

Climate Conversations Summary Report

In June 2011, the Mayor’s Office of Energy & Sustainability held three successful Climate Conversations aiming to inform area residents and other stakeholders on climate change and what can be done to address its impacts. The City is in the early phase of preparing its first Climate Action and Adaptation plan as part of the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The Conversations were held at two local library branches and the College of St. Rose and were well-attended by a diverse range of concerned citizens, businesses, and public and private institutional representatives.

The goals for the forums were three-fold. First, the City wanted to gauge the level of understanding that citizens had regarding climate change and how it impacts Albany. Second, there was interest in finding out what residents and business owners might be willing to do to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Third, breakout groups were convened to get input on specific issues related to climate change such as transportation, energy conservation, and waste generation.

After an introduction, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their knowledge and attitude toward climate change. A keypad polling program called TurningPoint was used which allows users to answer survey questions, which are recorded and tabulated instantly on the screen. The following are the results from the TurningPoint survey questions asked at the beginning of the meetings, summarized from all three Climate Conversations.

1.) What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time? (multiple choice)

- Watch TV
- Play on electronic devices
- Go to a movie
- Get outdoors
- Nothing
- Come to interesting public meetings like this one

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Watch TV	7%	3
Play on electronic devices	11%	5
Go to a movie	2%	1
Get outdoors	56%	25
Nothing	0%	0
Come to interesting public meetings like this one	24%	11
Totals	100%	45

2.) Are you..... (multiple choice)

- Male
- Female

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Male	55%	27
Female	45%	22
Totals	100%	49

3.) What is your primary reason for joining the workshop today? (multiple choice)

Interested to understand what the City is doing
 Want to learn how to address climate change in my own life
 Curious to see who would be here
 Had nothing else to do today
 Accompanying a friend

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Interested to understand what the City is doing	76%	38
Want to learn how to address climate change in my own life	18%	9
Curious to see who would be here	2%	1
Had nothing else to do today	0%	0
Accompanying a friend	4%	2
Totals	100%	50

4.) How did you hear about this community workshop? (multiple choice)

Neighborhood listserv
 Organization listserv
 Posted flyer around the City
 City website
 Community calendar
 Alive at Five or Father’s Day concert flyer
 Family, friend or co-worker
 Direct e-mail from City

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Neighborhood listserv	10%	5
Organization listserv	20%	10
Posted flyer around the City	6%	3
City website	8%	4
Community calendar	4%	2
Alive at Five or Father’s Day concert flyer	4%	2
Family, friend or co-worker	24%	12
Direct e-mail from City	22%	11
Totals	100%	49

5.) How would you describe your level of knowledge on issues impacting climate change? (multiple choice)

Expert
 I understand the basic science, though I do not have a firm grasp on all the issues
 Beginner
 No knowledge

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Expert	29%	15
I understand the basic science, though I do not have a firm grasp on all the issues	51%	26
Beginner	18%	9
No knowledge	2%	1
Totals	100%	51

6.) What is your attitude toward climate change? (multiple choice)

- I believe that climate change is a real concern to be addressed
- I believe it is a real issue, but I am not sure how it affects Albany
- I am skeptical about some aspects of the issue
- I do not believe it is a real issue to be concerned about
- I don't know enough to form an opinion

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
I believe that climate change is a real concern to be addressed	88%	46
I believe it is a real issue, but I am not sure how it affects Albany	6%	3
I am skeptical about some aspects of the issue	4%	2
I do not believe it is a real issue to be concerned about	0%	0
I don't know enough to form an opinion	2%	1
Totals	100%	52

7.) What is your chief concern regarding climate change? (multiple choice)

- Natural hazards such as heat waves, wildfires, and flooding
- Impacts to food sources
- Damage to infrastructure
- Public health concerns
- I do not have any concerns
- I do not have enough information yet

