

Green Circle Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mid-Hudson Region's natural resource economy is thriving, making significant contributions to the region's quality of life and its ability to attract outside investment and create jobs. Investments made by Gov. Andrew Cuomo for the previous four years have spurred an era of growth in this sector, yet more needs to be done to fully capitalize on these trends and leverage their benefits.

Tourism—the fourth-largest industry in New York State (*Journal News*)—remains a primary beneficiary of Green Circle investments, with the region contributing \$4.75 billion in economic activity annually (Hudson Valley Tourism, 2013), including \$184 million alone from recreational boating in the Hudson River (Cornell University Department of Natural Resources). Long Island Sound, partially within the Mid-Hudson Region, also is a major driver, generating \$8.91 billion in value to local economies annually (Long Island Sound Study Biennial Report 2011-2012). For the 12-month period ending May 31, the website of Historic Hudson Valley experienced over 200,000 annual visitors, with a peak occurring in March, when the site received over 5,700 visits in a single week. In the multi-region Catskills, all outdoor recreational activities (reliant on public and/or private protected lands) attracted 2,496,753 visitors, had an estimated impact of nearly \$115 million on the region's economy and supported 2,413 jobs (Economic Valuation Study for Public Lands in the Central Catskills: Economic Impact and Opportunities from Outdoor Recreational Activities, 2012). Collectively, these benefits are part of New York State's outdoor recreation industries valued at \$57.3 billion (Outdoor Industry Association, 2013), with clean water, scenic views, natural habitat, public waterfronts and a healthy environment the foundation of such recreation.

Agriculture in the Mid-Hudson is a major economic driver, generating \$10 billion of overall output (Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University, 2012), with tremendous potential for growth when one considers that unmet demand for fresh, local food in New York City is estimated to be at least \$600 million per year (NYC Common Council 2010 "Foodworks" Report/City Council Speaker Christine Quinn). Continued support of farmers' access to markets, farmland preservation through an efficiently managed NYS Agriculture & Markets program and other measures assisting the new generation of young farmers, along with a favorable tax and policy environment, will ensure future success.

Sustainable energy is a quickly growing element of the Mid-Hudson's Green Circle economy. Investments in sustainable energy infrastructure realize strong economic returns and important co-benefits. According to the 2014 NYS Draft Energy Plan, electricity demand is expected to grow annually by 0.7 percent between 2012 and 2030 to meet demand for all sectors in New York. Investments in energy infrastructure now and in the near future will have long-lasting implications on our ability to meet the state's GHG reduction goals. An under-supply of production in the Mid-Hudson increases the need for careful consideration of energy production investment. Guidance—tracked by appropriate metrics—is needed to ensure sound investment decisions are made. The sector represents \$153 million in direct economic activity and creates thousands of jobs in New York each year while reducing energy costs to consumers by over \$19 million annually (2014, Westchester Solar Initiative).

Green infrastructure, defined as intact natural systems (open space, wetlands, beaches, etc.) as well as designed natural landscapes and technologies, filter groundwater, mitigate flooding, provide habitat,

and create a variety of employment and downtown development opportunities in both rural and urban settings. For each \$1 million spent on water infrastructure, 26 jobs are created (Construction Industry Council of Westchester and Hudson Valley). Development of parks returns \$5 to the local community for every \$1 invested (2010, Parks and Trails NY), while the state's own Environmental Protection Fund—the stimulus for many Green Circle projects—returns \$7 to the economy for every \$1 invested in land and water conservation.

The Green Circle strategy has been informed through stakeholder input and established municipal and private sector plans for the region, including Ulster County's Renewable Energy Executive Order, Dutchess County's Greenway Connections (enabled through its Partnership for Manageable Growth), the Shawangunk Mountain Scenic Byway Plan, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress' Food Hub Study, and Scenic Hudson's Foodshed Conservation Plan and Sea Level Rise Mapper. These studies provide dual benefits—they are multiregional in scope, connecting the Mid-Hudson to the Southern Tier, Capital District, New York City and Long Island Sound.

