/>

anticipate that outreach will focus on the four key topics necessary to the development of a municipal and/or personal climate action: (1) the mechanics of climate change, including the drivers of climate change and human contributions to those drivers; (2) the effects of climate change, including changes in average temperatures, rainfall patterns, the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, and insect and insect-borne disease ranges; (3) mitigation measures, including national, regional, local, and personal-level responses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit the impacts of climate change; and (4) adaptation measures, including local and personal measures for adapting to predicted climate changes and increasing resilience.

Projects that increase public understanding of any of these four elements will be prioritized. In addition, based on initial community outreach and survey efforts, projects that incorporate a focus on the additional benefits of limiting emissions (e.g., lower or more adaptable cost heating and cooling methods) and increasing resiliency (e.g., reductions in the cost of flood insurance) will be emphasized.



Flooding in the Village of Clinton

Photo Credit: Sally Carman, CSC Task Force

## **B. Develop Shared Vision of a Sustainable and Thriving Community**

Community-level climate change responses can take many forms and may involve complicated, costly, or large-scale municipal and personal actions. Municipal projects are more likely to meet local needs and have public support and households are more likely to adopt necessary behavior changes if the community has a shared vision for the future. The Kirkland-Clinton community has done some of this work already through discussions surrounding the Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant process and a Kirkland Town

Library-sponsored community dialogue series. The Village has also received funding to support the development of a Comprehensive Plan and will be holding community visioning meetings in early 2024.

The Community Engagement and Education plan can build on that work through community surveys, dialogues, and other processes to develop a climate-specific vision of Kirkland and Clinton. Projects that help flesh out the public vision for Kirkland and Clinton and that answer the basic question of what the public wants Kirkland or Clinton to look like in 20 years will be prioritized.

### **C. Focus on Solutions, Tools for Minimizing Emissions/Maximizing Resilience**

Climate change can be a daunting and disheartening topic. Individuals may feel helpless in the face of large-scale climate drivers and pessimistic news coverage of the issue. A small survey conducted by the Clinton High School LEAP club revealed significant concerns about the limited impact of personal actions and the potential negative impacts of broader scale societal choices to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions (see discussion in Section III. below).

Providing positive messages and information about direct actions that individuals can take on a personal or household level and local or community-level initiatives that people can directly support and observe is critical. Not only will these actions help address climate change and build local resiliency, their success may help build support for broader national and international actions. In addition, campaigns that share success stories related to larger-scale mitigation or adaptation efforts may help address anxiety about such societal shifts. For this reason, the Public Engagement and Education plan will emphasize outreach on concrete actions and tools to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and maximize community resilience. Projects that focus on sharing solutions, accessible tools, and success stories from other communities will be prioritized.

### **D. Prioritize Areas of Greatest Return In Both Climate and Non-Climate Related Benefits**

Although climate issues may be pressing, both private and public attention and resources are limited. The public is more likely to attend education and engagement activities and to take climate-related action where they see the greatest return on their investment of time and energy. For that reason, activities that link community members to additional resources or that focus on dual-purpose actions (e.g., actions that also reduce energy expenses or potential costs from flooding) are more likely to engage a broader range of the public and will be prioritized. In addition, projects that help community members learn about and implement changes that will provide greater

emission reductions or that will move the community further along the path toward climate resiliency will be preferred.

### **E. Maximize Engagement**

Climate change cannot be addressed by the few; it is an all-hands-on-deck crisis. Further, climate action should not be limited to the wealthy or well-connected. The Task Force plans to create educational opportunities that make engagement as easy and as widespread as possible. Outreach activities that are accessible in terms of timing and location, are of interest to multiple audiences, are attached to activities that already draw a diverse crowd, and are active and engaging will be prioritized. For example, the Task Force might prioritize a hands-on workshop for home renovators on energy efficient construction presented as part of a local home improvement show. In addition, to maximize public commitment to concrete actions, the CSC Task Force will work to identify and publicize resources that support or subsidize individual efforts to reduce emissions, become more energy efficient, or increase adaptability.

