

COOL CITIES CORNER

Middlesex County Freeholder James Polos discusses Global Warming

Interviewed by Stefano Crema (stefcre@aol.com)

James Polos says that political action to confront global warming reminds him of the effort to institute recycling in New Jersey. Both initiatives started small, but with time gained speed and public support. Environmental groups went directly to the public, bypassing government, to teach people how important recycling was. As public interest awakened, local governments started supporting recycling.

At the state level there was initial support without a mandate for action. As the cost of solid waste disposal increased, the state passed enabling legislation. A similar thing is happening with global warming. Just four years ago Polos asked about the possibility of Middlesex County's vehicle fleet utilizing hybrids and alternative fuels. At that time it was difficult even to get information to evaluate the suitability of such vehicles. It took several months to obtain a few test vehicles; then heavy equipment manufacturers threatened to void warranties if bio-fuels were used to power them. After months of testing, Middlesex County held a forum, which was attended by more than 120 people, where results of the tests were disseminated, and it was announced that 10% of the county fleet would be hybrid.

That was in 2004 when the price of gasoline was \$1.78/gal. Not many municipal officials rushed to buy hybrids. Then came Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth," and a spike in the cost of fuel, and the phones started ringing. Starting in 2007, Middlesex County has been helping communities to integrate green technologies, from planning solar projects to writing ordinances to promote green buildings.

Polos believes that a major obstacle for municipalities has been the bureaucracy associated with Trenton. The simplest of projects requires hiring consultants and engineering firms for customized designs. The state can not

afford to support all municipalities requesting help. In his view, it would be much more efficient if the state would let counties deal with individual municipalities. Many counties have better relationships with their municipalities than the state does. He suggests that the state come up with a standardized set of criteria and designs to allow municipalities to avoid customized set ups. Furthermore, with the limited expertise available to the individual municipalities, mayors have a hard time determining if the suggestions they receive from consultants conform to best practices.

Polos thinks that overworked public officials might not pay attention to state goals unless they are given substantial help. He thinks that the 2020 goals outlined in New Jersey's Energy Master Plan are reachable with effort, but not the loftier 2050 goals. The state should come up with a series of intermediate goals, and provide incentives. There should be no unfunded mandates. Communities successful in implementing green initiatives will be imitated by others, under the pressure of their constituents. A dozen New Jersey communities are leading in green initiatives.

It is also important that sustainability plans at the county level mesh with plans developed at the community level. Middlesex County is the first in New Jersey to have developed a county sustainability plan, thanks to a grant that Sen. Bob Smith helped to get.

The federal government should also play a part in setting policies and providing funding. But Freeholder Polos believes that before adding to the existing tax burden, the federal government should eliminate unnecessary and inefficient programs and subsidies.

Local grassroots efforts alone will not have the impact needed to solve the problem of global warming. There are commercial and industrial developments in green energy practices that can only be stimulated by federal incentives.

Cool Cities News

By Faith Teitelbaum, our Cool Cities co-Coordinator

The Cool Cities Campaign has been having a busy time. Our goal this year is to get functioning green teams in every Cool City in NJ (that's 80!) We are focusing our efforts in Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Laura Bagwell and I gave a Cool Cities presentation to the Monmouth County Environmental Commission in April. In July the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders pledged to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80% by 2050. The Monmouth County Cool Cities Partnership (comprised of members of the Sierra Club, League of Women Voters, Unitarian Church of Lincroft, St Mary's of Colts Neck and The Methodist Church of Red Bank) is working with the Freeholders to put on lunchtime seminars on the environment. We also held a Saturday joint training at the County Agricultural building in Freehold on Nov 15, entitled "What is a Green Team." Jim Polos, Freeholder from Middlesex County was our featured speaker. Another joint training will be held in January or February entitled "How to Build a Green Team."

In October, Stockton College Prof Patrick Hossay presented training sessions in Toms River and Point Pleasant on

How to Do an Energy Audit and on How to Do A Carbon Inventory, respectively.

The Shore Group Conservation Committee hopes to influence towns to include cleaning up their coastal lakes into every Cool Cities Climate Action Plan. We have begun to work on a joint project between the Urban Coast Institute at Monmouth University, the Environmental Partnership of Monmouth County (environmental commissioners from 14 towns), Monmouth University Water Watch and the Monmouth County Cool Cities Partnership. Our goal is to clean up the coastal lakes in New Jersey, starting with our local lakes of Takanassee Lake in Long Branch and Deal Lake in Asbury Park. Oct 25 we had over 50 people cleaning up a section of Deal Lake. We eventually want to build rain gardens and educate the people surrounding the lakes as to the effects of fertilizers from their lawns on the lakes. Then we hope some of these people will form 'green teams' in their towns.