In addition, Green Circle strategies are heavily informed by state and federal plans for action that integrate the needs of multiple economic development regions. They include the NYS Open Space Plan as well as the Hudson River Estuary Program Action Agenda, Hudson River Valley Greenway Plan, NYS Draft Energy Plan and the federal Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan—all of which are currently under revision. Further, the federal NY-NJ Harbor and Estuary Program has made an important programmatic shift, embracing a watershed-wide/total estuary approach that unites three economic development regions under the management of a non-governmental partner.

The Green Circle Committee has retained its focus on a broad set of strategies that benefit the entire region, including waterfront development; tourism, arts and culture; artisanal food and beverage; agriculture; natural resources and the environment; sustainable energy; and water and wastewater infrastructure. The committee also recommends that five cross-cutting themes be advanced by the council and New York State in 2015:

- Enhance language in the Green Circle Goal to include water and wastewater infrastructure and sustainable energy infrastructure needs.
- Prioritize investments that represent synergies among Green Circle and broader MHREDC goals, including:
 - Investments in trail connectivity and nearby natural resource protection that help align tourism, downtown development, linkage to mass transit and quality-of-life opportunities in the region; export our region's tourism brand to global customers; and create access to our world-class natural resources, including for veteran populations;
 - Development of policies and programs that provide direct support to farmers to achieve a stable farming future in the Capital District and Mid-Hudson Region; meet the tremendous demand for fresh, local food in New York City; and export artisanal food and beverages to emerging global markets;
 - Prioritization of water infrastructure investments—including wastewater infrastructure, upgrading of existing drinking water facilities and open space protection—to achieve a swimmable and fishable Hudson River in the Capital District, and Mid-Hudson Region, a swimmable and fishable Long Island Sound, and business-ready downtown centers and waterfronts;
 - Establishment of “sustainable energy” metrics to guide future energy investments.

- Continue NYS support and growth for programs that fund Green Circle Priorities, including the Environmental Protection Fund, NYSERDA and the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), and ensure expeditious and efficient management of the Ag & Markets farmland preservation program to leverage private and federal dollars.
- Promote demonstrable political leadership to broaden efforts to ensure a swimmable Hudson River and vibrant waterfronts in the Capital District, Mid-Hudson Region and New York City through an enhanced PCB cleanup; and protection of natural resources through continued advocacy by New York State to the federal Department of Transportation to minimize risks associated with the transport of Bakken and tar sands crude oils.
- Sustain support for bills advanced by the NYS Legislature that would create an environment conducive to Green Circle projects in the future.

BUILDING ON OUR MOMENTUM—SUCCESS WITH GREEN CIRCLE STRATEGIES

SUCCESS: WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT—Downtowns and waterfronts revitalized while communities address sea level rise and plan for future storm events

Issue Summary: Building on the Green Circle Committee’s 2013 recommendation, the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council prioritized investments in downtown areas consistent with the Smart Growth Public Policy Infrastructure Act, thereby helping to make our urban areas more attractive to a new generation of workers. Waterfronts remain a focal point for development and conservation in many Hudson River, Delaware River and Long Island Sound communities as local governments grapple with the prospect of future severe storm events and sea level rise. Promoting waterfront access also presents an opportunity to address the needs of disabled veteran populations who may require special accommodations to fully appreciate natural resources.

Highlights:

Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Step 3 Implementation Plan for Rondout Waterfront, Kingston (Ulster County). The City of Kingston is awarding a \$430,000 contract to Perkins+Will for planning and design services to produce a Brownfield Redevelopment Implementation Plan, a Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (FGEIS) and a Market Conditions Update for the Implementation Strategy of the Kingston Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) involving more than 70 acres along Rondout Creek out to the Hudson River. The project will take place over the next 20 months, with completion anticipated by March 2016. Funding is provided through the NYS Department of State (DOS) BOA Step 3 program and local match sources.

Hudson Landing Promenade Funded to Jumpstart Development, Kingston (Ulster County). The Hudson Landing Promenade project, a public-private, inter-municipal partnership, will break ground next year thanks to a CFA grant through DOS for a one-mile-long promenade and trail along the Hudson River waterfront. The award was for \$1.2 million for construction, with a \$1.2-million match provided by the developer. The developer’s agreement is in place, with the Open Space Management Plan in draft form.