### **F. Expand Audience to New, Previously Disengaged, and Vulnerable Groups**

Maximizing engagement also requires reaching beyond the people and organizations that are typically active on climate and environmental issues. In particular, the Task Force hopes to reach populations that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, disadvantaged groups, and those that have been disengaged from prior climate discussions. The first step is to identify the missing and vulnerable groups and determine the reasons for their absence. Engagement and education activities that are designed to address these gaps can then be planned. This may require making discussions more accessible with childcare support; translation; evening or weekend schedules; holding neighborhood-based meetings; or sponsoring events in partnership with groups familiar to and trusted by our targeted participants. For example, by joining the Clinton Fire Department's Annual Car Show, the Task Force was able to discuss electric car ownership with a new audience. Similarly, the Task Force might partner with local churches, the Parent-Teacher Association or Athletic Booster Club from the Clinton Central School District, or other trusted community organizations to sponsor a discussion or direct learning activity.

### **G. Increase Community Awareness of and Engagement in the Climate-Related Work of the Town, Village, and Task Force**

The Town of Kirkland, Village of Clinton, and Task Force have all been actively working on climate-related issues since adopting CSC resolutions and before. Although significant steps have already been taken, many have happened out of the public eye.

Community members may underestimate the local commitment to climate action. Limited publicity may also mean that community members underestimate or fail to recognize the environmental and economic benefits of these changes. Outreach efforts that bring community members up-to-date on prior actions will help the public better understand how additional projects fit into the community's long-term climate plan and better estimate the potential return on investment from these future projects.

In addition to increasing public awareness of the climate work happening in the community, the Task Force will prioritize opportunities for the public to actively discuss and provide input on proposed climate-related actions. Local knowledge and community input can be critical in ground-truthing the data and assumptions driving project design and in determining priorities for change. Opportunities for community dialogues on and public voice around climate-change related projects may also build support for necessary next steps.

#### **H. Build on Existing Work from the Task Force and The Community**

As with the general public, the time and energy of the Kirkland and Clinton municipal governments and the Task Force is limited. Engagement and education projects that build on existing work within the community and on projects that the Task Force has already decided to do will be more likely to fit within these time and energy constraints. For that reason, projects that add an engagement and/or educational component to existing work will be prioritized. In addition, the Task Force may choose to prioritize helping with or supporting existing climate-related engagement and education projects or activities being planned by other community organizations. Joining forces on such pre-planned activities may improve those projects and provide greater outreach at minimal cost to the Task Force or to the municipalities.

#### **I. Take Advantage of Skills, Interests, Availability, and Existing Work of Task Force Members and Other Partners**

To some extent, the education and engagement work that can be done will be driven by the skills and interests of Task Force members, municipal leaders and employees in Clinton and Kirkland, and our existing partners. For practical reasons, simple projects that can readily be implemented without significant investment by the municipalities or the Task Force and that have the support of and can be easily implemented by one or more Task Force members, municipal staff, or other partners that are particularly passionate about the work may be prioritized.

### **III. Scope of Action**

The Community Engagement and Education Plan will be scaled based on the issues to be addressed, the Task Force capacity, and the support available from potential

partners. At minimum, given past efforts, the work should be broad enough to encompass both emissions reduction and adaptation/resilience building efforts.

### **A. Emission Reduction Focus**

A focus on emissions reduction will build on the existing work of the Town of Kirkland and Village of Clinton to conduct greenhouse gas emission inventories and energy benchmarking for municipal buildings. These assessments demonstrate that Kirkland, Clinton, and the CSC Task Force have the capacity to support emission reduction efforts. In addition, this is a baseline issue for climate work. Engagement and education activities will focus on individual and local government actions to inventory and reduce these emissions.

### **B. Adaptation and Resilience Focus**

A focus on adaptation and resilience will build on the existing work of the CSC Task Force to assess climate vulnerability and to capture the climate impacts of greatest concern to the community. Again, this work demonstrates the capacity of the CSC Task Force to develop engagement and educational materials on core issues of climate adaptation and resilience. Additional work will certainly focus on these ideas.

