

2021 - 2024

OVERALL STRATEGY

The Austerlitz Climate Committee and CSC Task Force, since their inception, have had a dual strategy to create and foster community engagement and resilience to climate change; ongoing efforts to reduce GHG emissions. The first strategy was to implement actions directly within the town's control, and effect town operations. The second strategy was to leverage success, create credibility and take actions to benefit the people of the town.

GOALS & SCOPE

While it is obviously beneficial and important for the town to itself adapt and mitigate, the involvement of the people to their benefit is itself a significant, ongoing achievement. With a strategy that involves the whole of the town, much more can be accomplished.

There is virtually no limit to what can be achieved, even in Austerlitz. If this small town, and its people, can take significant climate related actions, anyone can.

For example, we have posted to your town website our updated GHG inventory as well as our energy benchmarking reports that baseline the Town's municipal emissions. We plan to use this information to be more informed about municipal upgrades. Also, through this information, with our efforts to inform the public, we hope to inspire individual reductions in greenhouse gas consumption and for residents to understand from where they can reduce their greenhouse gas usage.

We also plan to further our partnerships with other entities such as the Capital District Regional Planning Commission and eventually the newly formed Columbia County Climate Smart Communities Task Force. We have hired a Climate Smart Communities Task Force Coordinator as of December, 2021.

We are only limited by what defines our town. Rural and overwhelmingly residential, our goals are to focus on what we can do and the residents of our town. We plan to extend our speaker series, and through that continue a dialogue about climate change with the community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Our initial methods of engagement were to publicize through our town website and other communication ways that the town was taking climate change seriously. First, we established a Climate Committee to focus on town operations. This was not only easier but they were necessary initial steps to show the people of the town how serious we are, and to raise their interest.

We have posted to the town website our GHG inventory, benchmarking analysis and other key climate related documents and we have developed a town climate website that will be useful not only to talk about our task force accomplishments but be a useful tool to individuals as they seek ways they can fight climate change. The website is at <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org>.

Accordingly, the town committed to several high profile actions such as installing an electric vehicle charging station, installing a solar panel array that benefited the town (and by extension the taxpayers), standardizing the solar permit process, and monthly meetings of our climate committees that are open to the public.

Information for many of our activities has been posted in the News on the Town's website and sent out in Town emails. We have also posted on our Climate Facebook page about our activities.

As expected, interest in the town's climate efforts began to grow. Membership in our committees has doubled, residents have become aware of our activities and are asking questions and getting involved, and interest is strong and getting stronger.

As intended, the Town of Austerlitz climate committees then initiated the second level of our dual engagement strategy – that is to begin actions that benefit the people of the town directly and increase their awareness and involvement.

To engage and benefit the people of our town, we have organized ourselves around several specific areas of focus. They can be described in more layman terms such as events, partnerships, community action and a town climate specific website. For the purposes of this document, they are broken down between adaptation and mitigation, and are described below.

At the end is a section on key partnerships. Although it is at the end of the document, it is by no means any less important. In fact, engagement with our key partners is a major way for us to expand our engagement.

We have come a long way, and we have much more to do.

MITIGATION

Composting

Coinciding with International Compost Awareness Week in early May, the Austerlitz Climate Smart Task Force initiated the following actions:

- On June 25th, 2021, we created and shared a fun and informative 2.4-minute composting video: 'Composting 101 from the Austerlitz Climate Smart Task Force.' The video was created and produced by Zoe Wohlfeld, an Austerlitz resident, and it features kids from the community. The YouTube link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QXyQtJsfqE>. We posted this on our Facebook page, and it was shared widely by the creators and participants. It is also on the Town's Climate Committee website page under Task Force Documents: https://austerlitzny.com/government/climate-committee.html?fbclid=IwAR2wSRb3MKdXRgqSN0u775azHqGZSkssFG1rRQ2wo_uXobjcs4XtjOZNFyE. Our composting video on YouTube has been viewed over 200 times. We have posted flyers at the Town Hall and the post office to teach residents how to use the free five-gallon compost buckets in a composting routine. Information has also been shared with schools, churches, and libraries.
- Austerlitz Town Board Member and Climate Committee Member Maureen Wilson collaborated with Zero Waste Columbia County, the Claverack CSC Task Force, and the Columbia County Library Association to present a webinar on May 6th 2021: 'An Introduction to Small Scale Food and Yard Waste Composting' with guest speaker Jean Bonhotal from Cornell Waste Management, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences. The flyer was shared throughout Columbia County and the webinar was well attended. FB post links: <https://www.facebook.com/AusterlitznyClimate-Committee-104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/294865292257808> and <https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/296951785382492>
- Local business Davistudio partnered with us to offer about 100 free five-gallon composting buckets to Austerlitz residents, available for them to pick up at the Town Hall. This was posted on Facebook with information on how to use it in composting steps (as seen in our video) and as news on the Town's website as well as sent out in an email from the Town. A flyer is also posted at the post office across the street from the Town Hall. At least 50 have been taken. FB post link: <https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/296281812116156>

Solar Energy

We have proudly shared information with residents about the 22.12 kWh solar array on our Town Garage. The meter was turned on November 11, 2020 and has offset GHG emissions for municipal operations since. The solar array is a visible sign that solar power is in our town.