Saw Mill River Daylighting, Phase III, Yonkers (Westchester County). The City of Yonkers continued to build on CFA grants to daylight (uncover) the Saw Mill River and revitalize its urban center, creating a new park—a major attraction within walking distance of the city’s Metro-North station. The project also

has attracted millions of dollars in investments in downtown businesses in a range of sectors and installation of a solar system on a repurposed former factory near the park. Construction is underway on the \$5-million Mill Street Courtyard project (Phase II) and plans have been laid for Phase III, which will bring the wave of revitalization further into the city center.

Central Hudson Downtown Revitalization Grants Attract Public/Private Investment and Help Maintain Vibrant Urban Cores. Projects located in the cities of Newburgh, Poughkeepsie and Kingston and the Village of Wappingers Falls collectively received \$1 million in downtown revitalization grant funds from Central Hudson. Matching funds were provided by not-for-profit partners and local municipalities. Funding leveraged capital investments in downtown anchor institutions and improved the urban streetscape, encouraged further development of local businesses and arts organizations, and helped achieve local economic development and property redevelopment goals.

Tidal Flooding and Sea Level Rise Planning. Thanks to Gov. Cuomo and Congressional leadership in securing substantial federal funds, more than 100 communities in NYS were eligible for federal/state relief through the NY Rising program. However, only a few communities in the Mid-Hudson Region have participated in the program—despite suffering significant damage from severe storm events. While progress is being made in seven designated communities spanning the Mid-Hudson Region and in the Catskill Forest Preserve in Ulster, Rockland, Orange, Delaware and Greene counties through the Community Reconstruction Zone program, communities on the Long Island Sound waterfront in Westchester County and the Hudson River waterfront in the Mid-Hudson Region have been proactive in addressing recovery and planning issues on their own, with collaboration and support from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and DOS when resources are available.

Building on the successful 2012 effort in Kingston, community-driven processes for waterfront planning are underway in villages in Rockland and Greene counties. Local stakeholders in collaboration with Scenic Hudson and NYS are refining tools to assess flooding risks and vulnerabilities, evaluate adaptation options, and prepare general and neighborhood-specific recommendations.

Previous outreach conducted by Scenic Hudson, Historic Hudson River Towns, the DOS and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in 2012 in the Town of Ossining resulted in the Ossining Planning Board asking developers of the Harbor Square waterfront project to raise its first-floor elevation. The developer heeded this advice and the project—now more resilient to flooding and sea level rise—broke ground in June.

SUCCESS: TOURISM, ARTS & CULTURE—Trails connect population centers and tourism destinations

Issue Summary: From rail trails to greenway trails and water trails, NYS, counties, local government, parks organizations and land trusts are collaborating to connect population centers and mass-transit with recreational opportunities, downtown retail and outdoor equipment rental/tour businesses, and farm stands, restaurants, distilleries, breweries, and wineries and tasting rooms that are capitalizing on the growth in the artisanal food industry. Opportunities to export and reinforce our tourism brand by ensuring top-quality experiences are significant and have been supported through several artisanal food summits in Albany.

Highlights:

Walkway Over the Hudson, Poughkeepsie (Dutchess County) and Lloyd (Ulster County). Construction of the elevator at Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park is nearing completion. It will provide a

major sightseeing attraction that allows MTA and Amtrak rail riders to access the pedestrian bridge from Waryas Park on the Poughkeepsie waterfront. Plans also are being laid to improve the western anchor of this popular park with development of a visitor center and comfort facilities (including supplying the site with municipal water). Across the river, Ulster County is providing leadership to complete a new connection in the Hudson Valley Rail Trail; it eventually will allow cyclists and pedestrians to take advantage of newly-laid plans for stronger public access on the west side of Walkway Over the Hudson and connect the Walkway to the Town of New Paltz and the broader, county-wide rail trail system.

Testimonial Gateway Trailhead Project, New Paltz (Ulster County). The Mohonk Preserve is collaborating with Ulster County, the Town of New Paltz and other anchor institutions on several connectivity and trail initiatives, including the Testimonial Gateway trailhead project, the New Paltz Flats Trail project and a UCAT bus loop route linking the Village of New Paltz, Mohonk Preserve and Minnewaska State Park.

Ashokan Reservoir Trail (Ulster County). The linkages described in the two previous highlights are slated to become part of a larger connection between the Walkway and the Ashokan Reservoir through a recently announced collaboration between Ulster County and the DEP that will result in the creation of a public trail along the reservoir as a signature element of the county's proposed Multi-Use Trail System.

