

Symposium Report

Waldo County Climate Change Symposium: Preparing for Tomorrow - Our Climate Future

The Climate Change Symposium, was designed by the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee and the All of Belfast Climate Dialogues team as the first step in an ongoing conversation to foster collaboration and ACTION. In this report, we suggest next steps for that collaboration and summarize the content of the presentations made by participating groups.

Overview

The Symposium was held as a ZOOM Meeting on January 22, 2022 in partnership with the Belfast Free Library's [All of Belfast Climate Dialogues](#) (ABCD), a community engagement project, and the [Belfast Climate Crisis Committee](#). (CCC)

The All of Belfast Climate Dialogues team included Brenda Harrington, Sarah Kirn, and Misty Mallar. Jon Beal, Belfast Climate Crisis Committee Chairperson, presented the purpose and ground rules for the Symposium. Jerry Brand, a CCC member, helped organize the Symposium and document the report.

Dr. Cassandra Rose of the Maine Climate Council opened our event with a succinct presentation on the science of climate change in our area, and the planned response set forth in the [“Maine Won’t Wait”](#) climate action plan. Dr. Rose shared the slides from her presentation. A link to these can be found in [the symposium notes in our Padlet](#) page, a virtual ‘whiteboard/bulletin board’ application we used to document the presentations. The Padlet notes are also attached as a PDF file.

Fifteen Waldo County organizations with climate change-related activities attended the symposium. Each gave a 5-minute presentation about who they are, their present activities related to climate change, and their future plans. A summary of each presentation is included at the end of this report. Additional notes, including links to websites and slides, may be [found in our meeting Padlet](#).

Several City officials and legislators were invited to listen. Senator Chip Curry (Waldo County) and Representative Jan Dodge (Belfast, Northport, and Waldo District 97) both attended the entire program and took part in discussions at the end.

Attendees expressed enthusiasm for having the opportunity to learn about the various climate-related activities already underway in Waldo County. There was general agreement on the value of staying connected in the future, and a call for the Belfast Free Library to serve as a “clearinghouse” to share information.

After the symposium, the organizers discussed immediate next steps, including the following:

1. Complete this report, distribute it to attendees and invitees to the Symposium.
2. Solicit input from attending organizations and others to assist the Climate Crisis Committee's development of a Climate Action Plan for Belfast.
3. Create a spreadsheet of organizations, their contact information, and brief summary of their activities to serve as a "clearinghouse" of information to support future collaboration and coordination.

Requested Actions

1. We encourage all of the invited organizations, including those who could not attend, to share this report with their membership.
2. We ask you to give us input for developing a Belfast Climate Action Plan. CCC and ABCD want your input as we develop a plan for the City of Belfast and the Belfast community to adapt to climate change, and to reduce our production of the greenhouse gasses which are causing global warming. ABCD has created a web page where you can input your priorities and suggestions for the plan. Once drafted, the plan will be submitted to the Belfast City Council for discussion, public review, and adoption. Your input of ideas will be valuable to the drafters, and will be an important indication of public support.
[Click here to access the web page survey](#). Feel free to submit as many ideas you think are useful.
3. We have created a clearing house for the community to locate and share information. The ABCD project has created a [shareable google spreadsheet](#) that can be edited and updated by the invited organizations and viewed by the community. Participants should have already received an email invitation to review your organization's information and edit the contact information. Let us know if you did not get it. Our hope is that the spreadsheet will encourage you to check out each other's organizations and give some thought to how you might work together.

Presentation Summaries

The following organizations were represented in 3 groups, each giving a 5 minute presentation. Longer summaries of each presentation are [available for viewing on the Padlet.](#)

Group 1:

Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition - Greg Biddinger

The BBWC is very active in natural resource conservation and education, both with area schools and adults. Climate Change mitigation and adaptation is embedded in all of their initiatives and programs, such as collaboration on watershed assessments.

Friends of Belfast Parks - Bonnie Black

The Friends have been active since 1996, supporting the Belfast Parks and Recreation Department with volunteers and fundraising. They promote greenway expansion and planting resilient native species as a means of combating the effects of climate change.