FB post links: <https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/326041899140147>

<https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/292145839196420/>

Town website:

https://austerlitzny.com/government/climate-committee.html?fbclid=IwAR2wSRb3MKdXRgqSN0u775azHqGZSkssFG1rRQ2wo_uXobjcs4XtjOZNFyE

MITIGATION

EV Charging Station

Our EV charging station was installed in 2018 with the help of a grant from the DEC. It was activated on November 18, 2018 and registered with the Dept. of Energy. It is available 24/7 and easily found on EV Charging Station Map apps. Here is a link to our FB post about it:

<https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/328544752223195/>

Community Campaigns

The Austerlitz Climate Committee has two active community campaigns: Clean Heating & Cooling and Electric Vehicles. In 2024, the Town completed Tier 1 of the Electric Vehicle Campaign and Tiers 1&2 of the Clean Heating and Cooling Campaign. Campaign information and outreach is posted on the Climate Committee's website: <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org/events/>

Repair Cafe

Several towns banded together to organize a Repair Café. The Climate Committees of the Columbia County Towns of Austerlitz, New Lebanon, Chatham and Canaan as well the Rensselaer Village of East Nassau. More information can be found on the Hudson Valley Repair Cafe website:

<https://www.repaircafehv.org/columbiane>. Now two years old, The Columbia NE Repair Cafe followed up on our successes in 2021 and 2022 with a great set of cafes in 2023, one in each of our four towns, with a total of approximately 200+ visitors and as many as 500 repairs and consultations. April 13, 2024 was the most recent repair cafe held at the Austerlitz Town Hall.

Free Energy Reduction Workshop

On June 22, 2024, the Austerlitz Climate Committee offered a free workshop to help residents save money and switch to clean energy alternatives. <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org/events/>

MITIGATION

Heat Pumps

In March, 2018, The Town of Austerlitz installed two heat pumps at its Town Hall as its only source of heating for the winter and air conditioning in the summer. Educational flyers promoting the heat pumps have been publicly posted in the town hall, and will be posted to the town climate website. The Town of Austerlitz hopes to lead by example through this effort, encouraging residents to upgrade their residential heating systems to heat pumps.

ADAPTATION

Columbia County CSC Task Force/Columbia County Environmental Management Council

As of October 2021, we have begun engaging with the newly formed Columbia County Climate Smart Communities Task Force, and continue to engage with the existing Columbia County Environmental Management Council (EMC). The town of Austerlitz has been an active participant on the EMC for several years now.

Riparian Buffer in a Bag

Austerlitz Town Board Member and Climate Committee Member Chris Schober identified a site on a five-acre parcel of land owned and protected by the Town of Austerlitz on West Hill Road. In his application to the DEC's Buffer in a Bag program, he stated: "The site is a small park in the town of Austerlitz with a stream running through it that enters the Green River. There are 150 yards with no cover. Our goal is to stabilize the banks, produce wildlife food and cover, improve aesthetic value, and invite the public to participate to raise awareness to the importance of protecting our waterways." The length of the planting is 450 feet, the width 50 feet, making the square footage 22,500 feet.

Our application was approved by the DEC , and the seedlings were planted, mulched, and fenced or tubed on May 18, 2021 – FB link:

<https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/304746181269719/>

A call for volunteers to keep the seedlings watered was posted on the Town website – link:

<https://www.austerlitzny.com/community/town-news-notice/276-volunteers-needed.html>; and on our FB page – FB link: <https://www.facebook.com/104829734594699/photos/a.156110939466578/307273331017004/>

Residents responded, and the seedlings are happy and thriving in Austerlitz!

ADAPTATION

SymBeeOtic: Embracing a Life with Bees

The Austerlitz CSC Task Force Coordinator asked Greene County beekeeper (and singer/songwriter/activist) Sheri Bauer to speak about her experiences and knowledge learned when taking over her family's four-generation apiary after the sudden death of her father. The Embracing a Life with Bees webinar was held on July 18, 2021 to educate residents on addressing climate change by strengthening local ecosystems. We invited our local arts organization, the Spencertown Academy, to collaborate with us to offer this webinar.

Here is the link on the Spencertown Academy website:

[https://spencertownacademy.org/event/symbeeotic-embracing-a-life-with-](https://spencertownacademy.org/event/symbeeotic-embracing-a-life-with-bees/)

[-bees/](https://spencertownacademy.org/event/symbeeotic-embracing-a-life-with-bees/) and here is the link to register:

<https://spencertownacademy.networkforgood.com/events/30179-symbeeotic-embracing-a-life-with-bees>

We have posted this information on our FB page, and we will continue to post about it up until the event. (<https://www.facebook.com/AusterlitznyClimate-Committee-104829734594699>)

We were informed by the Spencertown Academy on June 25th that they already had 21 people registered for this event and received \$155 in donations, and they are very pleased with this.

