

# HEADWATERS



2019 NEWSLETTER &amp; 2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT, ISSUE 56

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## Opinions About Life on Tug Hill

Tug Hill residents and landowners were surveyed about quality of life characteristics in 2019 by the Jefferson Community College Center for Community Studies. Comparison of 2019 responses to the original 2009 survey shows an interesting combination of stability and change.

### What is Similar?

Overall, there is continued satisfaction with the outdoors, environment, and overall rural setting of Tug Hill. It seems to be what brings people to the region and what keeps people here. Interestingly, the top five quality of life factors seen as excellent in 2009 were the same in 2019: the amount of open space on Tug Hill, a feeling of safety and security, recreational opportunities, quality of drinking water, and farming and forestry activities.

The quality of kindergarten through 12th-grade education, access to groceries and other necessities, and housing were similarly rated “good” over “excellent” in 2019 as in 2009. This shows that people on average believe that these services and opportunities are sufficient but could be improved.

In 2009 and 2019, the number one aspect of life that people surveyed thought was “poor” were employment opportunities in the region. Also, in both 2009 and 2019, of the five studied economic-related items, most support was for expansion of tourism and recreation.

### What is Different?

Despite over a quarter of respondents believing that employment opportunities are

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The Center for Community Studies  
*At Jefferson Community College*

Presentation of Results



TUG HILL RESIDENT  
AND  
LANDOWNER  
SURVEY

2019

  
Mr. Joel Lefebvre, Research Director  
Mr. Lawrence Danforth, Research Coordinator

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# Meet the NYS Tug Hill Commission's Watertown Staff

Commission staff provide support to Tug Hill councils of governments in community and economic development, land use planning, natural resource management, geographic information systems (GIS) and related fields.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Back, from left: Alaina Mallette, Carla Fowler, Jennifer Harvill, Felicia Passino, Gwen Decker, Matthew Johnson. Front: Jean Waterbury, Katie Malinowski, Philip Street.

**"Helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region"**

## Chairman Reappointed

The Tug Hill Commission's board chairman Jan Bogdanowicz was reappointed by Governor Cuomo to another term, to expire August 1, 2023. Jan has served on the board since 2009, and was first elected chairman in 2012. Jan is a resident of the town of Montague, Lewis County, where he served as town supervisor for many years. ■



Commission chairman Jan Bogdanowicz with wife Natalie in Montague.

## 2020-24 Strategic Plan

After a year of analysis and information gathering, the commission board adopted a new strategic plan in October, to guide the work of the commission for the next five years.

The new plan reaffirms the commission's mission of helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region using a grass-roots, non-regulatory model of building local capacity through technical assistance. Staff core competencies in land use planning, natural resources, and community development are still highly valued and sought after by the region's towns and villages. Circuit riders continue to be key to maintaining relationships and sharing information, especially with recent council of government growth. Looking forward, the commission will use its strengths in

collaborating with partner counties and other relevant organizations to put more focus on economic development in the region. Commission staff will also look for best practices in other rural areas of New York State and the country, to bring successful ideas to Tug Hill. Regional analysis will also be emphasized, as well as finding ways to market Tug Hill with the support of our communities and partners.

The complete strategic plan document can be accessed at [www.tughill.org/strategic-plan/](http://www.tughill.org/strategic-plan/). ■

## ABOUT HEADWATERS

Headwaters is the annual newsletter report of the NYS Tug Hill Commission.

The Tug Hill Commission is a state funded, regional agency overseen by a board of nine unpaid commissioners - two each from Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego counties, and one at-large.

Commissioners are appointed for five year terms: three each by the Governor, State Senate and State Assembly. The commission has an administrative link to New York State's Department of State.