### **C. Assessment of Task Force Capacity**

Through its members and partners, the Task Force can leverage skills and experience in the science of climate change, local and national climate change policy, local organizing, and public outreach and engagement. Our government representatives are active members, providing close communication to, and coordination with, the municipal government. The Task Force includes an environmental studies professor with expertise in climate issues, an environmental attorney with a focus on community engagement, an expert in clean transportation and electric vehicles, an architect with experience designing rain gardens, and members with deep ties to the community and leadership experience in other local organizations. In addition, Task Force members have connections to local colleges, political parties, and organizations active on environmental issues.

### **D. Available Partners**

The Village, Town, and Task Force have already established strong partnerships with many local organizations. Hamilton College has been deeply involved with our climate work through class research projects, technical and research support from faculty and student interns, and audio-visual support for public meetings. With the endorsement



of the Village and Town, the Task Force partnered with Heat Smart Mohawk Valley to begin a community campaign for heat pumps. Other community organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Clinton-Kirkland Improvement Corporation agreed to co-sponsor this work, helping to promote the campaign within their membership and constituents. The Clinton Central School District has engaged with the Task Force to support community conversations and to help with community surveys, primarily through the Clinton High School LEAP club. This partnership is particularly important in reaching a younger audience. Other potential partners within the Kirkland-Clinton community include Kirkland Trails, which promotes the development of hiking/biking trails within the community; Wild Ones, a group that promotes restoration of native plants; the Kirkland Town Library, which often provides meeting space, outreach assistance, and access to environmental services and information within the community; and the Oriskany Creek Basin Intermunicipal Commission, a relatively new organization dedicated to managing and mitigating flooding within the Oriskany Creek watershed.

## E. Target Audiences

### 1. Assessment of Stakeholder Communities:

The Kirkland-Clinton community includes a typical wide range of stakeholders, including village and town residents, businesses, agricultural interests, educational institutions, and young people. As noted earlier, engaging all of these groups is important, since the climate crisis is an “all hands-on deck” situation. However, some groups are critical due to size or potential impact on climate work.

Farmers and agricultural interests are a particularly important stakeholder group. In its 2017 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, Oneida County reported that, based on the 2012 US Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, more than half of the acreage within the township was being farmed.<sup>5</sup> At that time, Kirkland was one of the ten towns with the most acreage committed to agricultural uses within Oneida County.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, youth are a critical stakeholder group. Although the percentage of Kirkland/Clinton residents under 18 years of age (15.3%) is lower than the state or national averages (20.7% and 22.1% respectively), this group may be more committed to learning about and responding to the climate crisis (see Section III.E.2 below). In addition, as a college town, the population of young people increases substantially each fall.



Haying in Oneida County  
Photo Credit: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Oneida

<sup>5</sup> Oneida County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, June 2017, p. 19

<sup>6</sup> Oneida County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, p. 19.

Finally, because Kirkland and Clinton are relatively small communities, it will be particularly important to identify and engage with opinion leaders, such as long-established businesses and community institutions. Education and outreach efforts that work through community leaders and institutions, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Kirkland Town Library, school-related organizations, and long-established service groups will be particularly important in expanding our outreach to new audiences.

## 2. Assessment of Current Level of Engagement and Community Knowledge

The Task Force relied on information from several sources for this preliminary assessment of community engagement with and knowledge of climate change, climate mitigation, and resiliency/adaptation. These sources included surveys, data from community dialogues, and public feedback at climate-related events conducted by the Task Force.<sup>7</sup> Taken together, the data suggests that the community is paying attention to climate impacts and generally recognizes that climate change is happening, that it is causing harm locally, and that response is needed. There is less consensus, however, on the appropriate response at either an individual or societal level.

