

# MID-HUDSON REGION CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES

## Year 2 Report

*Prepared for the*

**New York State**

**Energy Research & Development Authority**

*Prepared by*

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An Independent Contractor to NYSERDA

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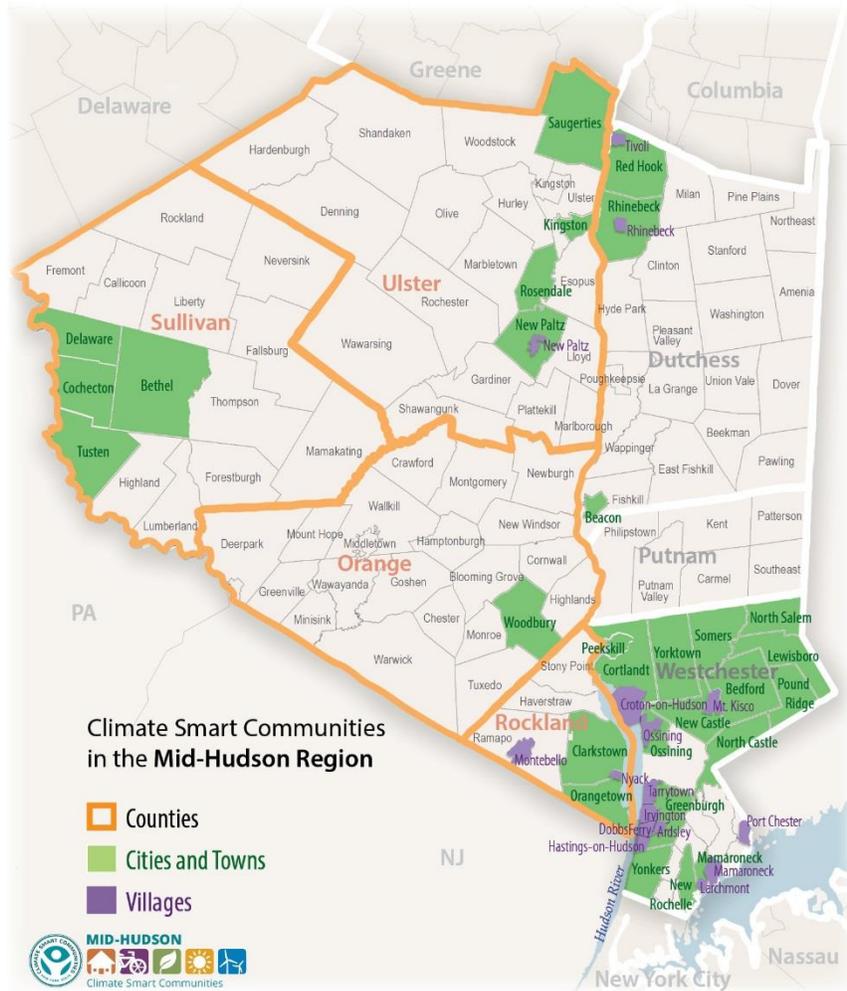


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## Introduction

This was a very successful year for the Mid-Hudson Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Regional Coordinator Pilot Program. VHB worked collaboratively with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), our subcontractor ICF International, and other partners promote the results of the regional greenhouse gas emissions inventory, conduct research about the 50 Climate Smart Communities, connect with CSC participants to determine their specific needs, deliver high-quality relevant resources and educational opportunities, as meet the needs of CSCs through one-on-one tailored assistance.



This report outlines the achievements in Year 2 of the Regional Coordinator Pilot Program, a reflection on some of the challenges that were met while delivering technical assistance and a snapshot of VHB’s plans for continuing to deliver best-in-class technical assistance to the Climate Smart Communities (existing and new) in the Mid-Hudson Region. The report is accompanied by the *Mid-Hudson CSC Year End Summary Report*, a five page summary that can be used to quickly and efficiently communicate the success of the program in Year 2. **Please note:** italicized words and phrases are considered deliverables and can be found in the folders associated with the final report. Copies of all referenced documents in this report are available upon request by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\)](#).



