

COG Chairs Meeting with Commission Staff

February 11, 2022

The Tug Hill region's five Council of Government (COG) board chairs held their annual meeting with commission staff on Monday, January 31 via Zoom. A robust agenda was discussed, including an overview on the commission budget and staffing, minimum maintenance roads and seasonal use zoning, short-term rentals, broadband improvement efforts, renewable energy, the Tug Hill community recognition award, and commission outreach efforts.



*Salmon
Rivers
Council of
Governments*



Each council also shared information about progress in their areas, including land use related items (official roads maps, comprehensive plans, cooperative ZBAs, solar laws and zoning), large projects moving forward (broadband, salt sheds, sewer infrastructure, energy related improvements), changeover in local officials including succession planning, and developments related to state and federal initiatives such as changes to open meetings law and ARPA.

The region's five councils of governments are critical to promoting cooperation between municipalities and delivery of Tug Hill Commission programs.

Mr. Herb Thorpe Shares His Story

The Tug Hill Commission recently partnered with the Oneida County History Center to record the oral history of Herb Thorpe of Rome, NY. Well known for his fame as a Tuskegee Airman, Mr. Thorpe was also involved with the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) and was stationed at the Camp near Camden, New York shortly before WWII broke out. In December 2021, commission staff and Patrick Reynolds from the Oneida County History Center sat down with Mr. Thorpe to talk about his life, his experience with the CCC and his contribution to the country as a Tuskegee Airman. The interview was recorded and is available on the [History Center YouTube Channel](#).

The commission plans to continue exploring the CCC camps on Tug Hill and co-host a presentation on the topic later this year. Five CCC camps were created on Tug Hill in 1935, two years after the program began. Four of the CCC camps were for reforestation and one camp was for fish and game. The four reforestation area camps were S-113 in Camden (near Cobb Brook Pond), S-116 in Mannsville (near Winona), S-122 in Boonville, and S-130 in Williamstown. The single fish and game camp was Little John Game Refuge near Adams. In the state's 1936 Annual Report of the Legislature, it was said that the "[e]stablishment of CCC camp at Littlejohn Game Refuge afforded an opportunity to develop this area for experimental deer management purposes. Extensive experimental work is being undertaken by this camp in addition to their regular construction work on truck trails and dams" (p. 145). Each camp undertook a wide variety of activities, from constructing vehicle bridges, fire towers, and buildings to planting trees, stocking fish populations, and pest control.



From left: Commission staff Jennifer Harvill and Alaina Mallette (via Zoom); Patrick Reynolds and Herb Thorpe.

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American Farmland Trust Releases Smart Solar Siting Report

The American Farmland Trust released a report titled “Smart Solar Siting on Farmland: Achieving Climate Goals while Strengthening the Future for Farming in New York,” last week, available at farmlandinfo.org/publications/smart-solar-siting-in-new-york-report/. As New York has set an ambitious renewable energy goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, demand for farmland to host utility-scale solar arrays across the state is increasing, as has been experienced on Tug Hill. The report is meant to guide state and federal policymakers, farmers, solar developers and local officials on how to expand solar energy generation while strengthening farmland protection and farm viability in NYS. On Thursday March 3 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. AFT will host a webinar to share the findings of the report in detail and answer questions from the public. Register for this upcoming webinar [here](#).

Key findings include:

- AFT found broad concern stemming from significant large-scale solar development pressure in regions with abundant high quality farmland soils, including within the Mohawk Valley and the North Country.
- Farmers were generally interested in hosting projects on only a portion of their farm and expressed a strong preference for siting solar projects generally to avoid prime farmland soils and actively farmed land.
- Farmers interested in hosting solar projects are predominantly motivated by the income potential, as well as by opportunities to transition farms to the next generation, and to incorporate dual use solar (or “agrivoltaics”), in which projects are designed to support forage and/or crop production alongside energy generation.
- Developers of both distributed generation and large-scale solar projects expressed interest in dual use and shared examples of the work they are doing to consider and integrate farming with solar arrays.

- While solar provides income to individual land-owners, only a minority of farmers who responded to the survey expected such development to have net positive impact on farm viability in their region.
- For the 65 percent of upstate farmers who rent some or all of the land, there is concern over how to support their farm operations.