Generally, the majority of community members agree that climate change is occurring and poses a threat to the community. Two-thirds of high school students and more than three-quarters of the community members that took the LEAP survey agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The 2021 Yale Climate Opinion Maps (“Yale Maps”) showed a similar level of belief that global warming is real (67%), although fewer respondents believed that it would cause significant harm to them personally (40%).<sup>8</sup> According to both the 2021 Yale Climate Maps and the 2022 Hamilton College survey, a slight majority within the region see global warming as primarily caused by human activity (51% in the Yale Maps study; 50% in the Hamilton College survey) versus natural causes (36% for Yale Maps; 30% for Hamilton survey).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the Task Force reviewed the data gathered during the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment public dialogue and post-dialogue surveys (hereinafter “Vulnerability Assessment Dialogue Summary”); surveys of Clinton High School students and community members by the CCS High School LEAP club (hereinafter “LEAP Survey”); results from community conversations on solar farm siting in rural areas (hereinafter “Solar Farm Conversation Summary”) and on the Draft Scoping Plan/implementation plan for New York’s Climate Act designed and facilitated by Hamilton College students (hereinafter “Scoping Plan Conversation Summary”); a survey of Madison and Oneida County residents related to the Climate Act’s Scoping Plan designed and analyzed by Hamilton College classes (hereinafter “Madison/Oneida County Survey”); and the final report from a series of Community Conversations sponsored by the Kirkland Town Library (hereinafter “KTL Community Conversations”). These sources are available by request from the Task Force. In addition, the Task Force reviewed the 2021 Yale Climate Opinion Map aggregated at the Utica-Rome metropolitan level, available on-line at <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/>.

<sup>8</sup> Marlon, J., Neyens, L. Jefferson, M. Howe, P., Mildenerger, M., and Leiserowitz, A. (2022, Feb. 23). Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2021, available on-line at <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/>

<sup>9</sup> Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2021; Madison/Oneida County Survey.

There is significantly less agreement on the appropriate response and the potential impacts of these responses. While a majority of Oneida-Madison County residents view solar energy as an important part of responding to the climate crisis (71.2%), that support declines when respondents are asked about solar in their community (62.7%).<sup>10</sup> Support for other specific interventions, such as expanding the use of electric cars through enhanced incentives or state-wide electric car goals, was even lower (48%).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, a significant minority of high school and community respondents to the LEAP survey expressed concern about the economic disruption caused by switching away from fossil fuels (25% of high school students and 33% of community respondents). Perhaps more tellingly, an even larger share of high school respondents did not have enough information to answer the question (32.9%).<sup>12</sup>

This gap in information, particularly in terms of the local costs and benefits of climate mitigation and adaptation measures, emerged in other discussions. During a Community Conversation on Solar Farms, participants were asked to identify and prioritize their questions about solar farms. Although this data comes from a small sample, the critical questions focused on the specific ways that solar farms benefit host communities, how energy from these farms is distributed, and what the overall lifecycle costs and benefits were.<sup>13</sup> A similar pattern emerged, albeit in a tangential manner, in the Hamilton College Oneida-Madison County survey. When respondents were informed that a particular climate response (Community Choice Aggregation) could result in lower energy costs, they were more supportive of the program than when it was described as targeting climate impacts alone.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that community members may not be well-informed about the economic or other benefits of climate policies.

In addition, the various community meetings and dialogues have demonstrated a gap in community understanding of New York's climate policies generally. Even the participants in these conversations, who are likely to be more engaged on climate-related issues than the general population, were unaware of critical state and local work related to energy efficiency, public transit improvements, or support for transitions to clean energy.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that the general public is likely to have a limited sense of the overall work that has been done and continues to be done by state and local governments to reduce the use of fossil fuels, limit greenhouse gas emissions, and transition to a clean energy future.

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<sup>10</sup>Madison/Oneida County Survey.

<sup>11</sup>*Id.*

<sup>12</sup> LEAP Survey.

<sup>13</sup> Solar Farm Conversation Summary.

<sup>14</sup> Madison/Oneida County Survey.

<sup>15</sup> Solar Farm Conversation Summary; Scoping Plan Conversation Summary.