BAHS (Belfast Area High School) Dave Thomas & Jonah Lovejoy

Dave Thomas, as a teacher and advisor, and Jonah Lovejoy, as a student representative, discussed the formal courses and student activity groups that focus on aspects of climate change. The very significant results have been development of sensors for tide levels; the resulting information is being analyzed and put into a database that provides a hyperlocal focus. Other projects include composting and storm water runoff mitigation. Very inspiring: these students are the future!

Island Institute - Abby Roche

The focus of the Island Institute is to sustain and enrich life for those living on the islands off the Maine Coast through education, advocacy, and leadership. They have 4 climate change initiatives: decarbonization, transition to clean energy, resilience to sea level rise, and improved island economies. They offer Community Energy Spark! and Shore Up grants.

MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Assoc.) - Heather Spaulding

MOFGA, in its long history, has been focused on creating food systems that are healthy, fair for all, and based on organic practices. (Editorial Comment: increased food insecurity is a very likely consequence of climate change.) A focus on organic practices that build soil fertility is a major initiative. They are policy advocates for the support of Maine agriculture and farmers in combating climate change.

UMaine/Waldo County Cooperative Extension Service- Rick Kersbergen

The Cooperative Extension Service conducts research, has initiatives, and educational programs that help farmers in Maine adapt to climate change and build resiliency. A particular focus is in building soils with increased fertility and capability for absorbing periodic intense rainfall and withstanding drought conditions, and crops that build sustainable farming systems.

Group 2:

Belfast Climate Crisis Committee - Jon Beal

The Belfast CCC is an advisory committee to the Belfast City Council. Its entire focus is on remediation and adaptation of the effects of climate change in the City of Belfast, and in Waldo County. It proposes policy for consideration by the Council, conducts numerous studies, public forums, and educational programs, and has engaged in cooperative programs for information databases, such as a weather station and tidal gauges.

Belfast Garden Club- Susan Conard

The Garden Club has been active since 1928, and its volunteers are responsible for the planting and upkeep of many of the gardens that make Belfast a beautiful city. In recent years, an emphasis has been on educational seminars and activities that emphasize adaptation, mitigation and resilience to the new challenges represented by climate change; such as the Evening Lecture series, and the RSU School Garden Collaborative.

Waldo County Bounty- Lissa Widdoff

Waldo County Bounty started in 2020 as a response to the pandemic-related increase in food insecurity. It is a program to support community farmers in supplying locally raised fruits and vegetables to all Waldo County food pantries and soup kitchens, and distribution to individuals by food boxes. WCB collaborates with other programs, and seeks to improve infrastructure and resilient farming systems.

Window Dressers- Corliss Davis

Window Dressers was formed 12 years ago in Rockland as a volunteer organization to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase efficiency by building internal storm windows. The program spread to volunteer community builds in Belfast and Searsport; and ultimately throughout Maine and into New Hampshire and Vermont. In the Builds, volunteers assemble window kits to fill orders from individuals, whose window dimensions were precisely measured by teams. When in place the inserts substantially reduce the leakage of cold air and insulate with double glazing. A substantial percentage of inserts are provided at very low cost to low-income customers. Last year, nearly 6,200 inserts were built in ME and Vermont, with an estimated savings of nearly 1,500,000 pounds of CO2 saved.

Universalist Unitarian Church Climate Action Team- Marje Stickler

The UU Church has become a Green Sanctuary church, and formed a Community Action Group focusing on climate change mitigation and education. They have conducted 4 educational ZOOM sessions in collaboration with an Ellsworth church on climate issues. They have joined the Perkins Road Solar Subscription, and are working on an EICDA carbon dividend tax.

Group 3:

St. Margaret's Church- Mary Rackmales

St Margaret's has long been active in reducing food insecurity and families through the Greater Belfast Area Ministries' food pantry and the Game Loft. Committee members are working to educate and encourage parishioners on climate change and mitigation measures. They are eager to learn from and collaborate with other organizations.

Citizens Climate Lobby- Peter Millard

The Belfast chapter of the national CCL is focused on advocacy for the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend (EICDA), HR 2307. This legislation puts a price on carbon based fuel use, collects fees, and would return them to citizens.

ABCD (All Belfast Climate Dialogues) - Brenda Harrington

The ABCD is a community engagement project of the Belfast Free Library, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. It sponsors and facilitates discussions around Climate Change and its impacts on local people. The intent is to facilitate communication across the community on the impacts on lives and how adaptation is possible.