

St. Lawrence County Environmental Management Council
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Draft

MEETING MINUTES

January 16, 2019

**2nd - Floor Conference Room, Public Safety Complex
49½ Court Street, Canton, New York**

Action items in bold italics / Motions underlined.

Blue boxes indicate internal links to sections of these Minutes.

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Joe Brant called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Since this was the first official EMC meeting for new member Rod Tozzi, and since the two guests have expressed an interest in serving on the EMC, all present introduced themselves.

2. **Roll Call, Determination of Quorum:** A quorum WAS NOT present.

Members present: Catherine Bennett; Joseph Brant, *Chair*; Ryan Burkum; Don O'Shea, *Vice-Chair*; Tiernan Smith; Nicole Terminelli, *BOL Liaison*; Rod Tozzi; Pat Whalen, *Secretary*.

Members absent: Jennifer Berbrich; Richard Marshall; Sue Rau; Lance Rudiger.

Guest(s): Larry Denesha, BOL; Toni Kennedy; Matilda Larson, Planning Office; Lee Willbanks.

Staff: John Tenbusch.

All present introduced themselves. L. Denesha reported at this time that he will no longer serve as BOL liaison with the EMC; Larry introduced Nicole Terminelli - District 14 (Massena) as the new BOL liaison.

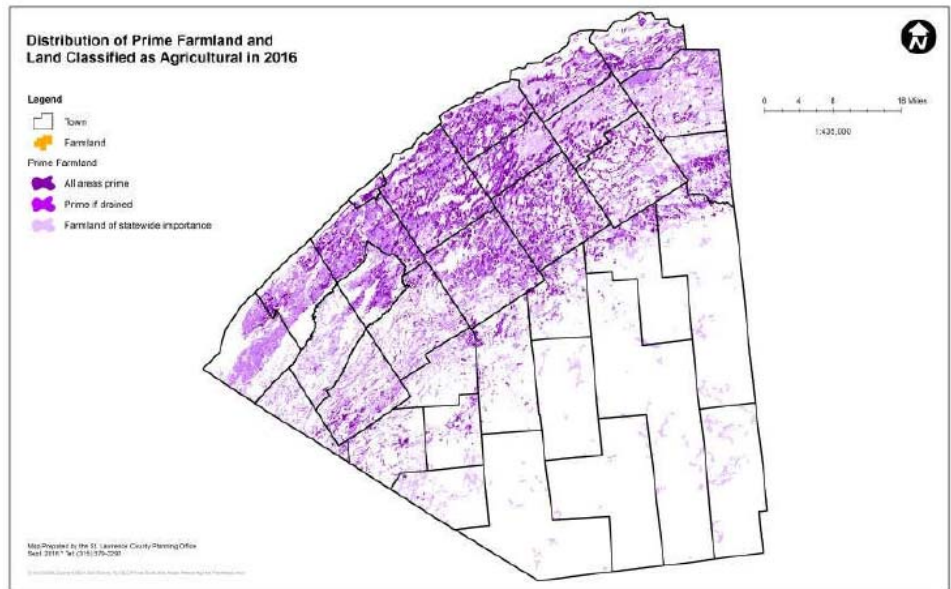
3. **Acceptance of Order of Business, Items for New Business, and Items for Unfinished Business:** Due to lack of quorum, this could not be acted upon.
4. **Approval of Minutes of the December 2018 EMC Meeting:** Due to lack of quorum, this could not be acted upon.
5. **Hearings, Comments from the Public.**

The invited speaker was Matilda Larson, Planner II with the County Planning Office. Matilda spoke about "Minimizing Development Impacts to Farmland".

Larson explained that only 36% of soils across the County are suitable for crop production. Only 19% of land in the entire County is considered "prime" or "prime if drained" farmland. These lands are concentrated in the St. Lawrence River Valley. While other lands can be, and often are, farmed, they tend to be less productive, increasing production costs.

Matilda reported that Gov. Cuomo, in his State of the State message this week, committed NYS to generating 50% of energy from renewable sources by 2023. This will require the installation of 3,000 MW of solar panels by 2023. (Elsewhere, she reported that construction of 1 MW of solar production consumes 6 acres of land; thus 3,000 MW of solar will require 18,000 acres of land.)

Larson reported that the type of land favored by solar developers is similar to prime farmland: flat and well-drained; not in a flood plain; access to power; at least 20 acres. Since land is relatively cheap in St. Lawrence County, Matilda explained that development for solar energy will inevitably compete with agriculture for prime farmland. As examples, she noted several recent proposals for solar arrays in the County (4.7 MW on 25 acres; 1 MW of 5.5 acres; 180 MW on 1,600 acres).



