

31st Annual LGC Held at Turning Stone Event Center

April 22, 2022

After a two-year hiatus, the Tug Hill Local Government Conference (LGC) returned this week at a new venue but with the same commitment to providing high quality training for the region's elected and appointed officials. Attendees from county, town and village governments in Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego counties and beyond chose from 29 individual sessions. In addition, 28 exhibitors shared information on the services they offer to local governments. Most session presentations will be available soon at www.tughill.org.

The keynote address, "Leveraging Our Assets in a Global Economy," was delivered by Andrew Fish from CenterState CEO. He urged Tug Hill communities to take advantage of their natural features, recreational opportunities, and individual community identities to leverage the economic development happening either in their communities or in the greater region.

This year's platinum level sponsors were BCA Architects & Engineers, C2AE, and GYMO Architecture, Engineering, & Land Surveying. Gold level sponsors were Comp Alliance and LaBella Associations. The silver lever sponsor was the Northern Oneida County Council of Governments. Bronze level sponsors were the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District and the North Shore, River Area, and Salmon Rivers Councils of Governments.

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Economic Impact of Agriculture Highlighted at Conference

On April 8, 2022, the Jefferson County Agricultural Development Conference was held in person for the first time since the onset of COVID-19 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Watertown. The highlight of the day was Cornell Professor Dr. Todd Schmit's presentation of results from a four-county economic impact study of agriculture, calculating that the economic impact of Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, and St. Lawrence County totaled \$1.7 billion in 2019-2020. Interestingly, the study shows that the impact of agriculture increased during the pandemic, when many other businesses were severely interrupted or even closed. While noting that agriculture as an industry does struggle with price volatility, weather volatility, and government regulations, Dr. Schmit indicated statistically significant signs of resiliency within the field as a cause for hope. Titled, "The Economic Contribution of Agriculture in Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, & St. Lawrence Counties: 2019 & 2020," the complete study, including interpretations, is expected to be released soon as an Extension Bulletin on the Dyson Website (dyson.cornell.edu/).

Other guest speakers included: Catherine Young, Executive Director of the Center for Food and Agriculture at Cornell AgriTech, and Jennifer Coleman, Director of Communications at Aimpoint Research Center, an intelligence agency specializing in agriculture.

The Jefferson County Agricultural Development Conference is hosted by Jefferson County Economic Development and supported by: Midway International Logistics, The Development Authority of the North Country AgriTech, LLC, makers of AminoMax, Dairy Farmers of America, Monroe Tractor, North Harbor Dairy Farm, Old McDonald's Farm, Robbins Family Grain, and Great Lakes Cheese Company.



Commission Board Meeting May 16, Turin

The Tug Hill Commission board will meet on Monday, May 16 at the Turin Municipal Building, 6312 East Main Street, Turin from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.. Remote access will also be offered, by Zoom at us02web.zoom.us/j/86573052992, or by calling (929) 205-6099, participant code 86573052992.

Open Meetings Law Changes

Amendments were made to Open Meetings Law in the final 2022-23 NYS budget. Section 103-a was added to Public Officers Law, which allows members of public bodies to participate in meetings via videoconference from a location that is not accessible to the public, so long as certain conditions are met, including that a majority of the board meets in a publicly accessible location(s). Sarah Brancatella from the Association of Towns (AOT) included information about the change in her Federal Funding Opportunities session at the LGC. AOT has a very informative guide with a sample local law available on their website at www.nytowns.org/images/Documents/Announcement/Sample%20Local%20Law%20%20Videoconferencing%20Amendments%20Guide.pdf. Their guide reviews the local law and local policy requirements, allowable reasons to videoconference, quorum requirements, town website and posting requirements, minutes requirements and transcriptions, and public participation.

This law became effective on April 9, 2022 and will expire in 2024. Towns have 60 days from April 9, 2022 to continue using videoconference under the current authority granted during the pandemic.

The Committee on Open Government also has materials available at opengovernment.ny.gov/chapter-56-laws-2022-guidance-document.

A poster for the River Area Economic Visioning Summit. The background is a scenic view of a river with a bridge and trees. The text is overlaid on this image.

RIVER AREA ECONOMIC VISIONING SUMMIT

RACOG
RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

ZERO DOCK STREET
Restaurant & Bar

Thursday, April 28, 2022
9:00AM to 12:00PM
Zero Dock Street Restaurant
130 Canal St.
Carthage, NY 13619

**FREE EVENT
REGISTRATION
REQUIRED**

Event is free, but pre-registration is required at <https://tinyurl.com/riverareasummit> or by contacting Mickey Dietrich by phone (315) 681-5023 or by email mickey@tughill.org.