Ulster County proposes local open space and recreation bond. Spur trail connections and investments in related open spaces and recreational infrastructure will be further enabled by a \$3-million bond that has been authorized by the County Executive and Legislature. Linkages with the potential to benefit from this fund and the CFA process are present in the Black Creek-John Burroughs Trail Corridor in the towns of Lloyd and Esopus, and between Rosendale Trestle/Joppenberg Mountain, businesses in downtown Rosendale, Green Line Park in Kingston and the former Williams Lake Resort property.

Hudson Fjord Trail advances, Cold Spring (Putnam County) and Fishkill (Dutchess County). The multi-agency, local-county-state, public-private collaboration on the Hudson Fjord Trail implemented Phase I and took a major step forward in developing conceptual designs and site plans for Phase II, as well as construction of the Washburn Trailhead parking lot. This initiative will connect Metro-North stations in Cold Spring and Beacon via an off-road hiking and bicycling trail paralleling State Route 9D.

U.S. Military Academy and Cold Spring Area Chamber of Commerce tours. The U.S. Military Academy at West Point collaborated with the Cold Spring Area Chamber of Commerce to commence tours of the village's Main Street and the recently completed West Point Foundry Preserve, which has received CFA grants in previous years. On the Cold Spring waterfront, a new paddle sport operation—Hudson River Expeditions—opened for business, using popular Foundry Dock Park as the launching place for kayak tours of the Hudson Highlands and Bannerman's Island.

Overnight stays enhanced, Peekskill (Westchester County). The popularity of waterfront communities is fueling overnight lodging opportunities that support our tourism economy. The newly opened Holiday Inn Express in Peekskill, located at Fleischmann's Pier, is within walking distance of the Peekskill Metro-North station, a Hudson River dock, the Westchester RiverWalk and the city's riverfront park, including an extension (currently under construction and jointly developed by Scenic Hudson and the city) onto a cleaned-up brownfield site.

Westchester Riverwalk park makes connections (Westchester County). Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow advanced plans to improve pedestrian circulation in Losee Park and provide a critical connection to the Westchester Riverwalk, while Lyndhurst (the former home of railroad tycoon Jay Gould) completed its aqueduct trail. Westchester waterfront destinations along the trail route also were enhanced. In

addition, in January the federal government announced that the Irvington Historic District was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Edith Read County Park dune restoration, Rye (Westchester County). This site provided a buffer that prevented significant damage to habitats and ecosystems at Playland Park from Superstorm Sandy. And for the first time in over 40 years 2,500 acres of shellfish beds were opened in Hempstead Harbor on the north shore of Long Island, spurring commercial and recreational fishing.

SUCCESS: ARTISANAL FOOD AND BEVERAGE & AGRICULTURE—Farm and food economies boosted through local-state-federal, public-private collaboration

Issue Summary: Food and farming is a cornerstone of the Hudson Valley's economy and quality of life. Agriculture and artisanal food and beverage in the Hudson Valley are thriving as farm-related businesses, community groups, not-for-profits and consumers rally behind a Hudson Valley brand. This energy is being fed by Gov. Cuomo's strong leadership in Albany through the Fresh Connect initiative and food industry summits focused on NYS products such as wine, beer, spirits, fermented cider, yogurt and dairy products. A major turning point was the recent issuance of a new RFP by the Department of Agriculture & Markets for the long-inactive Farmland Protection Program, made possible by an enhanced Environmental Protection Fund. The NYS budget also reaffirmed the state's commitment to new farm businesses through a \$1 million Young Farmers NY initiative that can provide innovation grants up to \$50,000 to help start or expand agriculture businesses. On the federal level, New York's delegation rallied to support key market access, fruit and produce export, and conservation measures through the 2014 Farm Bill. Significant opportunities exist to approach foodshed protection in multiple regions, linking farmers in the Capital District and Mid-Hudson regions with New York City consumers demanding fresh, local food.

Highlights:

Farm Hub, Hurley (Ulster County). The Local Economies Project of the New World Foundation, with support from the NoVo Foundation, announced the creation of a multifaceted Farm Hub that will serve as a regional center for farmer training, agricultural research and demonstration of innovative farm technologies on the 1,255-acre Gill Farm in Hurley.