More than half of farmer-renters surveyed reported negative impacts, including increased competition for land, higher lease rates for rented land, or loss of access to farmland. This is an especially challenging issue for dairy farmers.

- Some survey respondents questioned whether, after the 25–50-year life of the project, farmland used for solar would be returned to active farming in future generations.

The AFT report recommends several measures designed to encourage solar developers to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to farm communities and to protect farmland. These include adjusting the amount of mitigation funds required to be paid by the developer based on the amount of high-quality soils impacted by the development. The primary use of those mitigation funds should be to support permanent farmland protection in host communities. The report also recommends that local communities and NYS explore capping all development, solar or otherwise, on prime farmland in order to limit the cumulative impact of development within local farm communities.

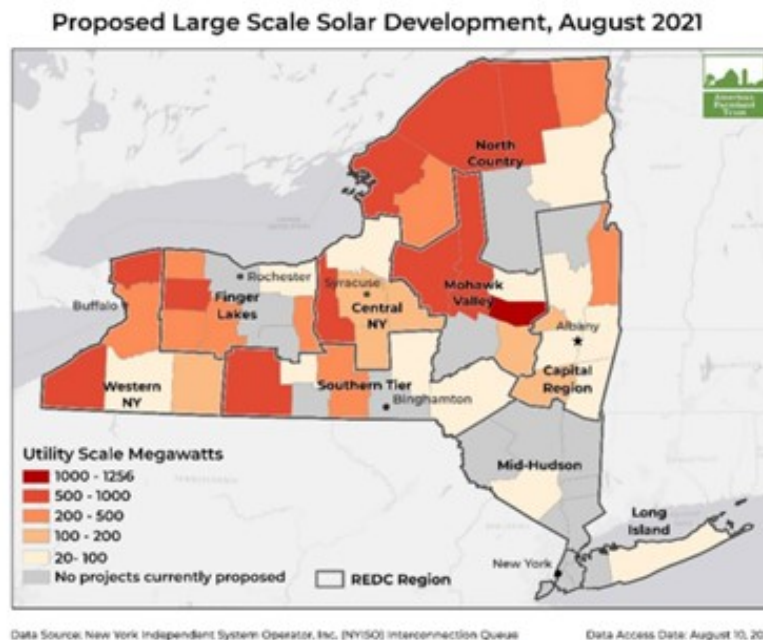


Figure 5 – Large Scale Solar Proposals, Aug 2021

Table 1 – Proposed Large scale solar percentages by REDC Region

REDC Region	% of Total Proposed Large-Scale Solar
North Country	22%
Mohawk Valley	22%
Finger Lakes	17%
Western NY	14%
Southern Tier	9%
Central NY	8%
Capital Region	6%
Mid Hudson	1%
Long Island	<1%

