

St. Lawrence County Planning Office
STAFF WORK REPORT
February 2023



ADVISORY BROAD SUPPORT

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board. On the 2nd, Matilda participated in a “Planning with Agrivoltaics in Mind” webinar hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension and Penn State University. On the 9th, the Board participated in a joint meeting with the County Planning Board to discuss their shared concern about the siting of solar energy facilities on farmland. During the week of the 13th, Matilda and Lisa drafted and distributed legal notices to official newspapers, and to municipalities announcing the annual review for Agricultural Districts 1 and 2 during the month of March. On the 16th, Matilda participated in Cooperative Extension’s Local Foods Advisory Board meeting at the Learning Farm. On the 28th, Matilda participated in NYSERDA’s webinar on the rollout of its Energy Storage Facility roadmap, and attended a community meeting to discuss solar energy facilities at the Canton Free Library.

County Planning Board (CPB). The CPB conducted a joint board meeting with the Ag and Farmland Protection Board, where Jason and Matilda delivered an overview of General Municipal Law, and Agriculture and Markets Law, and how they intersect on the siting of solar energy facilities on agricultural land. After the AFPB adjourned, the CPB reconvened and heard a project review for a retroactive special use permit for an existing sawmill in the Rural District in the Town of Brasher. The project was approved with a condition and non-binding recommendations.

Environmental Management Council (EMC). The EMC met on February 15th. The speaker was Jason Pfothauer, SLC Planning Director. Jason spoke about the increase in the number of solar-panel installations in St. Lawrence County over the past 10 years. Jason reported that the County Planning Board has reviewed 39 proposals for construction of solar-panel facilities in the County since 2014. These proposed facilities would generate approx. 228 MW of electricity, and use 4,990 acres of land (mostly prime farmland). In 2022, the County Planning Board recommended disapproval for six of nine projects reviewed.

Staff have created a Facebook page for the EMC. Please check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/St-Lawrence-County-Environmental-Management-Council-105829918672342>

Fair Housing Task Force. On the 10th, Matilda attended CNY Fair Housing webinar on Exclusionary Zoning in Onondaga County. On the 28th, the Fair Housing Task Force met both in person, and via Zoom to discuss training topics for a Fair Housing event that will be held in April at the Dobisky Center in Ogdensburg.

BOARD OF LEGISLATORS

SLC Water/Waste Water Infrastructure American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding Initiative. In December, funding recommendations were made to the ARPA Committee and County Administrator by the review team. 15 applications from 14 municipalities were received for this program. \$3 million

in funding has been allocated by the BOL; requests totaled \$6.9 million. Funding recommendations were presented, discussed and approved at the January Finance Committee meeting. Staff have issued contracts to the municipalities awarded funds.

Countywide Broadband Assessment. Staff continue to work with a BOL committee to develop an implementation plan for the completed broadband study. In February, staff participated in the pre-proposal meeting and assisted with the Q&A process for RFP 2023-04 “Expanding Access to Broadband in St. Lawrence County,” which has a proposal due date of 3/7/2023. Staff also addressed follow-up to the County’s “Bulk Challenge” to the FCC National Broadband Map submitted in January and participated in a regional listening session with representatives of the NYS ConnectALL Office.

OCF Repurpose Committee. Staff have been assigned to the County’s Ogdensburg Correctional Facility Repurpose Committee. The group met last on February 17th and took a tour of the facility. Multiple local, County and State representatives were in attendance.

COMMUNITY / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

The Planning Office currently operates two awards that address housing rehabilitation needs:

- SLC-CARES award to conduct housing rehabilitation for populations vulnerable to COVID-19. During October, the Planning Office requested, and was granted, a six-month extension until mid-March 2023 in order to complete the grant.
- The fourth round of the Countywide Housing Rehabilitation program (CHRP 4).

Lead Hazard Abatement Program. This \$1 million award from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is providing lead-based paint stabilization, or abatement assistance, to low- and moderate-income households throughout the county. By the end of February, the Planning Office reports that 19 units have been completed, 1 unit is under construction, and 14 clients are in an application phase.

On February 1st, HUD conducted a virtual monitoring inspection of files related to the Lead Hazard Abatement Program. While a written report from HUD has not yet been received, staff were informed by HUD representatives that the program appears to be well run.

GRANTS

Grants Notice Distribution. The Grants Notice is distributed to County Department Heads, Legislators, Superintendents of Schools, local municipal officials and approximately 350 additional individuals representing organizations throughout the North Country.

Septic Repair Program. The County has funds from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) to repair or replace deficient septic tanks within 250 feet of the St. Lawrence River in communities west of Ogdensburg, and along the lower portion of the Raquette River (from Norfolk through Massena) and the Little River (Towns of Clifton and Fine). To date, 23 projects have been completed.

PLANNING MATTERS

Homeless Housing Working Group. There is an ad-hoc group working to address issues of homelessness in St. Lawrence County. No updates in February.

Large Scale Solar. EDF Renewables announced to local media about their intent to file its 94C application for the Rich Road Solar Energy Center in the Town of Canton. The filing date triggers a 30-day window for area stakeholders to request intervenor funds to officially offer comments on the project to Administrative Law Judges who will review the application. As of the end of February no formal application has been filed.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

County Transit System. On the first, Matilda participated in a staffing transition phone call with her former and new Department of Transportation representatives. On the 3rd, Matilda met with former intern Aubrey Ahern who has been retained by The Arc to update its Public Transit bus schedules in GTFS for the NY511 website. On the 8th, Matilda met with Purchasing Department staff to review and finalize four RFPs to outfit the County's Public Transit bus fleet with technology. On the 14th, Matilda met with The Arc dispatch staff to review how to format and calculate STOA data in Excel. On the 16th, Matilda attended a Public Transit Task Force Meeting at the Fairfield Inn. During the week of the 20th and 28th, Matilda reviewed and finalized fleet work order expenses for 2022.