Hudson Valley Farm Business Incubator, New Paltz (Ulster County). Glynwood's Hudson Valley Farm Business Incubator, in partnership with the Open Space Institute, is providing the tools and resources aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs need to develop and manage viable farm enterprises in the Hudson Valley. The incubator will reduce the barriers to success for new farm businesses by providing access to land, housing, shared equipment, infrastructure, low-interest capital, business mentoring and training in sustainable farming practices.

Conservation easements ensure farming's future and support local farmers (Dutchess and Columbia counties). Scenic Hudson, in partnership with the Dutchess Land Conservancy and Columbia Land Conservancy, protected 1,457 acres on 13 farms in 2014 through the purchase of conservation easements. The program leveraged \$2,451,513 in local and private dollars to match an equal amount of federal funding. With the advent of the new RFP for the state's own Farmland Protection Program, land trusts throughout the foodshed are leveraging this opportunity to develop new partnerships to maximize public investment with private conservation funds.

The federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program provided 50 percent funding for many of these projects. Thanks to the leadership of our Congressional delegation, this program will continue (albeit with a new name—the Agricultural Land Easement program) under the reenacted Farm Bill.

Foodshed Conservation strategy advanced in Capital District and New York City. State legislators from the Hudson Valley and NYC held two briefings with farmers and conservation groups to identify strategies to diversify funding sources contributing to farmland conservation easements, while foodshed conservation advocates, including Scenic Hudson and downstate food and hunger organizations, participated in an educational effort at Gracie Mansion to begin a discussion with NYC officials about the city's role in ensuring the protection of land that supplies its residents with much of their fresh, local food.

SUCCESS: NATURAL RESOURCES & THE ENVIRONMENT—Co-benefits realized for win-win environmental protection to conserve land, enhance water quality and create jobs; region primed for major investment in clean water infrastructure and open space protection

Issue Summary: The Hudson Valley made tremendous strides in understanding the scope and impact of the connection between clean water and protected landscapes while implementing new projects that demonstrate the applicability of “green infrastructure” measures as part of the region's infrastructure solution. Traditional open space acquisition should continue. At the same time, investments that will refurbish water and wastewater infrastructure should be ramped up and innovative practices for new developments that require less “hard” infrastructure while still meeting water-quality and habitat goals should be encouraged. The committee recommends supporting open space acquisition that filters water and creates important quality-of-life attractions such as parks, as well as making significant new investments in built infrastructure to address our failing water and waste water systems. Whenever possible, innovative practices—such as bio-swales, rain gardens and similar technologies—should be utilized. While not actionable by the MHREDC or immediately achievable by NYS due to federal preemption, the committee also would like to express its strong concern regarding the threats posed by the shipment of Bakken crude oil and the prospect of shipping tar sands crude oil through the region by rail, boat and barge.

Highlights:

In both DEC Regions 3 and 4, land trusts in the Mid-Hudson region protected over 500 acres of non-farmland open space in FY 2014. NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation purchased two parcels to add to Fahnstock State Park and is in contract to conserve 1,230 acres on Fishkill Ridge and Mount Beacon, which will be added to Hudson Highlands State Park. The U.S. House of Representatives advanced legislation to reauthorize the Highlands Conservation Act, a key federal program that may help the state fund this transaction. County governments, notably Ulster County, also did their part by carefully reviewing public auction notices to ensure the protection of important habitat providing public benefits.

“Infrastructure Planning and Investment” study focuses on water infrastructure needs. Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress convened experts to discuss the region's infrastructure in a half-day conference on the heels of National Infrastructure Week, with strong support by members of Congress and the EFC. The conference focused on the findings of Pattern's new infrastructure report, “Infrastructure Planning and Investment: A Widening Gap,” and explored the EFC's new project funding criteria, which no longer prioritize consent decree communities at the expense of regular infrastructure maintenance. The report

can be downloaded at <http://pattern-for-progress.org/sites/default/files/2014%20Infrastructure%20report%20FINAL.pdf>.

