

Legislature Award Acceptance Speech

Thank you very much for this recognition. I appreciate the opportunity to shine a little light on the Nyack 2030 initiative.

Last February, we celebrated the adoption of the Nyack 2030 Climate Action Plan and kicked off the implementation phase at a Climate Solutions Fair. It was on a Wednesday evening in the middle of winter, but about 175 people gathered at Nyack Center. People could talk to our community partners—individuals and organizations from Nyack and throughout the county—who are working to bring down emissions and protect our natural resources.

We're proud that the Nyack 2030 plan has been selected as a model for other communities in the region to learn from as they develop their own plans,

We've been at this for a while. In 2019, we decided to create the plan and applied for a grant from the Climate Smart Communities program. We were ready to get to work on it in 2020, but Covid arrived, and then some other circumstances caused more delays.

When we got it all on track early last year, it was clear that a lot had changed in the meantime. I remember that in 2018 climate scientist Kathryn Hayhoe said "The most important thing you can do to fight climate change is to talk about it." Well, it's still true, but it was more true back then. By 2023, people **were** talking about it, and that made it much easier to bring people together and work on a meaningful plan.

In the plan, we describe practical actions with measurable impacts, based on our emissions data. This was for both government and the community— buildings, transportation and waste. So our project was to identify, describe and prioritize actions in a way that would work as a roadmap over time to get our emissions down at least 75% by 2030 over 2018 levels.

Since Nyack is a small village, we also wanted our plan to help expand our influence and help empower others.

What we proposed depends on a strong team to make it work. Our core climate team grew to over two dozen members in the process. We have people with diverse skills and lots of energy, including many individuals from the greater Nyacks and beyond in private and public roles.

The community is called on for action throughout the plan. There are certainly challenges to building the community support and engagement we envision for this, but we have a great foundation.

Right now we have three community campaigns going – one to promote heat pumps, one for community solar and one for EVs, and we're focusing our outreach to reveal and strengthen local knowledge and collaboration. We look for effective ways to involve community members, and as our efforts have become more visible, people reach out to offer support. For example,

we started The Nyack Tree Project, 8 years ago and have now planted hundreds of trees with local volunteers and corporate partners – about half of the plantings have been funded with private dollars. We're bringing pollinator-friendly plantings to backyards, multifamily housing, our downtown and parks in a partnership with a local non-profit. And we've corralled pro bono engineering expertise to help us identify pathways to make our buildings more energy efficient.

So our projects involve private groups, businesses, individuals, and not the government alone.

Recently lots of money has begun to flow from the state and federal government to communities to accelerate the energy transition. That makes it essential that there is support for staff and volunteers to get the funds and put them to work.

That's what **we're** doing, and we're so pleased that now Rockland County has a Sustainability Coordinator to work on this too. We're definitely looking forward to being part of the County's new sustainability initiative.

I mentioned that more people are now ready to talk about climate change. I think there are two reasons —

#1 it's clearly costing money to address the damage caused by climate change

2 people can see our vulnerability and the impacts on properties and human health

Nyack has recently been awarded a grant from the Hudson River Estuary program to conduct a climate vulnerability assessment and create an adaption plan. The plan we have just completed focused on reducing emissions, but not adaptation. But for both plans, we aim to build relationships and trust. And we're committed to that part – talking, learning, sharing information, and working together so we can do more, smarter and faster. We see this as a way to a build a resilient community

It will be especially important to connect and learn together as we assess and address the climate risks – sea level rise and storm surge, flooding, extreme heat, extreme weather events and climate related disease. We know that this new challenge will involve many conversations with the people already invested in some aspects of this –from our environmental community, our government agencies and leadership, our schools, hospitals, emergency workers, businesses, designers, utility companies and residents. We'll learn together as we go.

That's what I have been doing in this local arena for many years – I've had many mentors, especially within the environmental community here in Rockland and the region.

Last, I want to mention that one of the people who **did** want to talk about climate change back in 2018 was Steve Cea. That's when he came forward to join our Sustainability efforts in Nyack, and he quickly became a key member of our team. He's been an incredible partner with an amazing attitude, dedication, focus and energy. So thank you, Steve
Thank you all.