Austerlitz Climate Action Website

The Austerlitz Climate Committee has implemented a climate specific website:

<https://austerlitzclimateaction.org>.

Austerlitz Town Board Member Greg Vogler, Climate Committee Member Paige Ruane has been working with a local marketing expert since November 2020 to create a website dedicated solely to Austerlitz climate work. We are excited that this website became live in September 2021.

This website is a centralized place for communicating information to the public about climate change and steps residents/businesses can take to reduce GHG emissions and prepare for the effects of climate change.

Climate Change Panel at Spencertown Academy

On October 15, 2023, the Austerlitz Climate Committee organized a panel of experts to educate and engage the public on climate change resilience. <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org/events/>

Columbia County Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Plan

Austerlitz took part in the County-wide CARP initiative and engaged the public through surveys and education. <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org/events/>

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT TAILORED FOR LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES

While much has been done, we are always looking to the future. Our efforts are purposely aligned to appeal to our local circumstances.

We want to reach out to the ageing members of our community who may not be internet savvy. As such, post Covid, we want to host in person education and awareness sessions as well as program specific events in our new Town Hall. Not only will this be beneficial to anyone who wants to engage in a direct conversation with subject matter experts and program leaders, this will also give our non-internet savvy members of our community an opportunity to participate.

We are keenly aware that there are renters in town as well as homeowners. One of the many good reasons to initiate Community Solar is not just provide opportunities to homeowners, but also let renters participate even when, for example, they cannot control the installment of solar panels where they live.

We plan on an active speaker series that will directly engage the community about salient topics around climate change with the intent to not only inform about town efforts to address climate change but to educate about ways individuals and local businesses can take action, and even save money at the same time.

Our new climate website (<https://austerlitzclimateaction.org>) is also meant to appeal to all aspects of our community, be informational and newsworthy, and be a main vehicle for maintaining community engagement.

All of what we do appeals to the community's interest in preserving our environment, both from a bucolic perspective but also environmental. We will continue to do so.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Repair Cafe The Austerlitz Climate Committee is an active member of Columbia NorthEast Repair Cafe, a consortium of about five local towns implementing Repair Cafes, the first of which was conducted October, 2021.

Spencertown Academy is our community cultural center established in 1972. We invited them to partner with us on our presentation about beekeeping with Sheri Bauer on July 17: SymBeeOtic: Embracing a Life with Bees. Spencertown Academy also did PR for SymBeeOtic and even arranged an interview with Sheri Bauer with Sarah LaDuke on WAMC, which aired on July 16, and mentioned the Austerlitz CSC Task Force twice (The Queen is Constant and Other Lessons from Beekeeper Sheri Bauer with Sarah LaDuke).

Zero Waste Columbia, Columbia County Library Association and Claverack CSC: Zero Waste Columbia is a local chapter of a national organization committed to education and action that can move us toward zero waste. We partnered with these entities to present the webinar, An Introduction to Small Scale Food and Yard Composting.

Capital District Regional Planning Commission: we have been fortunate to have the expertise of Jill Henck, Haley Balcanoff and Tara Donadio to guide us on these endeavors.

Austerlitz & Spencertown Fire Departments represent another key segment of our population, and we are working with them on a Repair Cafe collaboration with other towns in Columbia County – New Lebanon, Canaan, East Nassau and Chatham. Also, the Austerlitz Fire Department helped us water our Buffer in a Bag, when needed, by allowing us to hook up a very long hose to one of their spigots.

Davistudio, a local porcelain potter nationally renowned, supplied approximately 100 five-gallon buckets to be offered for free to residents as composting buckets (as featured in our composting video). This also helped to recycle the buckets in which she receives her clay. Many residents have taken a bucket from the Town Hall vestibule, at least 50, and the supply gets replenished. There is a flyer at the post office and with the buckets that teaches people how to use the buckets in a composting routine.

OTHER KEY INSTITUTIONS FOR FUTURE PARTNERSHIPS

St. Peter's Presbyterian Church is the only church in Austerlitz and its congregation is a wide mix of people. Climate Committee Co-chair and Town Board Member Jere Wrightsman is a longtime member of the congregation and has shared and will continue to share all events with them. We are working on ideas for partnering with them.

Austerlitz Historical Society is another long-standing institution which we would like to partner with in some way in the future. They have been dormant since Covid.

Chatham Central School District is the school district that serves Austerlitz. CSC Task Force Member Emma Gregg was a well-liked athlete who graduated from Chatham in 2018. She is now going into her junior year at SUNY ESF. She passes event information onto her high school science teacher at Chatham to be shared within the school. Also, the mother of two children featured in our composting video shared the video with elementary and middle school teachers and parents. We plan to evaluate additional ideas with which to collaborate with the school district.

Finally, we maintain a call to action to all residents of the town to join our climate committee task force and be a part of the solution we all want to see. Residents and businesses are encouraged to ask questions and to provide feedback and suggestions for future events, actions and partnerships.