For further information on Cool Cities go to www.coolcities.us or contact me at faithtei@aol.com.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Solving the Gasoline Crisis

By Edward Hannaman (edrman7@yahoo.com) of our Central Jersey Group

The obvious short term response to the ever-worsening oil crisis is the prompt development of a far more fuel-efficient internal combustion engine. The true, long term solution would be a plentiful, reliable substitute for oil as an energy source (one that doesn't subvert the world's corn crop).

To achieve this I propose a "Manhattan-type" project/contest to achieve energy independence. If we can spend ten billion dollars a month for the war in Iraq, why can't we offer that kind of money to the inventors of a revolution in energy technology? How about giving one billion dollars to each of ten universities with leading science reputations - e.g., MIT, Cal Tech, even our own Rutgers (full disclosure: I'm a graduate!) to solve the energy problem?

Then offer two additional "prizes," of similar magnitude, to any school, compa-

ny, person or entity as follows: The first would be for the development of an internal combustion engine capable of powering a normal vehicle at 60 mph with an average of 175 mpg. The second would be for a suitable replacement energy source for vehicles, one which is environmentally friendly, cheap and renewable. Perhaps someone could refine photoelectric cell technology to propel a vehicle, and create highly efficient rechargeable batteries to supplement power. Perhaps chemical reactions could be a power source.

With this financial incentive one can imagine that new companies would be formed by venture capitalists, scientists and entrepreneurs to compete for the reward.

Even if the breakthroughs were not achieved quickly, this effort would demonstrate a national conviction to reject our self-defeating energy paradigm.

Chapter's Annual Appreciation Day Honors List



Ken Johanson, Alan Steinberg, Bernadette Bizer, David Yennior, Jeff Tittel. Photo by Wynn Johanson and Stacey Ayala.

Our annual awards ceremony took place in the historic Pretty Brook Farmhouse, on the campus of the Princeton Day School, on November 16th. Joan and George Denzer did their usual great job in organizing and coordinating the event. Based upon the reac-

tions of those in attendance, it appears that their efforts were successful.

Ken Johanson, Chapter chair, expressed the Chapter's appreciation and thanks to all those who have helped in achieving the Chapter's goals during the year, including our excellent staff,

our dedicated volunteers, our friends in Trenton and Washington and our many members and supporters. Jeff Tittel, Chapter director, went on to note some of our recent accomplishments, as well as the challenges that lie ahead.

Bernadette Bizer (a Madison High School sophomore), Club volunteer-of-the-year Dave Yennior, and Alan Steinberg (EPA Region 2 Administrator) received awards. Others in attendance were Congressmen Rush Holt (12th CD) and Frank Pallone (6th CD) and Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein (14th AD).

Bernadette Bizer was recognized for her efforts to build awareness of environmental issues among young people. Bernadette recently organized an environmentally friendly coffeehouse for teens. Attendees were encouraged to support the environmental movement by bringing their own coffee mug to the coffeehouse, rather than using a throw-away cup, and by making a voluntary donation to the New Jersey Chapter. Due in large part to Bernadette's dedication and hard work, the event was a great success.

Dave Yennior was recognized for leading our campaign to motivate the Legislature to pass the Smart Container

Act, A-121, a bill promoting the recycling of beverage cans and bottles by imposing a refundable deposit on the container. His remarks brought forth the story from Congressman Pallone of how, as a student at Middlebury College, he had got his start in politics by working on Vermont's Bottle Bill. Then Assemblywoman Greenstein explained how she had become a prime sponsor of the New Jersey Bill, along with Valerie Vainieri Huttler (37th AD) and Nilsa Cruz-Perez (5th AD).

EPA Administrator Alan Steinberg was commended for his efforts to clean up the Passaic River, as well as his efforts to limit the harmful impact of New Jersey's Permit Extension Act by sending a letter to legislators pointing out that some aspects of the proposed legislation might well be in violation of federal environmental laws. His efforts resulted in amendments that eliminated some of the most egregious provisions of the bill.

Many of our faithful benefactors were present, along with the Chapter staff, and many volunteer officers of our Groups, Sections, and of the Chapter itself. The weather was crisply cooperative, as was a herd of deer just outside.