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 making transitions to renewable energy. 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 to 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 consumption 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 resistors...
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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 Minkel, 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 ZEBs 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.

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/xr-us/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!

**Extinction Rebellion Comes to Western New York**

By Sara Schultz, SCNG Chairperson

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**Zero Emissions Bus Campaign**

by John Szalasny

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