## CHAIRMAN

Jan J. Bogdanowicz  
Lewis County

## VICE CHAIRMAN

Michael G. Yerdon, Sr.  
Oswego County

## SECRETARY

Thomas E. Boxberger  
Jefferson County

## MEMBERS

Leona M. Cheresnoski  
Jefferson County

Roger W. Maciejko  
Lewis County

Geraldine J. Ritter  
Oneida County

William W. Scriber  
Oswego County



# Best Partner Award from Department of State

The Tug Hill Commission was given the Department of State's (DOS) Best Partner Award in October. The award was presented as part of DOS's fifth annual Local Government Innovation Conference (LGIC), held to recognize and celebrate great work being done by local

government leaders across NY. The Best Partner Award is presented to a local government or municipal support organization that provides significant support for training, technical assistance, local government re-design and innovation. The commission was recognized

for providing direct assistance to local governments in Tug Hill with implementation activities in support of local government reorganization, as well as continued focus on accessing public resources that strengthen communities.

The commission has historically been a partner with DOS through its direct assistance to local government and partnerships like the annual Tug Hill Local Government Conference, along with other stand-alone workshops and training throughout the year. However, as perhaps one of the first regional organizations to prioritize cooperation and shared services, the commission has more recently become a direct partner with the state by assisting communities who are considering consolidation and shared services through the Local Government Efficiency Program.

The fifth annual LGIC featured a plenary on data-driven government and workshop tracks with compelling sessions, including emergency services, water and wastewater infrastructure, utilizing the Geographic Information Gateway, and programs to support rural economic development and resiliency. ■

***"The Tug Hill Commission is honored to receive this award from the Department of State. The commission's work on Tug Hill is founded on strong partnerships with the region's councils of governments, towns and villages. Our partnership with the Department of State helps us more effectively and innovatively achieve the shared vision of a thriving Tug Hill."***—Katie Malinowski, Executive Director, Tug Hill Commission



From left: Mark Pattison, Deputy Secretary of State; Angie Kimball, Cooperative Tug Hill Council Circuit Rider, Tug Hill Commission; Katie Malinowski, Executive Director, Tug Hill Commission; Carla Fowler, Community Development Specialist, Tug Hill Commission; Ann Thane, Director of Local Government Services, NYS Department of State.

## Phil Street Retires

He is known by a few different names including "Dr. Phil" and "Tug Hill Phil," but for most of us he is simply our friend and colleague, Phil Street. Phil announced his retirement in 2019 and officially retired on January 8, 2020 after 38 years at the commission and over 40 years in the north country.

Originally from Utica, Phil received degrees from Mohawk Valley Community College, SUNY Cortland and Pennsylvania State University. As Director of Planning at the commission, Phil provided planning and administrative assistance to over 60 communities and five councils of governments. Phil particularly enjoyed the small group settings where he could answer the "nitty gritty" questions. He also led countless training sessions, both at the annual Local Government Conference and in individual town and village halls.

Phil undoubtedly attended thousands of night meetings throughout his career. There was never a meeting that Phil wouldn't gladly cover because he truly enjoyed working with local officials on Tug Hill. Over the years, Phil's efforts have helped the commission build trust and lasting relationships with the communities.

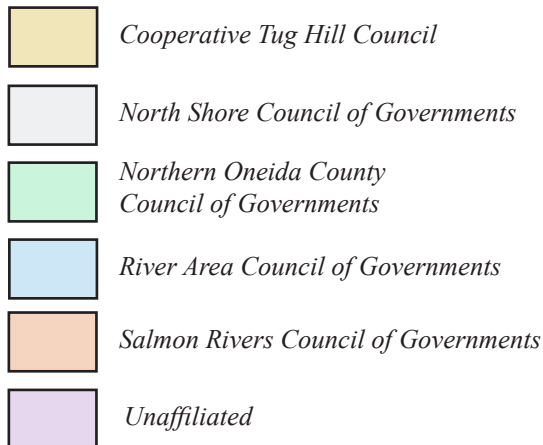
The amount of technical assistance questions Phil answered also numbers in the thousands. Questions from code enforcement officers, planning and zoning board members, as well as highway superintendents, town supervisors, mayors, and clerks have either been asked over the phone, via mail or email, or directly at training sessions. He has answered

questions on planning, minimum maintenance roads, local law adoption process, zoning enforcement, and planning board reviews, just to name a few. When anyone had a question, Phil would be able to research it, answer it or find the right person to address it.