“How’s the Water?” study underscores risks of avoiding investment. The Hudson River Estuary is a 150-mile-long public beach that spans three economic development regions. The environmental group Riverkeeper released its new report, “How’s the Water? 2014,” which summarized the state of the Hudson River for swimming. It shows that many riverfront locations fail to meet federally recommended guidelines for safe swimming and will continue to do so without increased investments in infrastructure, upgrades to water-quality standards and enforcement of pollution laws. The report can be found at: <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/7d9a5262#/7d9a5262/1>.

Long Island Sound is a 110-mile-long estuary spanning three economic development regions. Increased bacteria levels frequently force Westchester County communities to close their beaches, resulting in lost recreational and business commerce. In 2013 alone, the county lost 136 beach days because of pollution (Save the Sound). Alleviating this decades-old problem will require the cooperation of state and local governments to fix sewer leaks and repair, replace or reline old pipes.

Environmental Facilities Corporation finance tools promoted. Scenic Hudson convened a forum with the EFC and representatives from five county governments to discuss opportunities for municipalities to leverage the EFC’s finance tools for investments in land conservation measures consistent with the Hudson River Estuary Program Action Agenda that would meet water-quality goals.

Dutchess County Executive proposes water infrastructure and open space protection bond. The Dutchess County Executive proposed a bond through the county’s Partnership for Manageable Growth program to invest in sewer and water infrastructure in existing municipal centers—as a measure to achieve smart growth policy goals—while simultaneously investing in farmland conservation easements, parks and open space.

Municipalities collaborate to address water infrastructure needs. Clusters of municipalities in the region are becoming more proactive in addressing their water and wastewater infrastructure needs. Westchester County communities on Long Island Sound are working collaboratively to repair and upgrade sewer pipes, with conversations currently underway with the county and DEC. The City of Beacon (Dutchess County) has developed a regional approach to address water sanitation issues, while a public-private partnership in the City of Newburgh (Orange County) is seeking to implement green infrastructure solutions and habitat restoration along the sewer line that runs parallel with Quassaic Creek, a Hudson River tributary.

Bard College project demonstrates innovative water management practices, Red Hook (Dutchess County). Construction on Bard’s Regional Demonstration Project to Improve Stormwater Management Using Green Infrastructure began this summer and is expected to be completed by October. The project addresses stormwater run-off from a nine-acre sub drainage area on the campus that runs into the floodplain of a small tributary of the Saw Kill Creek and then into the Hudson River. The project features unique examples of low-impact design, including an 81-space permeable parking lot (asphalt), small bio-swales, native buffer restoration planting, a vegetated bio-retention swale and permeable paver walkway alongside the new parking lot, and a constructed wetland, also adjacent to the parking lot and abutting the existing wetland. These investments will slow the speed of water, reduce flooding and treat the water, thereby avoiding the need for more costly infrastructure associated with impermeable surfaces. The project also will educate the 40,000-plus annual visitors to the college.

Ulster County advances green infrastructure technologies while achieving smart growth, Kingston (Ulster County). In December 2013, Ulster County was awarded an EFC-Green Innovation Grant Program grant for \$439,000 to incorporate significant green infrastructure elements into the STRIVE project—a unique collaboration between Ulster County, SUNY Ulster, the City of Kingston and the Kingston City School District to relocate the SUNY Ulster Extension Center to a vacant elementary school in an urban center. The goal is to consolidate county government services, promote creative reuse of a vacant building and reduce taxpayer burden. The project will utilize significant “green infrastructure” technologies whose overall scope includes: reconstruction and expansion of a parking lot and surrounding area via porous asphalt paving, rain gardens, bio-retention areas and green walls. The collaboration with SUNY Ulster will allow for a unique interactive educational experience for faculty, students and the community, provide innovative problem solving to stormwater management issues, and create a strong education and outreach initiative to spur more “green” in the region.

SUCCESS: INVESTMENTS IN CLEAN & RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT—Reforming Energy Vision and establishing measures for future success

Issue Summary: The 2014 Draft NYS Energy Plan (<http://energyplan.ny.gov/Plans/2014.aspx>)—the third release from the state’s Energy Planning Board since 2002—identified goals and broad strategies to advance New York’s progress toward a clean energy economy. The draft plan proposes connecting a vibrant private-sector market with communities and individual customers to create a dynamic market that supports distributed, clean energy generation. The plan also calls on the Public Service Commission to:

“Enable and facilitate new energy business models for utilities, energy service companies, and customers to be compensated for activities that contribute to grid efficiency. Maximize the cost effective utilization of all behind the meter resources that can reduce the need for new infrastructure though expanded demand management, energy efficiency, clean distributed generation, and storage” (2014 NYS Draft Energy Plan).

