

PILLAR

4

# ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY

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**SINCE THE OUTSET OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, OUR UTILITIES AND OTHER ENERGY PROVIDERS WORKED TO ENSURE THAT BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS HAVE CONTINUED ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY, NATURAL GAS, AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS TO HEAT AND COOL OUR HOMES AND BUILDINGS, POWER OUR CARS AND EQUIPMENT, AND KEEP OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM OPERATING. BUT NEW YORK STATE’S ENERGY COMPLEX IS EVOLVING, AND OUR ENERGY FUTURE IS IN FLUX.**

In 2019, New York State passed groundbreaking legislation to place us on the path to a cleaner and more sustainable energy future. The ambitious Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) codified aggressive targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the next several decades – with aspirational goals of 100 percent zero-emission electricity by 2040 and 85 percent reductions of greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2040. The Climate Act is not very specific about how we reach these bold statewide goals.

The New York State Climate Action Council, formed under the Climate Act, is tasked with creating a scoping plan over the next eighteen months. This plan thereafter will be implemented primarily by the State Department of Environmental Conservation and by the Public Service Commission in the power sector. Currently in development, the scoping plan will involve some combination of: (a) rapidly expanding existing

renewable energy production; (b) developing new systems for enhanced renewables and negative emissions technologies; (c) conservation measures and smart grid technology; and (d) physical climate resiliency initiatives.

Like each economic region in the State, the Hudson Valley faces a unique set of energy challenges. As Indian Point prepares to decommission, over 2,000 megawatts of power generating capacity is permanently coming off-line. Moreover, due to increased demand and tightening capacity constraints, stress on the natural gas delivery system has led to Con Edison's temporary moratorium on new firm gas accounts for most of Westchester County. In the midst of these delivery constraints, Con Edison continues to invest in renewable energy, battery storage, and modernizing the distribution grid. Similarly, petroleum operators are delivering cleaner burning products as they continue to build out supply chains for renewable diesel and advanced biofuels.

The regional economic issues created by climate change and the regulatory response thereto predate the pandemic. They are, however, linked in numerous ways. For example, many climate change impacts (deforestation, loss of biodiversity) can create new pathogen pathways and increase the likelihood of novel infections. Moreover, as a respiratory infection, COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on places where air quality is poor.

Regardless of cause and effect, New York State now has one of the strongest climate change laws in the world. In order to meet these ambitious clean energy goals and become a leader in the fight against climate change, stakeholders in businesses and professional institutions, real estate developers, asset managers, community organizations, and local municipalities will need to be proactive. And they will need the proper incentives, information, and training to make it happen.

### **INITIATIVE 1 :: Advocate for Sustainable Energy Policy:**

Our business and professional community can embrace the evolution to a clean energy future consistent with the goals of the Climate Act. But they deserve greater clarity about how to bridge the gap between traditional energy sources and a carbon free economy. Moreover, they will need transitional assistance through incentive-based mechanisms.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Economic development agencies such as county-wide and local IDAs and LDCs should reward clean energy building projects and retrofits as well as other sustainable business practices.
- Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council (MHREDC) should actively solicit projects that move us towards a clean energy future.
- Model county-wide green building codes should be adopted.
- State and local government should view investment in both public transit and EV charging stations as essential economic infrastructure.
- As an alternative to Article 10, new siting mechanisms for large scale renewable projects should be developed and run out of the NYS Department of Economic Development.
- New York State should expand existing financing mechanisms available for businesses such as the Clean Energy Fund and the NY Green Bank.
- New York State should encourage the orderly and responsible decommissioning of Indian Point consistent with plans already put in place.
- New York State should expand its electric vehicle rebate program to encourage fleet purchases of electric vehicles.
- The federal government should pass legislation adopting a technologically neutral and non-sector specific carbon tax.

## INITIATIVE 2 :: Develop an Information Clearinghouse:

There are numerous programs and resources (financial and otherwise) currently available to developers, building owners, and businesses wishing to transition to a lower carbon footprint.

## A SAMPLE OF THESE PROGRAMS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

### ➤ Con Edison

- Energy savings programs and tariff-based incentives such as electricity Time of Use Rates
- Equipment efficiency financial incentives for businesses
- Demand management programs for large commercial customers

### ➤ NYPA

- Energy Project Financing
- NYPA Energy Solutions
- NYPA Blended Power Product

### ➤ NYSERDA

- NY Clean Energy Fund (Green Bank / Loan Loss Reserve Fund / Market Development / Innovation and Research / NY Sun)
- Flexible Technical Assistance Program
- Retail Energy Storage Incentive Program
- Bulk Energy Storage Incentive Program
- Commercial Tenant Assistance Program
- Clean Energy Action Plan

### ➤ NY and Federal Law

- Property tax exemptions for energy conservation improvements
- Business Energy Investment Tax Credit

These resources lack an easily digestible information clearinghouse, readily available to businesses and nonprofits. Organizations need a dynamic guide to resources to assist them. Accordingly, the WCA is partnering with Pace University's Energy and Climate Center to curate and maintain an annotated, dynamic sustainable energy resource guide which will be made publicly available.

### **INITIATIVE 3 ::** Develop and Offer a Formal Curriculum in Sustainability Management:

Together with experts from NYSERDA, NYPA, Con Edison, and other local organizations, the WCA will stage events focused on the State's energy future and available professional resources. However, preparing our businesses and nonprofits to adapt to a more sustainable energy future will require more than informational seminars. It will require agents of change who are educated in sustainability management concepts and who are armed with the resources to actively apply those concepts to make a demonstrative difference within their respective organizations.

Sustainability in business is not just about climate change. It's about corporate social responsibility and institutionalized fairness. It's about utilizing available resources with maximum efficiency and minimal waste. Most importantly, it's about developing a long-term strategic business model for innovation, profitability and enduring success. Organizations must be willing to commit to customized guiding principles, based upon empirical information, measured against qualitative norms, and supported (or at least understood) by an array of stakeholders. Sustainability and social responsibility feed the success of any enterprise, whether for profit or otherwise. It is a superior, long-term financial business model.

Accordingly, the Westchester County Association is partnering with Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business to develop a curriculum in organizational sustainability to train thought leaders with the necessary analytical tools to originate, market, and lead sustainability initiatives in a variety of professional contexts. This will be a single, stand-alone, semester long course, taught locally and sensitive to the time constraints of working professionals.

More ambitious than a series of informational sessions, the goal is to arm dedicated professionals with the practical skills necessary to develop and implement an enduring sustainability program within their organizations. Those who undertake and complete the coursework and assignments will be prepared to recognize and apply the pre-eminent tools used today in sustainability management, stakeholder engagement, and communications.