To cap off a wonderful career, Phil received the 2019 Heissenbuttel Award for Planning Excellence. This award is presented to an individual, municipality or agency for outstanding accomplishment in the planning field and/or for consistent support of the New York Planning Federation in its efforts to promote sound planning practice. ■



# COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS REPORTS



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# The Cooperative Tug Hill Council

Minimum maintenance roads continue to be a priority, with CTHC and commission staff continuing to build support for proposed Low Volume Roads legislation. Working with several state-wide partners in 2019, the legislation was approved by the NYS Senate, but again failed to make it out of the Assembly Transportation Committee. Work continues on securing support for the legislation.

Council towns continue work on Special Areas maps, with Boylston's new map approved by CTHC in 2019, for a total of

15 updated maps approved to date. Pinckney recently began map review with potential approval in 2020, which would be the last of the 16 original CTHC towns to do so. Once complete, the council will look at possible new actions and mapping to be undertaken in newer member municipalities.

In justice court news, the Harrisburg-Montague-Pinckney (HMP) consolidated court continues to use Harrisburg's municipal facility and one shared justice. Lewis and Boylston's justice courts continue to function in their own facilities

using the law that allows them to draw from neighboring municipalities for judicial candidates. Currently Lewis and Osceola share the same justice and Boylston shares a justice with neighboring town Sandy Creek. Finally, Worth and Lorraine are nearing the end of a lengthy process to consolidate their courts under the Uniform Justice Court Act Section 106B. One final joint resolution is needed from the towns and then the proposed legislation will be heading to the state legislature for action.

The Cooperative Tug Hill Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard five cases this year, two for subdivision approvals. Lyons Falls approved their first zoning law and appointed their first ZBA. Several communities are working on wind and/or solar laws or modifying existing zoning laws to regulate these uses. Some communities are also amending zoning laws to strengthen minimum maintenance roads protections.

Five wind projects are active in CTHC. The Number Three,

Deer River and Mad River wind projects are all in the Article 10 process. Number Three was recently approved by the siting board, and the developer is evaluating the certificate conditions. Deer River is in the hearings phase of the application process. Mad River has a filed Preliminary Scoping Statement with little news in 2019. The existing Maple Ridge PILOT was renegotiated and approved in 2019. Finally, the Roaring Brook project was approved through local review and construction is imminent.

Florence, Williamstown, and Lewis all continue to work on salt sheds with state grant funds. Leyden also received grant funding for a records room and records storage.

Long-time associate circuit rider Kay Chapman, who has contracted with CTHC since 2006, decided not to renew her contract for 2020. A new contractor, Karleigh Stucky, has been working with Kay the past few months and took over Kay's communities starting January 2020. ■



## Salmon Rivers Council of Governments

The effort to bring public water to the town and village of Parish stalled when the town did not pass a necessary resolution in support of financing the project by the required supermajority. This resolution was needed to qualify for grants necessary to make the project affordable under the comptroller's guidelines. The town and village are now both exploring alternate configurations.

The town and village planning board in Parish continue to work on updating their municipal zoning, including provisions relating to wind and solar energy. They passed a moratorium in support of that objective. The planning board has also been re-

viewing the comprehensive plan. The Amboy planning board has been working on updating the town comprehensive plan, and moved into a new phase of the update with planners from Tug Hill, who are assisting with updating the data underpinning the plan, including maps.

Albion, Amboy, Parish town and Parish village, and the Salmon Rivers Council of Governments acted unanimously in support of efforts to bring some kind of payment in lieu of taxes for wildlife management area (WMA) lands in the eastern part of Oswego County not currently receiving that offset, when other WMAs in the state do receive such funds. ■



# River Area Council of Governments

The River Area Council of Governments (RACOG) grew again in 2019, adding the villages of Castorland and Copenhagen. Both communities are in the process of setting up websites through RACOG. They are also part of the LED street lighting project.