Regional Map Shows Broadband Infrastructure Gaps

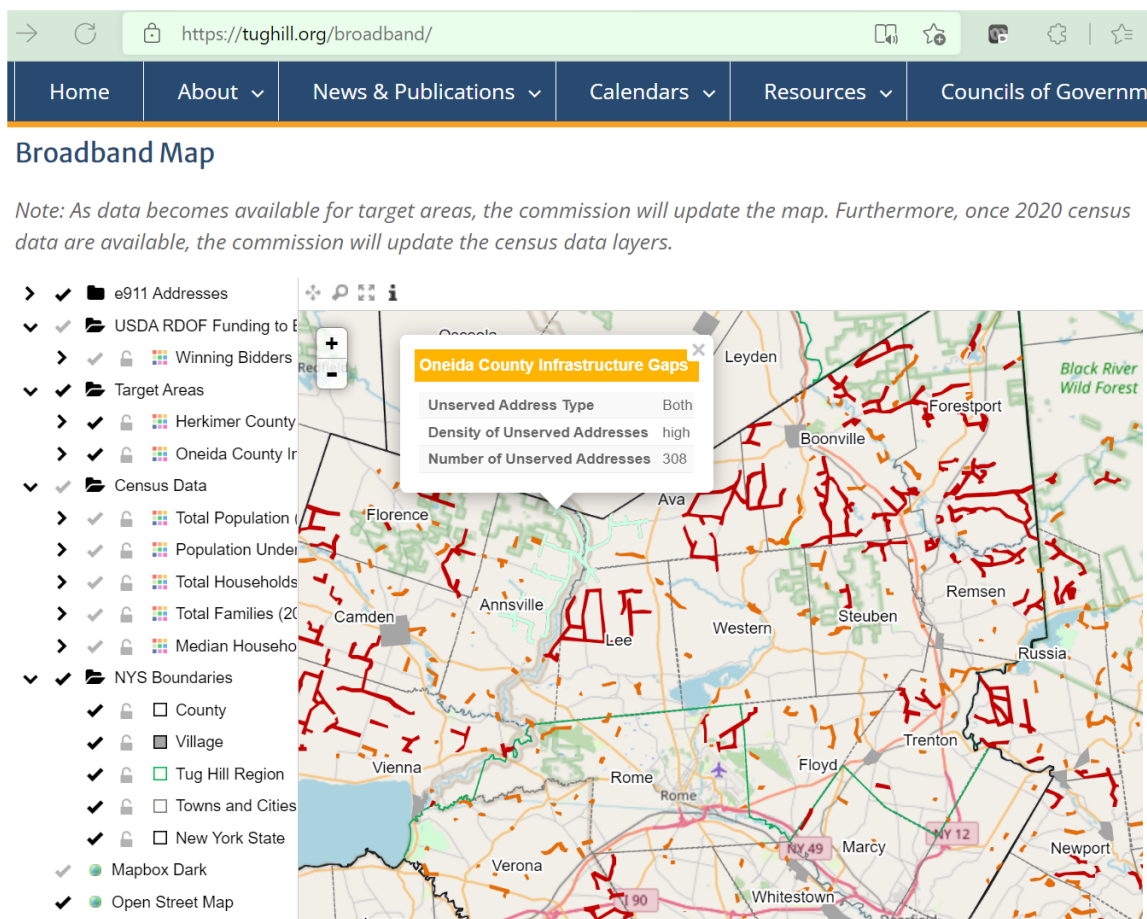
The Tug Hill Commission has worked closely with several counties, including Oneida and Oswego, and regional partners, including Mohawk Valley Economic Development District and the CNY Regional Planning and Development Board, to identify infrastructure gaps based on addresses without access to broadband infrastructure, or “unserved” addresses. NYS defines unserved addresses as any location which has no fixed wireless service or wired service with speeds of 25 Mbps download or less available. By identifying these gaps and the number of addresses unserved within those gaps, counties and regional organizations can identify high-need areas for broadband expansion. The [regional broadband map](#) includes these areas as well as 2010 census data and 2015 American Community Survey data for population, number of children under 18 years old, median household income, and other important indicators for affordability and equity.

This information can be used to begin the next step in the broadband expansion process, which is developing technical solutions with the support of both public and private entities. Counties, regional organizations, internet service providers (ISPs), and others can work together to identify potential areas for expansion and the cost of build out and operations. Once solutions have been vetted, a business plan can be created and used to apply for grants. ISPs, in most cases, become the owners of the new broadband infrastructure.

With the passing of the federal [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA) and around \$65 billion in investments expected, NYS is expecting to see federal funding come to the state by the end of the year for broadband. The regional map for broadband infrastructure gaps is one tool used to begin identifying and addressing the state’s broadband deployment, affordability, and equity challenges.

Currently, Oneida and Herkimer counties’ infrastructure gaps have been uploaded to the regional map with Oswego, Cortland, Onondaga, and Cayuga counties’ infrastructure gaps soon to follow, after a period of review. The commission and its partners also hope to create affordability gaps using survey information collected by the counties and regional partners to further inform dialogue on solutions.