Gov. Cuomo and the Public Service Commission (PSC) launched a groundbreaking, comprehensive energy initiative—Reforming the Energy Vision—to fundamentally transform the way electricity is distributed and used by consumers in NYS, including modernizing the grid. This effort will promote more efficient use of energy, access to renewable energy sources, and wider deployment of “distributed” energy resources such as micro-grids, on-site power supplies and storage. It also will promote greater use of advanced energy management products to enhance demand elasticity and efficiencies. Implementation by the PSC is expected in late 2014 and early 2015; implementation by utilities will commence separately. The 2014 Draft NYS Energy Plan (<http://energyplan.ny.gov/Plans/2014.aspx>) sets forth a vision for New York’s energy future that connects a vibrant private sector market with communities and individual customers to create a dynamic, clean energy economy.

As described in Chapter 5 of the MHRSP, these initiatives include but are not limited to making residences and businesses energy efficient (NYSERDA Energy Efficiency Programs and Energize NY), supporting policies and programs that encourage sustainable energy use (Community Choice Aggregation), favoring projects that utilize a mix of energy technologies (wind, water, solar) and stimulating collaborative work between like-minded municipalities. Energize NY has established a positive reputation for its success rate completing home energy retrofits within its service area and is an example for the rest of the state.

As these policy developments and programs take hold and gain momentum, the Mid-Hudson Region's sustainable energy future can be further catalyzed by strategic coordination between the Regional Economic Development Council and the Regional Sustainability Plan. While both plans offer a strategic framework for integration with one another, investments will leverage the greatest benefit if shared metrics are established to guide future investments. Total energy consumption, carbon intensity of electricity generation, energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, and green jobs created and/or maintained should be considered as part of the Mid-Hudson REDC Regional Dashboard/Performance Measures. Additionally project-level, REDC-compatible metrics such as timescale for production, cost of construction, capacity created, jobs created, tax benefits/burdens, and impact to natural resources and the environment should be considered for existing and proposed energy projects.

Highlights:

Sustainable Westchester and Westchester Solar have advanced opportunities for 30 municipalities to leverage resources and outside expertise to advance their collective energy-efficiency and renewable-energy goals, including installing 400 panel arrays totaling 2.8 megawatts, which will reduce costs to consumers by 15 percent. This effort was supported by the state Assembly and Senate through legislation to authorize a five-year pilot program that will enable local governments in the county to participate in a municipal energy aggregation program in order to procure electric and/or gas supply services through inter-municipal agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Amend Green Circle Goal to reflect need for water infrastructure and sustainable energy.

The goal of this committee to date has been to invest in the region's outstanding natural resources, tourism industry and agriculture to protect the environment, enhance recreation and quality-of-life attributes, and enhance job growth in related industries, and to leverage these goals as part of a "natural infrastructure strategy" to attract and retain high-quality jobs for all key industry sectors.

While we recommend that our principal aims remain largely the same, we request that the MHREDC modify its Green Circle Goal to represent new opportunities in the water infrastructure and sustainable energy sectors, as follows:

GOAL: to invest in the region's outstanding natural resources, including its open spaces and water infrastructure, tourism industry, agriculture and sustainable energy infrastructure to protect the environment, enhance recreation and quality-of-life attributes, and enhance job growth in related industries, and to leverage these goals as part of a "natural infrastructure strategy" to attract and retain high-quality jobs for all key industry sectors.

2. Focus MHREDC Green Circle Outcomes for 2015 on four cross-cutting themes:

- Investments in trail connectivity and nearby natural resource protection that help align tourism and quality-of-life opportunities in the region, export our region's tourism brand to global customers and create access to our world-class natural resources, including for veteran populations;

- Development of policies and programs that provide direct support to farmers to achieve a stable farming future in the Capital District and Mid-Hudson Region, meet the tremendous demand for fresh, local food in New York City, and export artisanal food and beverages to emerging global markets;
- **Prioritization of water infrastructure investments, including wastewater infrastructure, upgrade of existing drinking water facilities,** and open space protection to achieve a swimmable and fishable Hudson River in the Capital District and Mid-Hudson Region, a swimmable and fishable Long Island Sound, and business-ready downtown centers and waterfronts;
- Establishment of “sustainable energy” metrics to guide future energy investments.

