



The Trailblazer

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WNY Municipalities Featured in 2019 New York State Toolkit

by Ellen Cardone Banks, Niagara Group Executive Committee and Climate/Energy Chair

The National Sierra Club and Atlantic Chapter are releasing a publication of case studies from cities and towns in New York State that have taken significant steps toward our state's renewable energy goals. These case studies are intended to guide other municipalities that want to take on clean energy projects. Four of the case studies are from the Niagara Group area: Amherst, Grand Island, Lockport and Eagle.

Amherst has attained Clean Energy Community status with New York State Energy Research and Development (NYSERDA) by completing four of ten recommended "High Impact Actions". These 'Actions' include enacting a unified solar permitting process, holding a Solarize Amherst campaign with a waiver of building permit fees and discounts with two rooftop solar providers resulting in 80 contracts. Further actions entail training town employees on the NY State energy building codes and purchasing Amherst's first all-electric vehicle (EV) for the town fleet. These actions won the town a \$250,000 grant which is being used to expand the solar installation on the Clearfield Recreation Center; a related

grant will provide two additional EV charging stations. Amherst is also embarking on the Climate Safe Community program of the NY Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

The City of Lockport's case study described the conversion to geothermal heating, (cooling and hot water heating), of 72 older-adult apartments in the Autumn Gardens project. Lockport's Housing Authority won a New York Geothermal Organization's award as the third such project in NY State. Geothermal heating and cooling will cut electricity costs by 50-75% while saving air conditioning rental costs for the residents. Thermal energy (heating and cooling buildings) constitutes a third of statewide net energy consumption and is also responsible for a similar proportion of New York State's energy-related, combustion-based GHG emissions. Conversion from gas and oil heating to geothermal energy is an essential component of the transition to renewable energy.

The Town of Grand Island was recognized for three community solar energy projects that are expected to produce 50-60 Megawatts (MW), equivalent to all the electrical consump-

tion of the island's residents. Our Niagara Group volunteer, Roger Cook, was influential in winning over the community's support for community solar, as well as advocating for construction agreements supportive of organized labor. The sites include an abandoned industrial park and land along the Thruway, and pollinator gardens under the solar panels. As Grand Island is traversed by 30 million tourists every year on the way to Niagara Falls, the town plans to install an electronic sign along the Thruway showing the output of the solar projects in real time. Grand Island is between the site of the first long-distance electrical transmission in the US, Niagara Falls to Buffalo, and is also opposite the shut-down Huntley coal-fired plant, placing it between the past of electrical energy and the future of renewable energy.

The Town of Eagle, in Wyoming County, has the Noble Bliss Wind Park, a 671.5 MW project, completed in 2008, one of six wind farms in the area. Town Supervisor Brett Hastings, who was not in office when the project was constructed, reported that most resi-

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Northern Access Pipeline: A Story of National Fuel's Profit Over People and Environment

We celebrated in April 2017 when NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) made the decision to deny the 401 Water Certification for National Fuel's proposed Northern Access 2016 Pipeline Project. This certification is necessary for compliance with the Clean Water Act. NYSDEC determined after careful consideration that the 97 miles of fracked gas pipeline and crossing of 192 streams would be too devastating to WNY's waterways, wetlands, riparian and forest habitats.

In the year following this denial, even industry journals were declaring the project dead. So we were shocked and dismayed last August when the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) overturned the denial by declaring a January 2017 letter, signed by National Fuel and NYSDEC, to extend the decision date by one month, invalid. What made FERC issue this decision 18 months after the agreement letter was written and filed on their docket? This ruling throws out NYSDEC's environmental concerns and usurps NY's right to regulate waterways. New York State and the Sierra Club are currently fighting this ruling.

In January, FERC granted National Fuel their request for a three-year extension, making the pipeline that was to be completed in 2016 the same pipeline National Fuel is now aiming to complete in 2022.

