# Climate Smart Copake
# PE9: Public Engagement, Outreach & Education Plan

## Background and Objectives of Climate Smart Communities

The Climate Smart Communities Certification Program is a set of 100 actions, developed by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, that provides a transformational roadmap for municipalities. Under this program, the Town of Copake, together with participating communities across NY State, has committed to transitioning to zero carbon emissions, investing in community resilience, restoring ecosystems, and building a more just, healthy and livable future by mitigating and adapting to climate change.

## Importance of Public Engagement, Outreach & Education

Copake is committed to identifying solutions and taking action for mitigating climate change, and adapting to its inevitable consequences.

Public education, outreach, and engagement are critical to preparing communities for the effects of climate change and to enlist the public in taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as part of preventing further climate change. Outreach efforts provide opportunities to collaborate with nontraditional stakeholder groups, start conversations about the community's future, deepen a sense of identity and social cohesion, and identify innovative ways to reduce GHG emissions and build community resilience to climate change.

In order to reach, engage and educate the residents of Copake and those who work, go to school, and spend time in Copake, the Climate Smart Task Force is developing a Public Education and Engagement Plan. (PEEP)

## The Town of Copake and Climate Change

The Town of Copake, established in 1824, lies within the Hudson Valley Estuary, a watershed that is critical to NY State and at the heart of New York's most biologically diverse region. We are a community with rich traditions of agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreational activities including hunting, fishing, skiing, cycling and hiking, and community involvement. The Town is proud of and committed to protecting our scenic viewsheds, our clean waterways, our forests, our farmlands, our cultural heritage, and the rural character of the area. Our diverse population includes farmers, tradespeople, educators, artists and writers, religious leaders, restaurant and small business owners, healthcare professionals and first responders, lawyers and environmentalists, as well as retired people eager to volunteer.

The Town of Copake recognizes the inevitability of climate change and the resulting challenges including unpredictable weather patterns, sea-level rise, spread of invasive

species, public health impacts such as tick-borne diseases, and changes in ecosystems and habitat shifts impacting viable crops and local fish and game populations.

Meeting these challenges will require a community wide response.

**Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are all people who reside, visit, work, own businesses, attend school, or travel through our Town. Those stakeholders who are at particularly high risk include: the highway department; farmers; first responders; seasonal businesses that depend upon a healthy outdoor environment such as the summer camps and the local ski resort; residents whose homes are not equipped to sustain extreme heatwaves, high winds, or flooding; residents and visitors with compromised health conditions; and others.

**Partners**

The Climate Smart Task Force has identified the following organizations as potential partners**.** This list is certainly not complete, and we remain open to working with other interested parties.

- The Roeliff Jansen Community Library
- Columbia Land Conservancy
- Taconic Hills Central School District
- Friends of Taconic State Park
- Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association
- Copake Grange 935
- Copake Hillsdale Farmers Market
- Roe Jan Ramble
- Columbia Greene Community College
- The Neighboring Towns of Ancram, Taghkanic and Hillsdale

**Goals**

- To recognize, understand and respond to climate change issues affecting our community
- To encourage conversations about climate change and facilitate learning opportunities with Town employees, Copake residents, students, visitors, collaborators, and other interested parties
- To provide residents and other interested parties with resources including current, science-based information and practical ideas for mitigating Greenhouse Gas Emissions and adapting to climate change

- To analyze and measure the effectiveness of our efforts and to continually make changes to improve results.

**Actions**

- The Town of Copake will formally establish the outreach and education plan through a resolution, executive order, or memorandum of understanding during the fourth quarter of 2023.
- The Conservation Advisory Committee will create and maintain a social media presence that will serve as a platform for sharing information concerning Climate Smart Communities.
- The Climate Smart Task Force will conduct focus groups, interviews, and/or surveys during the first half of 2024 to gain a baseline understanding of the issues, perceptions and beliefs about the causes and effects of a changing climate in our community.
- The Climate Smart Task Force will secure documentation of at least two public education, outreach, and/or engagement activities focused on climate change where the local government played a key role. Such documentation may include sign-in sheets, summaries of information gathered from the community, photographs of events, copies of educational materials, etc.

## Specific ideas for education/ outreach/ engagement activities:

- Partner with the Copake Grange's Annual Plant Sale to offer Native Plants (available for minimal cost from the DEC nursery)
- Have an informational booth or other presence at the Roe Jan Ramble promoting clean modes of transportation
- Invite a climate expert to be a guest speaker at one of the Roe Jan Library's lecture series
- Participate in the Columbia County Climate Carnival
- Promote and publicize our climate smart actions on social media.