

Bringing Sustainable Energy Infrastructure into the Hudson Valley

by Abigail Kreitler

Representatives from the labor, legislative, developmental, environmental, and business sectors came together in a roundtable this spring to discuss renewable energy efforts now being made in the Hudson Valley and to make plans for its future coordination in the region.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)—Local 363 hosted the event on April 12 at its Harriman Training Facility, which sports a 60 kW solar photovoltaic system (PV) on its roof.

The Roundtable focused on energy efficiency, energy conservation, and green building techniques as forming the foundation of the regional strategy. Discussion specifically concentrated on high performance building methods, solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, fuel cells, tide-powered turbines, the re-powering of existing fossil fuel plant for increased efficiency, and integrating renewable energy into the existing infrastructure.

Some 185 people from various communities throughout the region, including more than 30 elected officials, discussed “Bringing Sustainable Energy Infrastructure into the Hudson Valley.” Roundtable participants included experts in many fields as well as Congressman John Hall, representatives of state agencies, county and local elected officials, media, business owners, engineers, land use attorneys and planners, electrical workers, utilities, and grassroots organizations.

In addition to IBEW-Local 363, co-sponsors included NYS Apollo Alliance, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation, Hudson Valley Regional Council, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Sustainable Hudson Valley and many more organizations.

In opening remarks, IBEW Local 363 Business Manager John Maraia and Timothy Riley of the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation demonstrated labor’s deep commitment to transitioning to energy efficiency and renewables. Craig Jacobs, Local 363 Training Director, outlined both the comprehensive training that IBEW is actively providing for union electricians and future projects on which the union is collaborating.

Current Government Initiatives

Steve Mitnick, Assistant Secretary to the Governor on Energy and Telecommunications, reported on New York State’s future plans and the status of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. A week after the roundtable, Governor Spitzer proposed a framework called “15 by 15,” which will reduce New York’s electricity consumption by 15 percent below the forecasted level by 2015 -- the most aggressive target in the nation. The following week, Governor Spitzer proposed Article X power plant legislation that would establish an expedited process to fast-track only clean power plant proposals with low or no emissions. The process will apply to both the re-powering of older, less efficient plants and to the siting of new clean ones, and to wind projects that generate energy for resale.

Jeff Peterson of NYSERDA gave an update about the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), which is funded by ratepayers’ System Benefit Charge (SBC); Patrick Curran of Energy Association of New York State addressed the utilities’ plans for energy efficiency and renewable energy; and John Crews of the Hudson Valley Regional Council addressed the need for regional planning and coordination.

Jeff Jones of the New York State Apollo Alliance, a coalition of business, labor and environmental groups, highlighted specific models, emphasizing the potential of energy efficiency and conservation to revitalize communities and create jobs. “Mayor Bloomberg’s recently released carbon footprint for New York City is an excellent model for establishing a baseline,” noted Jones. He suggested creating a

dramatically reduced carbon footprint for the Hudson Valley by increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy use in the region by 25% in the next five years.

Nicola Coddington, Energy Conservation Coordinator for the Town of Greenburgh, offered many examples of what a municipality can do, including requiring that all new residential construction meet Energy Star standards. Simon Gruber, Consulting Partner with Hudson Valley Regional Council, reported on initiatives in Montgomery and Orange Counties to plan for sustainable energy supply and local policy implications. Sustainable Hudson Valley Executive Director Melissa Everett showcased excellent models from around the nation and the globe. Newburgh City Manager Jean McGrane facilitated the envisioning of an integrated sustainable energy policy for the Hudson Valley and New York State, beginning with the full utilization of existing resources and increasing conservation efforts.

State and Federal Efforts Needed

While stressing the need to assure stability and reliability during the transition to increased renewable energy and energy efficiency, roundtable participants urged integration of sustainable practices into the current infrastructure. The group noted that governmental efforts at both state and federal levels would be instrumental in promoting greater awareness, as well as actual implementation.

Specific proposals for the Hudson Valley included:

- Increasing photovoltaic production within the Hudson Valley to help keep the circulation of resources local, increase jobs, and decrease the state's dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels.
- Increasing the solar net metering cap to 2 MW and including commercial customers.
- Increasing incentives for small wind and community owned systems.
- Using hydroelectric and tidal resources to supplement traditional power, including refurbishing low impact dams or installing tidal turbines in the Hudson River and its tributaries.
- Restoring large incentives for geothermal energy.
- Utilizing combined heat and power and dual-cycle combustion to repower existing fossil fuel plants for greatly increased efficiency,
- Using of fuel cells in hotels, hospitals, and other large energy consumers.
- Increasing reuse through organizations such as the Hudson Valley Materials Exchange.
- Using GIS software to map existing renewable energy generation in the Hudson Valley to see where opportunities for the implementation of additional renewable systems exist.
- Streamlining the NYSERDA application processes as an incentive to promote green practices in commercial/individual building and renovation projects.

Proposed funding mechanisms included:

- Shifting subsidies away from non-renewable energies and toward conservation and renewable energies.

- Creating large-scale financing opportunities such as allocating a percentage of the New York State budget to production of renewable energy sources, which creates jobs rather than exporting labor and dollars out of state.
- Working with private capital, such as the Allco Finance Group, which provides financing for municipal solar projects by selling Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) associated with the clean generation into the NYSEERDA pool set up to meet New York State's Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) goal of 25% renewables by 2013.
- Levying a tax on dry cask storage at Indian Point, as Minnesota has successfully done in their state.

Cooperation Crucial

In addition to opening up the dialogue, initiating the process of coordinating regional efforts, and encouraging the participants to pursue energy conservation and efficiency, as well as renewable resources, the April 12 Roundtable demonstrated that it will take cooperation among all sectors and a mix of all kinds of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources to fully implement sustainable energy infrastructure in the Hudson Valley.

"In order to reduce the regional impacts of impending climate change, we have to act aggressively, immediately, and collaboratively," said Manna Jo Greene, Environmental Director for Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*. "We have to put our differences aside and all work together with clear determination to really bring sustainable energy infrastructure into the Hudson Valley. To date our society has invested over 98% of its research, development and infrastructure into nuclear and fossil fuels, and less than 2% into energy efficiency and renewables. If we shift our priorities, we can transform the energy landscape in this region and become a global model."

Follow up meetings are planned with the various regional planning agencies, including the Hudson Valley Regional Council, Mid-Hudson Patterns for Progress and the Regional Planning Association in a process which is committed to being inclusive and obtaining measurable results on a very accelerated timeline.

A summary and copies of PowerPoint presentations are available at www.clearwater.org/sustainenergy

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Abigail Kreidler is an Earth Science student at Vassar College who did a Spring 2007 internship an Environmental Action intern at Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*, which was one of many co-sponsors of this event.

Photos of 60 kW photovoltaic system on roof of IBEW Local 363 Regional Training Facility in Harriman [IBEW Local 363](http://www.ibew.org) which produces 66,000 kWh/ year and reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 71,900 pounds/year. Courtesy National Photovoltaic Construction Partnership: photos.npcpunited.com