

January 8, 2026

Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger
Chairman Peter Criswell
Via email: exec@co.ulster.ny.us and Peter.Criswell@co.ulster.ny.us

re: Zero Waste Policy Requires an Implementation Plan Before Major Waste Infrastructure Commitments

Dear Chairman Criswell and Ulster County Executive Metzger,

We are writing to respectfully request that the Ulster County Legislature and County Executive jointly lead — in coordination with all necessary parties — the completion and public release of a comprehensive Zero Waste Implementation Plan that provides a clear, actionable path to achieving the Zero Waste Hierarchy.¹ This plan should be consistent with Ulster County’s adopted Zero Waste policy and incorporated into the County’s Local Solid Waste Management Plan,² as well as any other governing or planning documents that must be referenced prior to advancing any new major waste infrastructure projects.

We further request that all relevant parties — including the County Legislature and its committees and commissions, the County Executive, the Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency (“UCRRA”), community advocates, and other key stakeholders — work collaboratively to guide the development of this plan. **In the meantime, we call for a pause on any new major waste infrastructure projects until the Zero Waste Implementation Plan is completed, all public comments are addressed, and the plan is formally adopted by the County Legislature and the UCRRA Board.**

On November 19, 2019, the Ulster County Legislature adopted Resolution No. 451,³ establishing Ulster County’s commitment to becoming a Zero Waste Community. More than six years later, the County has yet to produce a completed Zero Waste Implementation Plan that clearly and transparently shows the public how it will move from current practices to achieving maximum waste diversion.

This conclusion has been reinforced by the County’s own review process. In its August 1, 2024 report,⁴ the UCRRA Reform Committee stated, “*In keeping with Executive Order 1 of 2023, requiring no organic material be sent to a landfill or incinerator by 2030,⁵ legislation requiring the separation of all food scraps and organics should be adopted.*” This finding reinforces that a

¹ [Energy Justice Network: The Zero Waste Hierarchy](#)

² [UCRRA: Local Solid Waste Management Plan](#)

³ [Ulster County Legislature: Resolution No. 451 November 19, 2019](#)

⁴ [UCRRA Reform Committee Report to Ulster County Legislature](#)

⁵ [Ulster County Executive Order 1 of 2023](#)

completed Zero Waste Implementation Plan is a necessary prerequisite to legislation, infrastructure decisions, and long term contractual commitments, and should be formally adopted by both the Ulster County Legislature and UCRRA before advancing any major waste management projects.

We understand that the June 1, 2025 Ulster County Service Agreement between Ulster County and the Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency⁶ defines the “system” to mean, “*Collectively all elements of any sites containing the facilities constructed or obtained by the Agency [UCRRA] to carry out the purposes of this Agreement... except that the term System shall not include any incineration, chemical recycling facility, or waste-to-energy facility with the exception of anaerobic digestion.*”

Regardless of which technologies may be permitted under that agreement, the Zero Waste Implementation Plan must be completed first and serve as the foundational step before any specific technologies or facilities are proposed, evaluated, or advanced. Without such a plan in place, it is premature — and contrary to the intent of the County’s Zero Waste policy — for UCRRA to advance or entertain major long-term projects such as anaerobic digestion facilities, landfill-dependent systems, or other capital-intensive waste infrastructure proposals, including the recent Global NRG proposal.

According to reports,⁷ “Global NRG would lease the UCRRA property but build, own, and operate a facility estimated to cost about \$100 million. It would take in all of the agency’s municipal solid waste, which in 2025 is forecast to total 107,100 tons, with expectations there will be a 70% reduction in the amount going to landfills.”

In the absence of a completed Zero Waste Implementation Plan, we have serious concerns about advancing a proposal of this scale and duration, including:

- The proposed use of the organic fraction of municipal solid waste as fertilizer or soil amendments without a Zero Waste framework that prioritizes clean source separation and aerobic composting for this material, and the landfilling of any processed mixed-waste residuals too contaminated to use as clean soil;
- The injection of biomethane into an existing, leaky fracked-gas distribution system, raising concerns about greenwashing and the continued entrenchment of fossil fuel infrastructure;
- The likelihood of long-term put-or-pay provisions in any contract, which could obligate the County to supply a fixed amount of waste for decades, constraining future waste-reduction progress;

⁶ [Solid Waste Service Agreement between Ulster County and UCRRA, June 1 2025](#)

⁷ [Daily Freeman: Ulster agency eyes 70% reduction of garbage going to landfills with trash-to-gas system](#)

- The potential to discourage or limit the expansion of source separation efforts that are essential to achieving higher levels of waste reduction and material recovery; and
- The high costs of such a facility, which would ultimately be borne by taxpayers and/or ratepayers and could divert funding from investments higher on the Zero Waste Hierarchy.