Through the Fort Drum Soldier for Life – Technical Assistance program, RACOG secured two interns in the fall of 2019 with much effort spent on RACOG's draft resource management plan. RACOG municipalities, as well as several towns and villages outside RACOG, also moved forward with the design phase for the LED street lighting project with the New York Power Authority (see LED lighting article in this newsletter). RACOG

also updated their information on the Black River concerning potential navigation hazards. Two walkable community workshops were held, with the villages of Carthage, Copenhagen, and Deferiet adopting complete street policies as a result.

Several presentations were made at monthly RACOG board meetings, including: InfoGroup regarding business data; the Adirondack North Country Association regarding the Clean Energy Communities program; Jefferson-Lewis BOCES regarding complete streets project support; and the Carthage Area Chamber of Commerce regarding a potential Oktoberfest celebration in 2020. Activities in 2020 will include

an event called the "River Area Visioning Economic Summit" being organized in conjunction with the Jefferson and Lewis economic development

agencies and additional presentations by community choice aggregation companies. ■



# North Shore Council of Governments

In 2019, the North Shore Council of Governments completed the transition of its (and the member municipalities it hosts) website to a new design with updated 'underpinnings.' The web sites are running under WordPress, a modern CMS (content management system)

offering increased versatility in the ability to maintain and update the web sites.

The town of Constantia established moratoriums on large-scale wind and solar power generating projects while the town worked on updating its

land development laws to more adequately address the challenges presented by these potential efforts. The town also began work on updating the town comprehensive plan, and held a visioning session in the fall to help shape the recommendations of the draft plan update.

The town of Constantia and village of Cleveland continue to work together to improve and update the wastewater treatment facilities and infrastructure in the village, and to extend wastewater utilities to the eastern part of the town. In December 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the award of a \$5 million grant to the town of Constantia in furtherance of this effort.

The town of West Monroe has begun to explore options for expanding wastewater treatment availability in the town.

It has completed the design changes and expansion of its existing Big Bay sewer district with the addition of the Toad Harbor area.

The municipalities of Constantia, Cleveland, and West Monroe, and the North Shore Council of Governments acted unanimously in support of efforts which would bring some kind of payment in lieu of taxes for those wildlife management area (WMA) lands in the eastern part of Oswego County which are currently not receiving that offset when other WMAs in the state do receive such funds.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation announced almost \$1 million in improvements to the Cleveland Dock to be completed in 2020. ■





# Northern Oneida County Council of Governments

At the fall annual meeting, NOCCOG re-elected the same slate of executive committee officers: John Doiron, chair; Bob Sauer, vicechair; Betsy Mack, fiscal officer; Mark Trnchik, director, and Joe Rowlands, director. Contracts for associate advisors John Healt and Harlan Moonen were also renewed, and NOCCOG heard updates from commission executive director Katie Malinowski on regional issues and commission staffer Mickey Dietrich on NOCCOG's GPS initiative.

Oneida County provided \$7,500 to NOCCOG in 2019, thanks to efforts by NOCCOG's county legislators. The county support allowed NOCCOG to purchase two GPS units with tablets to collect infrastructure

data in NOCCOG towns and villages. Training by commission staff and a written tutorial is available for communities interested in borrowing a unit to collect data. A point person at the town or village comfortable with technology and familiar with the information to be collected is critical. Locally, Paul Phister in the town of Lee is also available to provide technical support as communities work with the GPS unit.

Annsville's salt storage facility grant application was funded this year, with assistance from NOCCOG and commission staff. The towns of Vienna, Camden, and Floyd opted to construct salt facilities independent of grant funding, but all will help protect water sup-

plies and taxpayer funding by minimizing runoff and waste.