Finally, the level of engagement and awareness in the area is relatively low. Although most of the respondents to the LEAP survey (56.1% of students and 81.4% of community members) reported paying close attention to climate-related news when they heard it,<sup>16</sup> a minority of Utica-Rome residents reported discussing climate issues occasionally (32%) or hearing about it in the media at least once a week (31%).<sup>17</sup> This was also reflected in the community dialogues and public outreach meetings conducted by or in collaboration with the Task Force over the past two years. Participation in these meetings was typically relatively small (20 participants or fewer) and frequently involved familiar faces or repeat players. In other words, while community members report being worried about climate change and engaged when information comes to them, far fewer are actively seeking avenues to engage on or learn more about climate issues.

## **F. Activity Planning/Proposed Plan:**

### **1. Potential Projects:**

The Task Force began its work on the Education and Engagement Plan by brainstorming a list of potential projects. These include:

- a. Leafletting/Tabling at the Clinton Farmers' Market, Clinton Arena, Sporting Events, and other public venues (distributing information about the Task Force, Village/Town campaigns, and progress/achievements)
- b. Green Energy Fair (bringing green energy companies and products, funding information, and other resources to a public fair)
- c. Heat Smart Communities Campaign (community campaign to encourage and assist homeowners and businesses to adopt air or ground source heating/cooling systems)
- d. Community Visioning Meetings (Climate-focused or broader discussion about community goals, plans for future development)
- e. Community Presentations/Dialogues on Climate Related Issues (facilitated conversations on issues of community concern, such as solar farm siting, flood mitigation and response, sidewalk expansion, or other issues tied to climate mitigation and adaptation)
- f. Social Media Programming (Facebook, Website, Instagram sites designed to promote climate information and events)
- g. Repair Café (project to provide space, tools, and volunteer experts that gather regularly to help repair items that might otherwise enter the waste stream)
- h. High School Environmental Science/Climate Science Fair (similar to Green Energy Fair, but focused on basic information about climate, individual projects to reduce impacts, and possibly careers in green energy)

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<sup>16</sup> LEAP Survey.

<sup>17</sup> Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2021.

- i. Composting/Sustainable Gardening and Yard Maintenance (expanding Green Bucket program to more Village/Town residents)
- j. Adaptation Planning, such as Community Participation in Managing Waterways (Opportunity for community input on adaptation planning in coordination with the Public Works departments of the Town and Village.)
- k. Developing a Sidewalk Plan/Proposal (community mapping exercise, community discussion to provide input into Complete Streets programming)
- l. Public Transit “Bus-In” (publicized group bus ride with information about access, cost, routes, and climate benefits at the beginning or end of the ride; potentially targeted toward high school and college students)
- m. Adaptation Education/Training Projects (hands-on demonstrations of adaptation-related work, such as creating rain gardens, installing and using rain barrels, creating drip irrigation systems, home composting, etc.)
- n. Electric Vehicle entry in local parades for the Fourth of July, the Shoppers’ Stroll at Thanksgiving, or other local events (raises profile of electric vehicles to a broader audience)
- o. An event explaining sustainable farming methods with input from local farmers.

**G. Evaluation/Selection of Priority Projects:**

1. Implemented Projects (prior to 2022):

a. Electric Car Rally/Info Session:

The Electric Car show was a priority project and was completed in June 2021 and June 2022. Although the individual behavior targeted – purchase of an electric or hybrid car – requires a significant investment that may be outside the reach of many people and requires a long-term change to attain significant climate benefits, the reasons prioritizing this project outweighed these considerations.

This project was prioritized because it targeted car enthusiasts, a group that might not otherwise engage with climate change issues (Criterion F); focused on a positive solution (buying an electric or hybrid car) that reduces emissions (Criterion C) and generates significant economic benefits for the individual purchaser (Criterion D); provided practical information for people considering a switch to electric vehicles, including federal and state tax rebates and local electric charging stations (Criterion D); and maximizes Task Force resources by piggybacking on an existing event and relying on the knowledge and experiences of Task Force members (Criterion I). This event was supported via Town and Village resolution.

b. Tabling/Literature Distribution at Farmers’ Market and Community Events:

The Task Force decided to prioritize information distribution/tabling at the Clinton Farmers’ Market (June through August) in the summers of 2021, 2022, and 2023 and at the Clinton Art and Music Festival (August) in both 2021 and 2022. People come to

browse the vendor tables at these popular events from all around the area, meaning that the reach of tabling is potentially far broader than the climate-focused events.