Full implementation of a Zero Waste Implementation Plan — grounded in measurable actions, clear timelines and accountability — is necessary to determine whether mass disposal infrastructure is needed at all and to ensure that investments align with the Zero Waste Hierarchy. Without this planning framework in place, the County risks overbuilding costly, long-term systems that could constrain future waste reduction, reuse, and material recovery efforts.

We are also concerned that, over the stated 20-year period,⁸ meeting the projected annual waste requirements could necessitate accepting waste from neighboring counties without their full commitment to upstream Zero Waste solutions. This outcome would further entrench disposal-based systems and undermine the work of Zero Waste advocates in Ulster County and surrounding communities. Advancing a proposal of this scale without a completed Zero Waste Implementation Plan risks locking the County into infrastructure and contractual obligations that conflict with its adopted Zero Waste policy and long-term sustainability goals.

A Zero Waste Implementation Plan must:

- Follow the internationally-peer reviewed definition of Zero Waste and the [Zero Waste Hierarchy](#), as codified by the Zero Waste International Alliance, prioritizing reduction, reuse, repair, and recovery before disposal, and prohibiting incineration;
- Include a clear timeline showing how Ulster County will transition from current practices to a Zero Waste system, with measurable milestones;
- Establish and support a Resource Renovation/Reuse and Repair Center as core infrastructure;
- Develop pilot projects and phased implementation strategies that use incentives to encourage reduction, reuse/repair, recycling, and composting;
- Be treated as a living document, reviewed at least every two to five-years and comprehensively updated approximately every ten years; and
- Identify stable, long-term funding mechanisms to ensure implementation is achievable rather than aspirational.

Once materials are mixed together, they cannot be readily recovered to meet their highest and best use. Decisions that further entrench mixed-waste systems directly contradict Zero Waste principles.

⁸ [UCRRA Board Meeting 12/12/25](#)

For these reasons, we are calling for:

1. **A pause on major waste infrastructure decisions or commitments** — including anaerobic digestion and landfill-dependent projects — until the Ulster County Zero Waste Implementation Plan is completed and public comment period has been conducted.
2. **A meeting with UCRRA, the County Legislature, the County Executive, community advocates, and other key stakeholders** to guide development of the Zero Waste Implementation Plan; and
3. **The completion, adoption and public release of a Zero Waste Implementation Plan** that meets the standards outlined above, with all public comments addressed and formal adoption by the County Legislature and the UCRRA Board.

In 2019, Ulster County made a clear policy commitment to Zero Waste. The public deserves a transparent, credible roadmap to fulfill that commitment before irreversible decisions are made. While some may claim that achieving Zero Waste is impossible, the goal — operationally defined as a 90% reduction of waste sent to landfills, without incineration — is practical, measurable, cost effective and achievable. A completed Zero Waste Implementation Plan will provide the timeline, milestones, and metrics needed to demonstrate how Ulster County can transition from current practices to a Zero Waste system, ensuring that infrastructure decisions support, rather than undermine, this goal.

We look forward to your response and to seeing concrete progress toward a Zero Waste future for Ulster County.

Sincerely,

Josephine Papagni

Vice President

Greenway Environmental Services

Ulster County resident

Rebecca Martin

Organizer

KingstonCitizens.org

Ulster County resident

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Manna Jo Greene

Former Legislator

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CC:

Ulster County Legislature
Marc Rider, Executive Director, Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency
Board of Directors, Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency
Ulster County Department of the Environment
Ulster County Recycling Oversight Committee (ROC)
Ulster County Association of Town Supervisors and Mayors (UCATS)
Ulster County Environmental Management Council