NOCCOG staff, working with the Tug Hill Commission and the Local Government Edu-

cation Committee of Oneida and Herkimer Counties, also provided training sessions on Amish issues, minimum maintenance roads, and newly elected information in 2019. ■



## Commission Funding 2019-20

The Tug Hill Commission's funding increased by \$20,000 for the first time in eight years. Most of the commission's funding comes from its annual state appropriation. Approximately 85% of the budget is spent on salaries, with the balance covering commission operating expenses.

In 2019-20, commission staff helped partner communities and organizations secure approximately \$700,000 in grant funds, trained more than 1,500 local officials, started working on 38 new projects across the region, maintained progress on an additional 32 projects and answered many technical assistance questions.

Commission staff also worked with state agency partners on a variety of statewide priorities

and initiatives. These included shared services, municipal dissolutions, watershed programs, and conservation projects.

The commission employed 13 people, including four circuit riders for the region's five council of governments. The other nine staff members provide program and administrative support out of the commission's Watertown office. Commission staff provide support in many areas including planning, community development, training, natural resources and GIS.

The commission continues to look for fiscal savings while sustaining vital services to the Tug Hill region, and looks forward to helping our communities in the coming year. ■

## Creating Smart Communities With LED Street Lights

Sixteen communities working together to convert their street lights to LEDs with smart controls got a significant boost with the award of a \$291,220 NYS Department of State Local Government Efficiency grant.

The towns of Adams, Champion, Denmark, Lyme, Martinsburg, Wilna, and the villages of Adams, Carthage, Castorland, Copenhagen, Croghan, Deferiet, Lowville, Lyons Falls, Sackets Harbor, and West Carthage (lead applicant) continue to make progress in partnership with the New York Power Authority to design and implement the complicated project. The River Area Council of Governments has played a key coordination role.

The group plans to buy back streetlights from National Grid and install smart controls, which is estimated to achieve a 69% savings. Smart controls will help municipalities make data driven decisions and increase street lighting efficiency, which will improve service to residents. It will also allow for the addition of advanced sensors that could include cameras, temperature and humidity, noise and acoustics, air pressure, water meter readers, lighting, vibration, or the ability to provide Wi-Fi. These sensors will create opportunities to improve the efficiency of municipal service delivery and reduce operation and maintenance costs. ■



## NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION

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## Tug Hill Residents

**Cont. from page 1**

“poor”, it does appear that the overall feeling on employment opportunities has shifted, positively. There was a drop of 15% of people rating employment opportunities as “fair” or “poor”, which appears to be an improvement in the perception of employment opportunities. A potential link to poor employment opportunities is the lack of adequate internet access. People surveyed in 2019 are increasingly dissatisfied with internet access, which will be a strategic focus for the commission over the next five years.

The 2019 survey results show an increased support for outdoor, non-motorized activities compared to motorized activities for recreation. The following three recreation-related development items resulted with a majority of participants in 2019 supporting an increase: cultural activities (e.g. concerts, performances, and festivals), parks and playgrounds, and hiking/walking/camping. Furthermore, the top five items in terms of level of support are all non-motorized outdoor recreation – the three cited above, along with cross country skiing and canoeing/kayaking.

With regards to energy development and consumption, there is decreased support for solar, wind, biomass, and nuclear energy development compared to 2009. However, more than half of people surveyed in 2019 want to increase wind energy development and nearly three quarters would like to see solar energy development increase. The proportion of people in 2009 who previously wanted to increase the development of these technologies have shifted to either wanting to keep existing projects, but not add any more, or decrease the amount of development in 2019.

Tug Hill has historically been a place skeptical of strong governmental regulation. In 2009 and 2019, this was and is still the case. If anything, in 2019 there is a stronger desire for less local, state, or federal regulation than in 2009. The commission will continue to provide services to Tug Hill communities through a grassroots, bottom-up approach by going to the communities when we are asked to provide technical or project assistance.

The full survey report of results is available on the commission’s website at [www.tughill.org/about/survey-2019/](http://www.tughill.org/about/survey-2019/). ■



Mickey Dietrich, NYS Tug Hill Commission