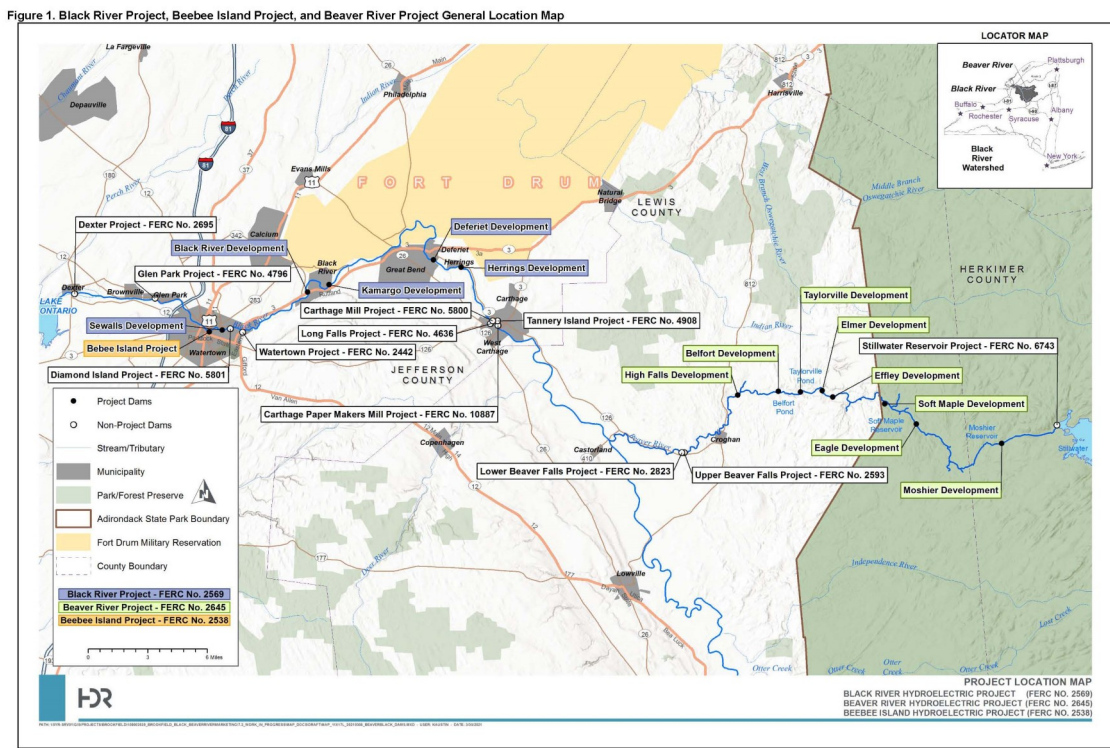
Please reach out to the commission if you notice any errors in the broadband infrastructure gaps or if you have information on build out that is currently underway in those areas, at katie@tughill.org or by phone to 315-785-2380. Furthermore, an overview of basic broadband concepts can be researched on our new web page: [Broadband Concepts – NEW YORK STATE \(tughill.org\)](#).



Black River, Beebee Island and Beaver River Hydro Licensing Update

A Proposed Study Plan meeting was held this week for the Black River (FERC No. 2569), Beebee Island (FERC No. 2538), and Beaver River (FERC No. 2645) hydroelectric licensing projects. The Black River Project consists of five developments located along the Black River in Jefferson County (from upstream to downstream): Herrings, Deferiet, Kamargo, Black River, and Sewalls. The Beebee Island Project consists of a single development also located along the Black River in Jefferson County. The Beaver River Project consists of eight developments located along the Beaver River (from upstream to downstream): Moshier, Eagle, Soft Maple, Effley, Elmer, Taylorville, Belfort, and High Falls. The Moshier Development is located within Herkimer County; all other developments are within Lewis County. Erie Boulevard Hydropower is the company filing for the licenses.

Several potential studies will be part of the process, including a proposed habitat characterization and river conditions study, a proposed recreation study, a proposed Beaver Lake impacts evaluation study, and a proposed cultural resources study. For more information about any of the projects, go to www.ferc.gov, click on eLibrary, and enter the FERC project number. Interested parties can register online at www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/esubscription.asp to be notified via email of new filing and issuances related to this or other pending projects.