This project was prioritized because it could reach individuals not likely to come to events on environmental or climate change issues (Criterion F); increases public awareness of the CSC Task Force and the work being done by the Town and Village (Criterion G); and took advantage of Task Force members' interests and availability (Criterion I). This activity also had the capacity to build Task Force capacity by drawing new members or partners to the group. This action was supported by Town and Village representatives on the Task Force and by the Village providing needed assurances to the Chamber of Commerce to allow tabling in Summer 2023.

## 2. Priority Projects Being Implemented (2022-2023):

### a. Heat Smart Campaign:

The Village and Town worked with the Mohawk Valley Heat Smart Campaign to launch a Heat Smart Campaign, promoting the use of air source and geothermal heat pumps to heat and cool homes and businesses. The Heat Smart Campaign began in April 2022 with a goal of having at least five residents in the Village and five residents in the Town replace their existing heating system with heat pumps or geothermal systems.

The kick-off meeting was held at the Kirkland Town Library in the Village center and included an initial presentation by the Heat Smart Mohawk Valley team, self-introductions from vendors, and an opportunity for community members to view equipment and ask questions of the vendors. A second public event was held at the VFW Hall in Clark Mills, a more rural and lower income area of the Town of Kirkland, in October 2022. Task Force members distributed Heat Smart brochures during tabling events. The campaign was also part of a climate-related educational event in October 2023.

As of summer 2023, the Heat Smart Campaign had achieved its goal, with five confirmed adoptions in the village of Clinton and nine in the Town of Kirkland. Additional adoptions are likely, since not all vendors were surveyed. However, the Task Force plans to continue the campaign into 2020 with an additional educational event in spring 2024, after major new federal incentives for heat smart technology are finalized under the Inflation Reduction Act.

This project was chosen as a primary education and outreach project for this year for several reasons. The Heat Smart campaign prioritized areas of greatest return (Criterion D), focused on solutions related to climate mitigation (Criterion C), and involved a discussion of basic climate science, educating and expanding public understanding of climate change (Criterion A). The Heat Smart campaign also took advantage of an existing organization, Heat Smart Mohawk Valley, with the skills, knowledge, and staff to ensure that the campaign was a success (Criterion I). The Town and Village supported this campaign by adopting resolutions in support, linking to promotional materials, and sending representatives to attend the meetings.

**Goal/Success Metric:** Help five Village residents and five Town residents replace their traditional heating/cooling systems with air source heat pumps.

b. Adaptation Community Education Event:

On October 3, 2023, the Task Force held a community forum on local adaptation to climate change. A total of 33 people attended the event, where Matt Syke, Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, and Amy Wynant, Otsego County Conservation Association, gave brief presentations on climate change adaptation options at both the community and individual level. The information presented included a description of the state and federal programs available to help with the adaptation options described.

After the presentation, Aaron Strong, Hamilton College, led a discussion during which attendees were able to ask questions and explore priority actions for the community and individuals. The major themes that emerged from this discussion included the need for better communication from municipal governments to the general public on the issue of adaptation and related topics; the potential to create a community tool lending program to help residents undertake some of the adaptation options presented; and the need for cooling centers within the Town and Village.

This project was chosen because it focused on solutions related to adaptation (Criterion C) and expanded public understanding of climate change and adaptation needs (Criterion A). In addition, the project drew on the skills and interests of Task Force members and our active partners (Criterion I). The Town and Village supported this event by linking to promotional materials and attending the event.