CTHC Spring Meeting and New Associate Circuit Rider

On Thursday May 19 the Cooperative Tug Hill Council (CTHC) will hold their annual spring meeting at the Steak and Brew Restaurant, 4497 State Rt. 26, Turin. Social hour will start at 6:00 p.m. with dinner at 7:00 p.m. and the business meeting to follow. Business to be conducted includes election of officers for 2022, the review and adoption of the town of Pinckney's Special Areas map, adoption of goals for the year and many other topics. Officials from Lewis County are expected to be the speakers for the evening. Invitations with a tentative agenda and additional details will be out soon, so save the date.

In other exciting news, the CTHC executive committee recently interviewed and offered a contract to a new Associate Circuit Rider to replace outgoing associate Karleigh Stuckey who chose not to renew her contract for 2022. Kelley Martin accepted the contract and started making her way to meetings this month to meet the boards for the municipalities she will be covering going forward. Kelley and her husband are new to the area and live in Watson. Kelley can be contacted via email at kelley.rae.martin@gmail.com. Welcome Kelley!

A poster for the Black River Watershed Conference. The background is a scenic view of a river with trees and a blue sky. The text is overlaid on this image.

**Black River Watershed
Conference**

**SAVE
the
DATE**

June 8, 2022

3 Willows Event Center Lyons Falls, NY

State Comptroller Audit Report on Forest Tax Exemption Program

The Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) released an audit report this week to determine if the Department of Environmental Conservation is adequately monitoring the 480 and 480a forest tax programs to ensure forest land is appropriately enrolled and landowners are adhering to requirements to assist in the protection of the environmental benefits of the State's forest resources. The audit covers properties that received tax exemptions under the 480 and 480A programs for the period January 2017 through December 2019. The full report is on their website at www.osc.state.ny.us/state-agencies/audits/2022/04/20/oversight-new-york-state-forest-tax-programs, and a more interactive presentation of the results is available in story map format at storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/84b0416214b340bd92a4dc2a866b5655. Excerpts from the report are below.

Related to the 480a program, OSC's review of 135 properties identified 45 (33%) with questionable eligibility, including: Land not committed into the 480a Program but receiving an exemption (eight properties); Property with committed land inappropriately receiving an exemption on ineligible land (25 properties); enrolled land that included partial uncommitted acreage and otherwise would not have met the size criteria (less than 50 contiguous acres) (two properties); land inappropriately enrolled into the 480a program without an approved management plan (five properties); and inaccurate or insufficient documentation provided to be able to determine what land is committed/ineligible (five properties).

OSC also surveyed local assessors and found additional issues with the 45 properties. For 12 properties, the assessors did not have or were not able to provide certificates. For 10 properties, the acreage on the certificate the assessor provided differed from the acreage on the certificate the Department provided.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) officials stated that several of the exceptions identified are an error on the assessor's part and the Department has no authority to oversee their actions. Currently, the DEC and assessors both possess information that could assist each other in overseeing the program but have limited communication with each other regarding the program. Improved communication and partnerships between the assessors and the DEC could enhance the success of the 480a Program.



Additionally, the process for transmitting approved certificates and management plans – from DEC to landowners to assessors, without a direct line of communication between the DEC and assessors – introduces the risk that landowners may alter the information, which could affect the tax exemption (e.g., total eligible acreages). Officials agreed that better cooperation and communication between DEC and assessors would benefit both parties and result in a greater degree of program compliance. DEC officials stated they intend to reach out to the New York State Assessors' Association to open a dialogue on this topic and suggest appropriate actions.

The report recommends:

1. Improved communication and partnerships with local assessors to ensure that properties are appropriately enrolled, eligible, and benefiting from the 480a and 480 Programs; and that management plans are followed, adequate records are maintained, enforcements are applied when violations occur, penalties are satisfied, and other administrative changes the DEC deems necessary to improve the 480a and 480 Programs are made.
2. Develop and maintain a centralized statewide database to improve oversight and administration of statewide forest tax programs, including compliance with management plans, work schedules, and annual commitments.

NYS Environmental Facilities Corp. Announces WIIA Awards

Municipalities and public authorities across the state have been awarded \$638 million in grants by the Environmental Facilities Corporation to help fund 199 water infrastructure projects that protect public health or improve water quality. Nearly \$601 million in Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) grants and over \$37 million in additional federal subsidies will support approximately \$1.6 billion in total infrastructure investment statewide.