3. Support state funding categories that advance Green Circle Goals and leverage local, federal and private investment:

- Funding for the Environmental Protection Fund remains one of the most critical tools available to advance waterfront revitalization, tourism (hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, biking and cultural visits), open space and natural resource conservation, farmland preservation and other agricultural and clean water projects.
- Financial support for Green Circle projects through NYSERDA to help develop a sustainable energy economy and multi-modal trails consistent with the 2013 Mid-Hudson Sustainability Report.
- Continued support for the Environmental Facilities Corporation and financing of innovative projects that advance water quality, natural resource protection and projects consistent with the Hudson River Estuary Program Action Agenda.

4. Broaden efforts to ensure a swimmable Hudson River and vibrant waterfronts in Capital District, Mid-Hudson Region and New York City through enhanced PCB cleanup.

The Hudson River PCB cleanup is nearing completion, yet 136 acres of contaminated sediments—including the Champlain Canal—will remain in the upper Hudson (Capital District) when the cleanup is finished. This will prevent the river’s full recovery, preclude the NYS Canal Corporation from fulfilling its obligation to dredge and maintain the canal, and delay opportunities to leverage economic activity, including waterfront revitalization efforts in the Capital District, Mid-Hudson Region and New York City. The committee recommends that this situation be resolved while remediation infrastructure is in place, before the end of the cleanup under the federal Record of Decision.

5. Support public policy proposals consistent with Green Circle Goals. The NYS Legislature advanced several bills that also address Green Circle priorities, including:

- The Suburban Agricultural Bill (A.8026/S.6360) proposes to amend the Agriculture and Markets Law in relation to Agricultural Districts and reduce the current required acreage to form an Agricultural District from 500 to 250 acres. This will allow diversification of farming and new business opportunities in the Mid-Hudson Region.
- A package of bills that would support young farmers and the development of new agricultural enterprises include a measure (S.6880A/A.9288A) to create a revolving loan program to provide startup funds for agriculture novices that can be used to purchase land and equipment. A second bill (S.5377A/ A.7002B) would seek to identify available land—including surplus state lands—that might be ideal for new farmers to cultivate.

- The Municipal Energy Aggregation Plan legislation (A.7896C/S.5500D) will authorize inter-municipal agreements that will allow better coordination by municipal energy aggregators, thereby opening new opportunities to source electricity from—and develop—sustainable sources.
- The Community Risk Reduction and Resiliency Act (A.6558B/S.6617B) will enable New York State to integrate the impacts of severe floods and sea level rise into certain state-led planning, grant and permitting processes. This will ensure a more stable business environment by making sure public investments support projects that are designed to withstand the impacts of severe storms and are sited to ensure their relevance to our future economy.
- The Curb Light Pollution Act (A.07489/ S.05275) will require buildings operated by and for the state to utilize energy-efficient night lighting that will ensure public safety while conserving natural resources.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Ned Sullivan, President, Scenic Hudson – Committee Co-chair
- Dave Church, Planning Commissioner, Orange County – Committee Co-chair
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- Jeffrey Domanski – Courtney Strong
- Todd Erling, Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- Melissa Everett, Sustainable Hudson Valley
- Jerry Faiella, Historic Hudson River Towns
- Paul Gallay, Hudson Riverkeeper
- Simon Gruber, CUNY Institute for Sustainable Cities
- Glenn Hoagland – Mohonk Preserve
- Ken Kleinpeter – Glynwood Center
- Cara Lee, The Nature Conservancy of New York
- Deborah Meyer-DeWan – Rondout Valley Growers Association
- Herb Oringle – Sustainable Westchester
- Mary Kay Vrba – Dutchess County Tourism
- Alan White – Catskill Center for Conservation and Development
- Herb Oringel – Northern Westchester Energy Action Consortium
- Nancy Seligson – Supervisor, Town of Mamaroneck