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Natural hazards such as heat waves, wildfires, and flooding	42%	22
Impacts to food sources	29%	15
Damage to infrastructure	6%	3
Public health concerns	17%	9
I do not have any concerns	0%	0
I do not have enough information yet	6%	3
Totals	100%	52

8.) Who should take the lead on addressing climate change issues? (multiple choice)

- Federal and state government
- City government
- Businesses
- Individuals
- It should be a shared responsibility
- I do not believe it is an issue that needs to be addressed

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Federal and state government	23%	12
City government	0%	0
Businesses	0%	0
Individuals	0%	0
It should be a shared responsibility	77%	40
I do not believe it is an issue that needs to be addressed	0%	0
Totals	100%	52

9.) Do you think the City should allocate resources to help Albany deal with climate change? (multiple choice)

- Yes, as much as possible
- Yes, but with minimal financial investment
- No, I do not think the City should allocate any resources to climate change

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Yes, as much as possible	75%	39
Yes, but with minimal financial investment	23%	12
No, I do not think the City should allocate any resources to climate change	2%	1
Totals	100%	52

10.) Would you be willing to make investments to make your home or business more energy efficient? (multiple choice)

- Yes
- Yes, but only if I received an incentive or rebate
- No, I will not make any changes
- I rent, but would be willing to change behavior
- I rent and have no control

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Yes	56%	29
Yes, but only if I received an incentive or rebate	25%	13
No, I will not make any changes	0%	0
I rent, but would be willing to change behavior	19%	10
I rent and have no control	0%	0
Totals	100%	52

11.) The most significant factor preventing me from taking public transit is... (multiple choice)

- It's too expensive
- I don't feel safe
- Takes too long
- Not convenient (time or proximity)
- I love my car
- Nothing...I take public transit and it's great.

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
It's too expensive	0%	0
I don't feel safe	0%	0
Takes too long	21%	11
Not convenient (time or proximity)	48%	25
I love my car	2%	1
Nothing...I take public transit and it's great.	29%	15
Totals	100%	52

12.) Would you be willing to invest in stormwater management measures (ex: permeable pavement or rain gardens) at your home or business? (multiple choice)

- I already do
- Yes, I would
- Yes, but only if I received a tax incentive
- No

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
I already do	10%	5
Yes, I would	54%	27
Yes, but only if I received a tax incentive	32%	16
No	4%	2
Totals	100%	50

The results show that participants were generally well informed about climate change and they believe that it is an issue that needs to be addressed as a shared responsibility between the federal, state and city governments (although there was strong support for a significant role for the City in such an effort). Natural hazards such as heat waves, flooding and wildfires were the top climate change concern, followed by impacts to the food supply. There was significant interest in taking action to mitigate the impacts of climate change on a personal level, although providing financial incentives would increase participation.

After an introduction on climate science, attendees learned how climate change could affect Albany. Participants were then invited to share their opinions on what the City, along with its residents, institutions, and businesses could be doing to reduce the impact of climate change. Facilitated breakout groups were asked a series of questions regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation issues and potential recommendations as they pertain to Albany specifically. Numerous helpful proposals and ideas were suggested.

The following questions were asked of each breakout group at all three Climate Conversations.

- Transportation - What would it take to make it desirable to walk or bike to your workplace?
- Buildings and energy - What kinds of educational or incentive programs would make you implement energy efficiency measures at your home or business? What are the current barriers you face in doing so and what could the City do to help?
- Waste - What can you do at home or at your business to reduce the amount of waste you produce each year and/or to recycle more?
- Green infrastructure - What do you think the effects will be on you, your home, your business of an increase in the annual amount of precipitation (i.e. more flooding)? What do you need to be prepared?
- Economy - Do you think that access to healthy and fresh foods is a problem in any parts of Albany? If so, what could be done to overcome it?

The following is a listing of all the notes from the conversations at every table on each of the five questions asked. After the breakout sessions ended, a representative from each table was asked to report on the most important points made on the five questions.