2022-2023 LGRMIF Grant Applications Open

The New York State Archives is now accepting applications for the 2022-2023 Local Government Records management Improvement Fund grant cycle. The Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) provides grants to local governments. These grants assist local governments to establish records management programs or develop new program components. It is a competitive program, awarding grants based on the merits of applications.

There is a new “eGrants” system to apply for the LGRMIF grants so if your institution does not already have an eGrants user account, or if your Records Management Officer (RMO) has changed since the last time your institution applied for a grant, please complete and submit the online [registration form](#). The deadline for requesting a new user account is **5:00 p.m. on March 7, 2022**.

Individual applications of up to \$75,000 and shared services applications of up to \$150,000 will be accepted, in the categories of disaster management, document conversion and access, file management, historical records and inactive records. More information on the LGRMIF grants can be found at <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/grants/lgrmif-grants> or by reading the [2022-2023 LGRMIF Grants Guidelines](#). You can also contact the Archives at archgrants@nysed.gov or (518)474-6926 with any questions.

There is a new six-part LGRMIF webinar series that covers topics like navigating the eGrants portal, writing the grant narrative and more, available [HERE](#). Deadline to apply for the 2022-2023 LGRMIF grant cycle is March 21, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.

Cornell Local Roads Program Spring Workshops

The full lineup of workshops being offered this spring by Cornell Local Roads can be found at cals.cornell.edu/nysltap-local-roads/training-events/workshops. In the Tug Hill region, **Local Roads (and Streets) Done Right** will be held on April 14 in Oneida County, New Hartford, and **Running Your Highway Department** is scheduled for March 31 in Oswego County, Williamstown. Registration is required.

Canals Grant Program Open

The NYS Canal Corporation has a new competitive grant program to support tourism and recreation along the New York State Canal System, including canal waterways and Canalway Trail. The 2022 program will provide funding to support tourism infrastructure and amenity improvements, and events. Funding is open to counties, municipalities, units of local government, not-for-profit organizations and federally recognized Native American tribes within the canal system boundary.

In Tug Hill, this includes the towns of Constantia, Floyd, Hastings, Vienna, and West Monroe and the village of Cleveland and Sylvan Beach. The grant program includes two funding categories:

- EVENT SUPPORT (Award Range: \$500 to \$15,000)
- TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE & AMENITY SUPPORT (Award Range: \$5,000 to \$24,000)

Applicants may apply for one or both categories. **Applications open on February 22, 2022 and are due on April 1, 2022.**

Projects submitted should demonstrate how they will achieve one or more program objectives: facilitate recreation and/or tourism; enhance visitor amenities; encourage overnight stays; improve the visitor experience; make recreational and tourism assets more accessible; attract and serve diverse audiences; or improve connectivity between recreation areas and communities or between waterways and land trails

A virtual Q&A session (registration details pending) for applicants will be held on Thursday, March 3, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. More information will soon be available at www.canals.ny.gov/community/grant.html.

Continuing Partnership with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Since 2020, the commission has partnered with Dr. Joshua Cousins, professor at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF). The partnership offers practical experience in the form of semester projects for a group of SUNY ESF students who are supervised by both Dr. Cousins and commission staff. The first project offered to students in spring 2020 was a study on the impact of wind energy systems on property values. The second project offered in spring 2021 was a greenhouse gas inventory and study in partnership with Lewis County.

This spring semester, the commission and Dr. Cousins are offering two projects to students: trail connectivity in the southeastern portion of Tug Hill and portions of a climate action plan in partnership with Lewis County. The trail connectivity study will look at case studies from other places on how to improve recreational trail connectivity. Students may even look at existing trail networks on Tug Hill and identify barriers and solutions to building a more integrated network. The climate action plan study will also look at case studies of what has been done elsewhere in locations similar to Lewis County as well as forecast greenhouse gas emissions based on the spring 2021 greenhouse gas inventory.

The commission always looks forward to working with Dr. Cousins and his students, as they provide an invaluable service to the commission, our partners, and our communities. By bridging the gap between a research institution and the practitioner world, the commission provides SUNY ESF students and faculty with practical experience and context while the SUNY ESF students and faculty educate the commission on the growing body of knowledge within academia.

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For upcoming trainings, grant deadlines, and meetings, view our [calendar](#).