Larson recommended that local communities plan to deal with solar developments. She reported that communities should be aware of where their prime soils exist; what fields have seen infrastructure investments including tiling ditches and diversions; etc. Matilda reported that local land use codes could be revised to include site planning elements including:

- Concentrating solar panels in ways to minimize their footprint, leaving as much farmland open for farming as possible.
- Stockpiling topsoil, so that it can be re-used on site or nearby.
- Be aware of different anchoring techniques (subsurface footers; ballast footers; etc.) Prompt developers to keep soil disturbances to a minimum.
- Access roads should be built along edges of fields.
- Eliminate fencing; gates at road access points should suffice.
- Require decommissioning bond.
- Allow small-livestock or apiary access; or other ways to encourage agricultural activities.

Matilda suggested that communities consider negotiating a Payment In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT) agreement with solar developers; she thought that the County's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) might be in a position to assist with negotiating PILOTs.

Larson also suggested that communities market parcels that could be repurposed for solar development; these might include: former parking lots or covered landfills; former quarries; remediated brownfields. Matilda also suggested that communities might encourage "Community Solar" projects, so that local residents can invest in solar and receive benefits (e.g., cost savings) even if they cannot place solar panels on their individual properties.

Chair Brant thanked Ms. Larson for her presentation, and presented her with EMC note cards as a small thank-you. He called a five-minute recess. The meeting resumed at 7:25 PM.

6. Report by Representative of the Board of Legislators. Nicole Terminelli reported that discussion about solar development in the County has already occurred at BOL meetings.

7. Reports by EMC Members on Conversations with County Legislators: None.

- Tenbusch distributed the current “EMC: BOL Contacts List”. With the recent election for BOL and resulting new BOL members, and with the current turnover on the EMC, several changes have taken place.

8. Report of the Committees:

a. Executive Committee: No meeting; no report.

b. Conservation of Resources Committee (CRC): T. Smith gave the Committee report; see attached (includes Fish Survey tabulation).

- i. P. Whalen noted that DEC has several fishing survey projects that might dovetail with the EMC project. He spoke with several DEC staff; they tend to agree that there seem to be fewer small fish. Whalen stated that DEC would be willing to review drafts of any future fishing surveys the EMC might want to conduct.
- ii. C. Bennett reported that she has followed up on the idea of “Trashpresso”, which had been discussed during the Committee meeting. She expressed enthusiasm that the EMC might be able to bring this “waste-plastic-to-tile-building-material” project to St. Lawrence County. Several other EMC members also expressed enthusiasm.

c. Environment + Economy Committee (E+E): R. Burkum gave the Committee report. See attached.

d. Invasive Species Committee (ISC): D. O’Shea gave the Committee report; see attached.

e. Watershed Management Committee (WMC). No meeting occurred in January.

9. Report of the Staff: Tenbusch reported on several items:

- On December 12th, the Planning Office received word that the County has been awarded \$1 million to help low-income households address problems with lead in their older homes.
- The St. Lawrence River Shoreline Resilience Study will hold a “Stakeholders Meeting” in Ogdensburg at the Dobisky Center on Feb. 5th at 10 AM.
- The County Planning Office has assumed management of the County Transit System.

10. Unfinished Business: None.

11. New Business: None.

12. Announcements:

- Tenbusch announced that Save The River will hold its 30th Annual Winter Conference in Clayton on Saturday February 2nd. He distributed registration forms for anyone interested to attend.
- Tenbusch reported that St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) will hold several weeks of cutting and peeling ash trees. The Tribe's Environmental Division had girdled 200 ash trees in 2018. These trees will be cut down beginning Feb. 4 – 8; the following week (Feb 11 – 15) will see further cutting, and peeling off bark from cut samples to look for EABs; the third week (Feb 18 – 22) will see further peeling and other activities to finish the project. **VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED AT EACH STEP. Please contact J. Tenbusch to volunteer.**

13. **Message to the Board of Legislators:** EMC members were asked to let their assigned BOL member know about the importance of prime farmland in the County, and the need to conserve such land in the face of solar development. They can also talk about re-using previously-disturbed land for solar development. They can also mention that Community Solar might offer benefits to individual communities.

14. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned by consensus at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Patrick Whalen

Secretary

Minutes written by J. Tenbusch