Strategies	Meeting Date		
	June 28, 2011	June 29, 2011	June 30, 2011
Transportation			
Improve driver awareness of bicyclists	X	X	X
Complete Streets Program	X	X	X
Create a bike-share system	X	X	X
Enforce sidewalk clearing during the winter	X	X	X
Implement dedicated pedestrian crossing times at hazardous intersections	X	X	X
Construct more dedicated bike lane infrastructure	X	X	X
More plentiful bike parking needed	X	X	
Increase traffic enforcement	X	X	
Educate bicyclists on rules of the road	X		X

Require workplace facilities for bicyclists - showers, changing rooms, etc	x		
Create a downtown permit parking system	x		
Businesses should issue transit passes to workers		x	
Connect Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) with Park & Ride facilities		x	
Improve pedestrian safety after dark		x	
Create more bicycle destinations		x	
Increase bus frequency on routes			x
Create a car-sharing program			x
Buildings & Energy			
Create an outreach campaign with National Grid & NYSERDA to increase awareness of efficiency upgrade incentives and free energy audits	x	x	x
Reduce financial barriers to improving home efficiency - tax breaks, grants, incentives, rebates, etc	x	x	x
Create standards for efficient building practices - building codes, LEED, green roofs, etc	x	x	
Create incentives for landlords to upgrade their buildings and assist renters in reducing energy use - Green rental leases		x	x
Ensure incentives are available for low-income residents		x	x
Train more contractors and home owners on building energy efficient homes			x
Waste			
Increase education and outreach for recycling, e-waste, and hazardous waste disposal events	x	x	x
Encourage and support more backyard, commercial, and institutional composting	x	x	x
Increase recycling efforts in apartment buildings and businesses		x	x
Make recycling mandatory	x	x	
Implement a pay as you throw waste pricing system	x		x
Encourage the use of reusable shopping bags		x	x
Increase enforcement of proper recycling procedures	x	x	
Create local waste centers for organics and compost	x		
Explore the use of anaerobic digesters for organic waste disposal	x		
Install more recycling bins and Big Bellies in parks		x	
Recycle material from demolished buildings			x
Green Infrastructure			
Educate and plan ahead for potential floods and other disasters	x	x	x

Change building codes to require more efficient building practices	x	x	x
Conduct a vulnerability assessment to identify at-risk areas for flooding and climate change	x	x	x
Require permeable pavement surfaces and natural landscaping to absorb runoff from developments	x	x	x
Subsidize rain barrels for homes	x	x	
Encourage businesses and institutions to install green roofs	x	x	
Separate sewers and storm drains to prevent CSOs or build underwater detention basins for storm water	x	x	
Prepare for an influx of climate refugees		x	
Encourage more local agriculture		x	
Increase the City's tree canopy			x
Economy			
Increase access to fresh foods and eliminate "food deserts" in certain neighborhoods	x	x	x
Increase the number of community gardens using vacant land	x	x	x
Support and expand local farmers markets	x	x	x
Allow urban livestock	x	x	x
Protect and support area farms	x		x
Educate the public about healthy food	x	x	
Create a "Veggie Mobile" to deliver fresh produce to neighborhoods		x	x
Improve access to grocery stores using public transit	x		x
Implement a carbon tax to support other programs	x		
Expand the role of the Normanskill Farm	x		
Implement a carbon tax to support other programs	x		
Build greenhouses to extend the growing season			x

It was interesting to note that a number of new ideas were provided by Climate Conversation participants each day. Clearly, there are also a number of common themes that emerged at every meeting as well.

After the breakout session, participants were asked additional TurningPoint questions, starting with a repeat of several questions asked earlier in the session. The idea was to determine whether what was learned from the presentation and the breakout groups changed the knowledge base or the opinions of the participants. Additionally, a series of demographic questions were asked so the City could learn who was represented at the meetings, and perhaps more importantly, who was not. The following is a summary of the answers to these questions.