To further complicate matters, National Fuel also appealed the denial in court. The 2nd Circuit Federal Court has recently ruled to vacate the denial, calling on NYSDEC to produce more robust evidence to support their decision. NYSDEC is currently working to provide that evidence.

So what does it take to build a fracked gas pipeline? Apparently a federal agency like FERC that is known for rubber stamping every project it encounters and lawsuits galore.

National Fuel has sued and won against the Town of Pendleton over their zoning laws. No matter if residents don't want a 22,214 HP compressor station spewing toxic benzene, toluene and formaldehyde over their homes. National Fuel's profits and fracked gas export to Canadian markets matter more.

Another step in the process is hiring land agents to knock on hundreds of doors to inform landowners they have a choice, to sign over

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Annual Sierra Club Awards Dinner

Join us

Wednesday, April 10th, 2019
Unitarian Universalist Church
(Elmwood Avenue & West Ferry Street, Buffalo)
6:00 to 8:00 pm

This year we will have a delicious catered plant-based dinner in support of the planet.

Please RSVP to: niagarasierra@gmail.com
OR go to this Eventbrite link:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ny-cheek-towaga/sierra-club-annual-awards-dinner/>

Tickets are \$30 per person.



Zero Emissions Bus Campaign

by John Szalasny

The Sierra Club's Electric Bus Committee has been working with NFTA to encourage them to purchase zero emission buses since October 2016. We have successfully participated in bringing three different electric demonstration buses to Buffalo in cooperation with NFTA. The electric bus companies that participated included: Proterra, BYD and New Flyer. We lobbied the Erie County Legislature and helped pass a resolution in December 2017. This resolution communicated to NFTA that whereas: "Zero emission buses reduce tailpipe emissions, reduce the noise on our streets, increase fuel economy, decrease maintenance costs, and increase bus fleet stability; that the health of our neighborhood, our economy, and our climate depends on a switch to clean transportation we the Erie County Legislature encourage NFTA to purchase Zero Emission Buses." The resolution was passed unanimously.

Our electric bus committee attends NFTA Board of Commissioner meetings for Surface Ground Transportation. We are able to provide the Commissioners with relevant up-to-date information regarding electric buses at key moments. Our work on this issue includes

keeping open discussions with the President of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU representing NFTA employees), who has been supportive of our efforts.

After collecting 2503 petitions supporting the idea of NFTA purchasing Zero Emission buses, from the public, our group met with CEO Kim Minkle, Board of Commission Chair Denise Roache, Director of Surface and Ground Transportation Tom DeGeorge and Commissioner Phil Wilcox at NFTA headquarters in August 2017. The Commissioners and NFTA Directors were impressed with the petitions. We also made seven presentations broken down into two categories: Financial Benefits and Health Benefits of the ZEB. Our arguments for ZEB's were very well-presented and well-received by NFTA.

The Director of NFTA Grants Department Darren Kemper and Assistant Director Jeffery Amplement have written grants to add 23 electric buses to the NFTA fleet. Our Electric Bus group was asked to write letters of community support to these agencies on behalf of the NFTA and we are hopeful that this work will result in the receipt of grant monies toward a cleaner transportation future.

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dents supported the project when it was proposed. The town was looking for development opportunities and chose the windfarm instead of a landfill. While a few residents and outside voices raised concerns about noise and harm to wildlife, these problems did not materialize. (A landfill, Hastings pointed out, would have had large, noisy, polluting trucks coming and going all day.) PILOT payments (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) from the project have eliminated town taxes and trash collection fees, while providing supplemental leasing income that helped dairy farmers maintain their family businesses.

The Municipal case studies project was a joint venture of Sierra Club volunteers and national staff. Most of the interviews were conducted by our volunteers, and several months of graphic design and editing by Hudson Valley volunteer Gale Pisha and national staff have resulted in the final report. We had requested a footnote recognizing our 2018 intern, Megan Racinowski, one of the Amherst interviewers, who tragically passed away in September, and we were moved to find that the whole document was dedicated to her memory.

