

THE PRINCETON PACKET



SOLUTIONS

By Huck Fairman

Princeton on track for greater sustainability

Sustainable Princeton (SP), which is led by Molly Jones and Christine Symington, but also with Jenny Ludmer and Ellen Malavsky, has been doing a lot to help make our town more sustainable.

Their efforts have included helping to formulate a town action plan, promoting EV usage and charging stations, urging the adoption of green energy systems and energy audits, promoting increased walking, biking, and sustainable landscaping practices, and they have organized a number of talks and discussions at the public library on all of these topics. Another is coming soon.

Given the state of our environments, however, the question remains: what more is needed? SP certainly acknowledges there is much more to do. But by whom? How many of us should become involved, and in doing what?

Warnings of catastrophic change to our environments and the planet are increasing in number and severity. Renown cosmologist and theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking warned, before he died earlier this year, that our species may be able to survive only another one hundred years on the planet before it becomes uninhabitable. Environmentalist Bill McKibben, who recently spoke here, informs us in a recent "New Yorker" magazine article that we have already killed off 60 percent of the world's wildlife, and that nine out of 10 of the deadliest heat waves in human history have occurred since 2000.

And yet humans have and can improve life, at least for our species. Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker has pointed out that human societies have lately made many advances, such as: reducing violence and wars, producing more and better food, medical care and education - together leading to longer lives.

Despite these achievements, a lead story in the "New

York Times," recently warned: "Emissions Surge, Hastening Perils ..." Scientists worldwide predict that we have 10 to 12 years to significantly reduce CO2 emissions before global warming increases beyond our control.

The urgency of this prediction results from studies by scientists around the world announcing that those emissions are, with the exception of the European Union, rising. Here in the United States, while our emissions levels had evened out or fallen slightly before 2018, this year they rose. Whereas emissions from power generation have fallen, as we switch away from coal, industry and transportation in our growing economy have produced more emissions. We are second only to China, which emits roughly twice what we do. Europe, on the other hand, with a smaller economy, produces approximately a third less than we do.

So, in the face of these daunting developments, what should we do? Science writer Michael Lemonick, also recently speaking in Princeton, characterized the environmental challenges as so large and wide spread that only governments can adequately respond. And yet, with some exceptions, governments are not doing so. Not even the United Nations can compel action by its member states.

But in this country, here and there, states and people are responding and demanding action. A group of Princeton grad students is reaching out to industry and government to find solutions. High school students elsewhere have marched to demand action on global warming. Individuals have filed suit against the federal government for not taking care of our environments. Princeton University has taken steps (solar panels, Co-gen power system, and others) toward the goal of reaching net zero emissions in several decades. SP has similar goals. Its programs include: supporting state and municipal programs to purchase vehicles and install charging stations; encouraging an EV car share program, similar to the University's model; and hosting, next Spring, a "Lunch & Learn" program for businesses and residents to learn about EVs.

Among other needed, local innovations are establishing the means for apartment or townhouse dwellers without garages to be able to charge EVs overnight, ideally in carports protected from precipitation. Owners, renters,

and town representatives should work together toward solutions.

Another need, now in the political pipeline, is permitting and financing community solar installations, where a number of dwellings can draw from a common solar array.

New Jersey did have a program for charger funding, but it is uncertain if that has been renewed. It is also to be hoped that the state will facilitate municipalities' purchasing EVs. And a similar municipal program to help residents purchase or lease EVs would increase their numbers and reduce emissions. An analysis of benefits vs. cost would be necessary. Such a program would also introduce people to the money-saving benefits of EVs: no gas, no oil changes, and a reduction in other, expensive maintenance costs that gas and diesel vehicles require.

All of these efforts are commendable, but to respond to the speed with which the globe is warming, many more organizations, companies, governments and residents will have to join together in one way or another. What is needed, really, is a national, and global, mobilization of people and efforts such as we saw in World War II. As in that case, sacrifices of time and resources will be necessary. Americans resisted joining World War II, until Pearl Harbor. Now we're undergoing the world's Pearl Harbor. And we know the outcome if we don't join together.

SP and Princeton University have given much thought to the solutions, and they have reached out in many directions. Local residents who want to contribute, but are not sure how, should contact SP or the mayor's office which is supportive of innovation.

For a wider focus, non-profit "Sustainable Jersey" offers communities and counties the tools, training, financial incentives, and connection with each other necessary to begin creating a more sustainable state, then nation.

In summary, we have the means and know-how to make our town, state, and world sustainable. We can no longer halt global warming entirely, but we can, if we act together, reduce the worst impacts in the coming decades. It remains to be seen if we will mobilize the cooperation to make those necessary changes.