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## Task 1: Provide Regional Outreach to Climate Smart Communities

To jumpstart Year 2, VHB updated the Mid-Hudson Regional CSC Strategy to meet the changing needs of the existing Climate Smart Communities (CSCs). In Year 2, our resources evolved to address the increasing progress that local governments were making and continue to challenge them to use the 10 Pledge Elements as their climate protection roadmap.

Over the past year, VHB continued to build and maintain a comprehensive database of actions address the Climate Smart Communities 10 Pledge Elements. In addition to actions that have been completed, VHB also tracks relevant actions that local governments are in process of completing and those that have been identified as priorities. The database is still fully searchable, complex system that allows us to document contact names and information, email correspondence, phone conversations, meetings and attendance at other events, partners, actions taken or identified, and relevant websites. The database enabled us to provide several communities with instantaneous examples of how their peers were addressing various Pledge Elements to inspire and guide their own progress.

Using the database as the source, VHB created monthly *Community Profiles* to monitor and communicate local government's progress in addressing the 10 Pledge Elements. Each local government received a copy prior to their In-Person Consultation and then a revised version after we confirmed any additional actions that had been completed during their consultation, but could also request one if progress had been made between In-Person Consultations. Community Profiles are posted on the [Mid-Hudson CSC website](#).

In September 2013, VHB conducted another *survey* of all of the Climate Smart Community participants. We received 17 responses out of 47 (total number of CSCs at the time of the survey) local governments – 36% response rate. Although it was a little lower than the previous year, the responses allowed VHB to not only identify local needs and priorities, but to also create tools and trainings that addressed the overall results of the survey. Some of the highlights include:

### **Most Challenging Pledge Elements to Address:**

- 61% Pledge Element 7
- 50% Pledge Element 2
- 50% Pledge Element 4

### **Sectors Where the Most Assistance is Needed to Reduce GHGs (see Figure 1):**

- 61% Vehicle Fleet Efficiency
- 76% Planning for Renewable Energy

### **Preferred Topics for Climate Smart Communities Training:**

- 30% How to Engage the Community
- 29% Adaptation



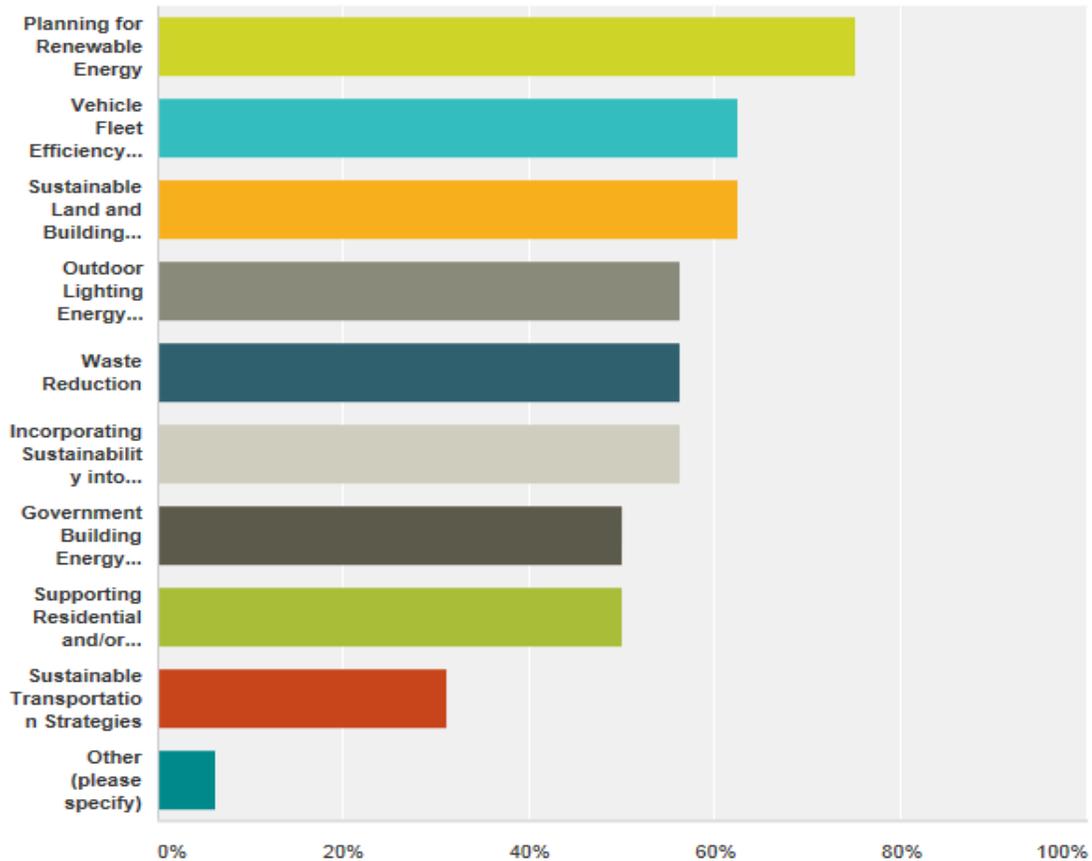
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Figure 1: Survey Responses: Sectors Where the Most Assistance is Needed to Reduce GHGs