13.) What is your attitude toward climate change? (multiple choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
I believe that climate change is a real concern to be addressed	94%	46
I believe it is a real issue, but I am not sure how it affects Albany	6%	3
I am skeptical about some aspects of the issue	0%	0
I do not believe it is a real issue to be concerned about	0%	0
I don't know enough to form an opinion	0%	0
Totals	100%	49

14.) What is your chief concern regarding climate change? (multiple choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Natural hazards such as heat waves, wildfires, and flooding	47%	23
Impacts to food sources	29%	14
Damage to infrastructure	6%	3
Public health concerns	14%	7
I do not have any concerns	0%	0
I do not have enough information yet	4%	2
Totals	100%	49

15.) Do you think the City should allocate resources to help Albany deal with climate change? (multiple choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Yes, as much as possible	78%	39
Yes, but with minimal financial investment	20%	10
No, I do not think the City should allocate any resources to climate change	2%	1
Totals	100%	50

16.) What is your age? (multiple choice)

19 and younger
 20 – 34
 35 – 44
 45 – 54
 55 – 64
 65 and better

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
19 and younger	0%	0
20 – 34	23%	12
35 – 44	17%	9
45 – 54	19%	10
55 – 64	25%	13
65 and better	15%	8
Totals	100%	52

17.) What is your annual household income? (multiple choice)

Less than \$10,000
 \$10,000 to \$24,999
 \$25,000 to \$34,999
 \$35,000 to \$49,999
 \$50,000 to \$99,999
 \$100,000 to \$149,999
 More than \$150,000
 I'd rather not say

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Less than \$10,000	2%	1
\$10,000 to \$24,999	10%	5
\$25,000 to \$34,999	10%	5
\$35,000 to \$49,999	12%	6
\$50,000 to \$99,999	50%	25
\$100,000 to \$149,999	10%	5
More than \$150,000	4%	2
I'd rather not say	2%	1
Totals	100%	50

18.) How do you identify yourself? (multiple choice)

African American
 Asian
 Hispanic
 White
 A mix
 Other
 I'd rather not say

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
African American	16%	8
Asian	0%	0
Hispanic	0%	0
White	75%	38
A mix	4%	2
Other	4%	2
I'd rather not say	2%	1
Totals	100%	51

19.) Where do you live? (multiple choice)

Area 1
 Area 2
 Area 3
 Area 4
 Area 5
 Area 6
 Area 7
 Area 8
 Area 9
 Area 10
 Not in
 Albany

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Area 1	8%	4
Area 2	2%	1
Area 3	8%	4
Area 4	4%	2
Area 5	0%	0
Area 6	0%	0
Area 7	4%	2
Area 8	4%	2
Area 9	22%	11
Area 10	6%	3
Not in Albany	43%	22
Totals	100%	51

20.) What portion of the workshop today was most valuable? (multiple choice)

Purpose of the project
 Presentation
 Keypad polling
 Breakout sessions
 Did not find the meeting to be of any value

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Purpose of the project	16%	8
Presentation	24%	12
Keypad polling	2%	1
Breakout sessions	53%	27
Did not find the meeting to be of any value	6%	3
Totals	100%	51

21.) I am leaving this workshop with a better understanding of ways to become more sustainable. (multiple choice)

Strongly Agree
 Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Strongly Agree	24%	12
Somewhat Agree	48%	24
Somewhat Disagree	16%	8
Strongly Disagree	12%	6
Totals	100%	50

22.) Would you be willing to engage further in the development of the City’s Sustainability Plan? (multiple choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Yes, I would attend another meeting like this and provide comments and ideas through the webpage	67%	35
Yes, I would attend another meeting like this	13%	7
Yes, I would provide comments and ideas through the webpage	8%	4
No	4%	2
Not sure	8%	4
Totals	100%	52

Most participants felt that the workshops would lead to a better understanding of ways to become more sustainable and there is a great deal of interest in continuing to participate in the development of the Climate Change Action Plan.