

It Takes a Village

Town Hall Discussion Calls on All Port Chester Residents to Work Together to Fight Climate Change

By **Victoria Bresnahan**

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Author and Rye Conservation Commission/Advisory Committee member Lori Fontanes discusses how to prevent food waste during the Climate Change Town Hall on Tuesday, December 10 at St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Smith St. Victoria Bresnahan|Westmore News

If the global temperature rises by four degrees Celsius from the continued burning of fossil fuels, parts of downtown Port Chester could eventually be underwater.

Large swaths of neighboring cities such as New York and Stamford might be immersed as well.

This information comes from a map created by Climate Central, an organization of scientists and journalists who report on the impact climate change could have on the planet. To highlight these dangers and to teach residents how they can contribute to its prevention, the Sustainable Port Chester Alliance sponsored a Climate Change Town Hall on Tuesday, Dec. 10 at St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Smith Street.

For Rye Town Historian Gregg Hamilton, a member of the alliance who helped organize the event, now is the time to act.

“This topic is too important to ignore, so I decided to take it on,” he said during a later phone interview. “I was doing research and I found that our neighboring towns -- Mamaroneck, Rye Brook, Rye -- have had sustainability committees that have been active and forming plans for years now.”

During the town hall, Hamilton said the transition toward becoming fossil fuel-free will be disruptive—but it is necessary. He said there are three routes society should take: expand and exploit clean, renewable energy sources, reduce usage of dirty fuels and plastics, and invest in methods that will capture carbon dioxide, such as creating more forests.

“We can (still) warm our houses, we can take hot showers, we can travel across the country,” Hamilton said. “It’s a little tricky getting across the oceans, but we can do so many of the things that we do using an electricity source from clean, renewable sources. That’s very encouraging.”

Many of these solutions are already in place, they just need improvement or implementation plans, he said.

All the village’s residents need to work together to fight this issue, Hamilton said, which can be problematic if more is not done to include the many Spanish-speaking members in the community.

While there were Spanish translators available at the town hall, Hamilton said no one used them.

“I had a translator there last night,” he said. “I had headsets to allow for real time translation. But, my invitations didn’t penetrate that audience, so we didn’t actually have anybody show up who needed the translation services. That’s unfortunate because we can’t truly reduce the village’s carbon footprint if only half of the village is working on that. Everybody has to be involved for this to work.”

The current population is responsible for ensuring the next generations have a planet to live on—which is one of the reasons Hamilton got involved in this movement.

“If we made progress on this, maybe we could inspire Greenwich, maybe we could inspire other communities in Westchester,” Hamilton said. “By the way, we are all responsible. If Port Chester doesn’t do it then shame on us.”

People, Planet and Prosperity

According to President of EarthKind Energy Ron Kamen, a speaker at the town hall, utilizing the triple bottom line theory can lead to a more sustainable future. The framework encourages organizations to analyze success based on its benefit to society, the environment and its own profits, rather than just the latter—money.

“If we want to create change and create this virtuous cycle where there is a positive feedback loop, you take people, the planet and prosperity, you put them together with (the) public (sector), private (sector) and partnership, you start dealing with policies, programs and projects and all of sudden it just starts taking off,” Kamen said. “It just starts doing all of those things that we want it to do and we start to get to where we want to be.”

Kamen told the audience they should find household projects that can create a sustainable impact. Secondly, he urged them to make a community environmental program and discern what policies are needed to drive the initiatives further.

Residents should pick a program to join such as Community Solar, which is available to all utility customers and allows them to participate in solar power options. At home, residents should consider making energy efficient choices, such as using mass transit. A potential policy that could be pursued is advocating for the village to join Sustainable Westchester, Kamen said.

The Village of Port Chester is one of two municipalities in the county that is not involved with Sustainable Westchester, a collaboration of local governments that are dedicated to creating more sustainable communities.

The organization's primary focus is implementing clean energy -- which includes electricity, heating and cooling, and transportation. In addition, they are focused on shifting to a zero waste and land usage culture.

Members get access to resources and benefits by joining the organization. For a municipality to get involved there is a \$1,000 annual fee.

Throughout his presentation, Kamen pointed out many ways a resident, business or municipality could become greener. These innovations included geothermal technology, or ground source heat pumps, and switching to electric vehicles.

"Our motto is (an electric vehicle) in every garage," he said. "If you've got more than one car, have one be electric because that's your around town car. Take it to work, take it to the train station, take it for your errands. That's all you need. You plug it in at night and that's all you need to do."

The newly formed Port Chester Sustainability Committee discusses many of these topics, including how to reduce the village's carbon footprint. For more info, email sustainability@portchesterny.com.

How to Reduce Food Waste

Author and Rye Conservation Commission/Advisory Committee member Lori Fontanes has a passion for food. Changes in climate will lead to changes in agriculture, she said. Where food comes from and how it is distributed will need to be altered, which she said is the good news about climate change.

"You eat multiple times a day probably. The choices that you make, how you eat, who you buy your food from (and) how you buy your food can make a huge impact on climate," she said.

The current food system is terrible, she said. There is food waste at each stage -- growing, processing, distribution and consumption. Despite this, there is still nationwide food insecurity.

"Why are we wasting so much food when so many people are hungry?" she asked. "It's the system. It's probably not you at all. It's the way we do this as a country and as a world."

Three ways to reduce damage to the climate through food practices is to eat better, utilize home composting -- which Fontanes said is more efficient than municipal composting because it does not need to be trucked -- and implement recycling programs.

Her recipe to save Earth: people should feed themselves with locally-grown, cleaner and healthier food. Rather than wasting leftovers, the surplus should be given to others. Any scraps after that should be used for compost or, if necessary, incinerated.

Ideally, food waste should never be entering landfills.

"Just remember, if it's good for the people, it's good for the climate," Fontanes said. "If it's good for the climate, it's probably good for you."