Awardees in the Tug Hill region include the town of Orwell in Oswego County, awarded \$1,763,400 in support of a \$29,166,670 project; the village of Copenhagen in Lewis County, awarded \$660,600 of a \$1,101,000 total project; and the village of Sylvan Beach in Oneida County, granted \$14,583,336 (half of which is an additional federal subsidy) of their \$29,166,670 project total. The Upper Mohawk Valley Regional Board was awarded \$3,000,000 of a \$54,104,000 project.

Click [here](#) for the full list of awardees and project descriptions or [here](#) for awards by region.

Drinking Water Technical Assistance for Communities

The NYS Departments of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Health (DOH) have a new initiative to assist municipalities with assessing and supporting drinking water source protection programs. The Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) is a state-run program created to assist municipalities with proactively protecting their drinking water sources. The goal is to help municipalities develop and implement their own unique drinking water source protection plan for the source(s) of their drinking water.

NYS is looking for communities to work with a technical assistance provider (TA provider), free of charge, to develop a DWSP2 plan. TA providers will work with the community every step of the way, using the DWSP2 Framework, to develop a community specific DWSP2 plan. As a result of this program, participating municipalities can use their newly developed DWSP2 plan to start implementing protection measures.

If you would like to work with a TA provider, follow the links below and submit using the submit button at the bottom of the PDF. Reach out to the DWSP2 Team at source.water@dec.ny.gov with questions.

- [DWSP2 Application](#) (PDF) - Fill out the application with as much detail as possible. All applicants will be notified regardless of if they are selected or not.
- [DWSP2 Fact Sheet](#) (PDF) - A summary of the Drinking Water Source Protection Program and free technical assistance available.
- [DWSP2 Roles and Responsibilities](#) (PDF) - Roles and responsibilities of participating municipalities, the State, and the technical assistance providers.
- [DWSP2 vs. SWAP Fact Sheet](#) (PDF) - This document goes over the similarities and differences between DWSP2 and the Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP).

Communities will be provided:

- Free technical assistance throughout the entire DWSP2 Plan development process
- A flexible schedule for communities to continue meeting other priorities
- Little work for the community due to the aid of a TA provider
- Complete inventory of potential contaminant sources surrounding the drinking water source to protect against current and future sources
- Thorough list of implementation actions to address current and future potential contaminant sources and land use changes
- State and Federal funding strategies highlighted to aid with the cost of implementation actions (e.g. [Water Quality Improvement Project \(WQIP\) Program and Source Water Buffer Program](#))
- Complete DWSP2 plan may improve the likelihood of receiving state funding

Constable Hall Association Docent Position Open

The Constable Hall Association, Inc., in Constableville is looking for a docent to assist the executive director in day to day and longer-term duties at the museum this season.

Qualifications include: the ability to communicate well with a broad cross section of people, personal skills to lead and manage group activities, ability to work well with others and ability to manage planning for multi-week activities. Being a trustworthy self-starter is a must.

This is a temporary position for approximately 250 hours in the summer of 2022 from May through August. The position is a workscholarship funded by the Pratt-Northam Foundation. To be eligible, the person filling the position must be enrolled in a college or university for the Fall 2022 semester.

Please contact Constable Hall at constablehall@rocketmail.com with questions or to apply.



Contact Us

NYS Tug Hill Commission

317 Washington Street
Watertown, NY 13601

Phone: 315-785-2380

Toll Free within the region:

1-888-785-2380

Email: tughill@tughill.org

Visit us at:

Web: www.tughill.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/TugHillCommission

To request our newsletter electronically please email gwen@tughill.org or call

1-888-785-2380.

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

National Grid Adopt a Park Program

In 2021 in association with the New York Day of Service, National Grid launched a new initiative called Project C. The initiative is part of National Grid's community commitment to:

- **Connect** our communities to clean and sustainable energy.
- **Care** for our neighborhoods and their revitalization.
- **Compassionately** address the challenges our customers face, including environmental justice and social equity.
- **Create** the workforce that will help build New York's clean energy delivery system.
- **Collaborate** with our customers, community partners, stakeholders and so many others to deliver the clean, fair, resilient and affordable energy future.

Along with volunteerism, Project C focuses on four key priorities: clean energy and sustainability; workforce development; neighborhood investment and community engagement; and environmental justice and social equity. The initiative is funded by National Grid shareholders.

The Adopt a Park grant program is one portion of this initiative which will preserve green spaces and restore local parks to their natural beauty. National Grid will partner with municipalities and nonprofit organizations to provide funding that supports the revitalization of community parks and pocket parks across the company's New York footprint. For more information on this opportunity and a link to apply for funding visit National Grid's [Adopt a Park](#) webpage.