Eight other communities across the state have case studies in the document. Together, municipalities have a major role to play in moving our state to 100% clean energy.

"Northern Access Pipeline" continued from front page

right-of-way to National Fuel or have that right seized in court through eminent domain. If you resist the clear cutting of trees and a 24" high pressure fracked gas pipeline bisecting your property, National Fuel will see you in court and will likely win. We rejoiced when an Allegany County couple won their case on appeal. National Fuel will be taking them to court for the third time, this spring. As landowner Theresa Schueckler says, "Eminent domain for corporate profit just isn't right." Another power granted to National Fuel by FERC.

In my view, this is an egregious ignoring of landowner rights, NY State rights, environmental impacts and health concerns on the part of FERC and National Fuel. As we face a climate crisis, this project would cause the fracking of up to 2,100 new wells in neighboring PA over a projected 30-year lifespan.

FERC has a near 100% approval rate of pipeline projects. They never see a project they don't like. Isn't it odd that not a single project fails to meet FERC's environmental standards? Over the past 10 years alone, they have approved 240 pipelines. A coalition of 200 groups is now calling for a Congressional investigation of FERC and real action on climate change.

We need your support as we continue to resist this fracked gas pipeline and work for a renewable energy future. Find updates and ways to help at niagarasierraclub.com.

Extinction Rebellion Comes to Western New York

By Sara Schultz, SCNG Chairperson

With the constant heartbreaking attacks on our natural environment, I try to look for solace and hope in positive things that are happening on a daily basis. It is one way to cope. It is also a way to stay motivated. Recently Community Beer Works offered our Sierra Club Niagara Group one of their "Happy Hour" fundraising opportunities. We were small in numbers but huge in connection with those who showed up. One small group of millennials, spoke with us about the organizing they are doing in defense of all living things. They have created a local chapter of Extinction Rebellion.

We learned that Extinction Rebellion (also known as XR) is an international movement that grew out of the group 'Rising Up' in the United Kingdom. XR's mission is to call attention to the extractive suicide economy we all participate in. They hope to awaken those who are not paying attention to the devastating effects of a warming climate before it is too late. Through Non-Violent Civil Disobedience (NVCD), in the footsteps of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, XR will sound the alarm around specific issues that already, and certainly in the future, will affect everyone. Sierra

Club has always had strict rules governing NVCD. Recently, the rules have changed to allow NVCD as a local group or state chapter if sanctioned by our national organization. I am not saying that NVCD and possible arrest is for everyone. It is one way to move the conversation forward for those who are willing to take risks and go beyond their comfort zone. There are many paths to take when fighting climate disruption. We do this by aligning ourselves with our Union brothers and sisters, relentlessly educating legislators, collaborating with the strong WNY non-profits that have similar missions, lobbying the Boards of our school systems and our NFTA, speaking up at public hearings and writing, writing, writing to every publication to move the needle in a hopeful direction.

I encourage Extinction Rebellion to persist with their movement. I was proud, as an individual, to participate in their first event previously this year. There are growing pains for all new grassroots endeavors, but I believe in the loving, thoughtful and compassionate people I stood with that day who are willing to speak out for creatures and forests that cannot speak for themselves. These young visionaries are fighting for their future. Let's "have their backs" and applaud their efforts.

For the demands, principles, and values of XR go to their website <https://rebellion.earth> or their sign-up page <https://xrebellion.org/xrus/signup>. You can also contact the local organizers at xrbuffalo@gmail.com or 716-427-3118. Whatever way you personally choose to advocate for a livable future, be sure to push yourself to go out of your comfort zone and peacefully but forcefully join the fight for all living things!

Ways to keep updated on Sierra Club Niagara Group News:

Group website - niagarasierraclub.com

Facebook - [sierra club niagara group](https://www.facebook.com/sierraclubniagara)

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