**Goal/Success Metric:** Draw at least 20 participants to this meeting with at least five new faces in the room.

c. Tabling/Literature Distribution at Public Events:

Because of the success of past efforts, the Task Force plans to continue to staff an information table at the Clinton Farmers' Market in Summer 2024 and at other public events, such as the Art and Music Festival, as permitted. Task Force members will provide basic information on climate impacts, mitigation and adaptation measures individuals can take, the Village and Town's efforts to become certified Climate Smart communities, climate-related meetings and campaigns, and ways to become involved in this work. We will rely on giveaways, raffles, and similar attention-grabbing devices to catch the attention of event visitors and try to engage people in general conversation about the climate.

This project was chosen as a priority because it increases community awareness of the climate-related work of the Town, Village, and Task Force (Criterion G); may reach new or previously disengaged groups (Criterion F), maximizes engagement, given the number of visitors at the Clinton Farmers' Market and similar events (Criterion E); expands understanding of climate change to the extent that visitors engage with Task Force members (Criterion A); and takes advantage of the interests and skills of Task

Force members, many of whom have tabled for other organizations in the past (Criterion I). Often, the Task Force shares a table with other environmentally focused organizations, such as Kirkland Trails or Wild Ones, an organization devoted to restoring native plants to the area. These collaborations reduce the time and staffing required from the Task Force and potentially expand our reach to people interested in hiking or gardening, but not necessarily interested in or informed about climate change. The Town and Village supported this activity as described in Section III.G.1.b above.

**Goal/Success Metric:** discuss/provide climate-related information to 50 people and add 5-10 names to our e-mail distribution list each summer.

### 3. Schedule for Implementation of Priority Projects:

As described above, the three priority projects chosen by the Task Force – the Heat Smart campaign, the Adaptation Community Education Event, and the Tabling/Literature Distribution at Public Events – are already underway and one has been completed.

- The Adaptation Educational Event was a stand-alone event. It was held on October 3, 2023 and is now complete.
- The Heat Smart Campaign is on-going. It began in October 2022 and will continue through at least Spring 2024.
- The Tabling/Literature Distribution project is on-going. It began in Summer 2021 and is expected to continue at least through Summer 2024.

### 4. Post-implementation Evaluation of Projects/Plan Update:

Education and Outreach projects will be evaluated annually. The Task Force will assess whether the numeric and/or qualitative goals set for each project were met and whether the criteria that drove selection of the project were furthered. Based on that assessment, the Task Force will determine whether project goals have been met and the project should be ended, or whether the project will either meet the original goal or provide continuing benefits if it is extended for another year. Finally, the Task Force will consider whether projects being extended should be modified to address shortcomings or increase overall benefits and whether the success metrics for the extended project should be adjusted.

When a project is determined to have met its goals and to be at its natural end, the Task Force may choose a replacement project. To do so, the Task Force will assess its capacity and review the current list of potential projects. Replacement projects will be chosen based on the selection criterion listed above. Projects that target audiences or highlight issues not addressed in prior years may also be prioritized. When projects are formally adopted, the Task Force will set success metrics for the work. As projects are



completed and removed from the potential projects list, new ideas may be added. At minimum, the review process shall occur annually during the active life of the Task Force.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Village of Clinton and Town of Kirkland are committed to building a sustainable, thriving community in the face of climate change. Since 2020, both municipalities have taken important steps toward reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions and creating a more resilient future through adaptation measures. Many local organizations and individuals within our community, including the members of the Climate Smart Community Task Force, have been working on environmental and climate-related issues for much longer. These individuals and organizations represent an important resource.

in terms of knowledge, experience, and dedication and the collaborations sparked by the Climate Smart Community program will move us closer to our goal of a clean, renewable future.

However, the message that climate is changing and action is required has not been heard or understood by all community members. Without active outreach, education, and engagement, the broader community may remain unaware of the critical nature of the issue, the available solutions, or the steps that have already been taken to address the issue. The climate crisis is an all-hands-on-deck situation. Building a sustainable, resilient, and thriving community requires input from all corners and broad support, if not direct involvement. This Community Engagement and Education Plan is our blueprint for building community understanding and drawing the broad collaboration needed to address the climate challenge.