In which sectors you would like to receive assistance implementing strategies to reduce GHG emissions? Please choose the top 5:

Answered: 16 Skipped: 4



VHB was able to use this information to inform our work in Tasks 3, 4, and 5 to create two tools on vehicle fleet efficiency, begin planning for a guide on micro-grids (which is being considered for Year 3), and develop two trainings on vulnerability assessments. These deliverables are described in the appropriate tasks in this report.

### Task 2: Recruit and Market

In 2013 the Mid-Hudson CSC website ([www.MidHudsonCSC.org](http://www.MidHudsonCSC.org)) was launched to support and connect local CSCs by promoting a wide range of resources that encourage climate transformation



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and innovation. Since the website debut, there have been nearly 3,025 page views. Local governments visit the website to access their local *Climate Smart Community Profile*, which highlights completed projects and climate achievements under the 10 pledge element framework. With over **100 CSC resources available online**, 65% of website users are identified as *returning visitors* who regularly visit the website to download resources, previous webinars, guides, templates and case studies.

The website is more than a centralized platform for resources, but also enables stakeholder engagement through social media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, which are embedded in the website to display trending activity in real-time. VHB created Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts for the Mid-Hudson Region CSCs to highlight their successes and activities, such as awards, webinars, and networking events. Almost 50% of CSCs in the Mid-Hudson Region use social media tools to engage their communities. The Mid-Hudson’s social media presence has furthered relationships between local governments and key stakeholders who are involved in local climate protection efforts and **increased website traffic by 54%**.



Facebook alone has generated 817 website page views, which represents the total number of website visitors that found the Mid-Hudson CSC website through our Facebook page or posts. Likewise, 212 page views were the results of the Mid-Hudson’s CSC tweets, using the handle, @MidHudsonCSC, and hashtag, #ClimateSmart. Since spring 2013 our LinkedIn members have more than doubled and Facebook Likes continue to increase as our posts are shared by partner organizations.

Developing a brand and identity for the Mid-Hudson CSC Region was top of mind again in Year 2. We continued to use the logo created in Year 1 to complement the statewide CSC logo (see header). This logo is used in tandem with the CSC Program logo on electronic communication, agendas, the website, social media, custom service strategies, reports, and in the Pocket Pledge. In Year 2, the design and content of the Pocket Pledge (Figure 2) was modified to keep it relevant, with the same intent of communicating climate protection best practices in the region. It maintained the accordion style, business card size, but was given a face-lift to include contact information and the modified



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Climate Smart Communities Pledge Elements. VHB uses this at all of the events we attend and provides it to the CSC participants and potential recruits to communicate the program.

Figure 2 – Mid-Hudson CSC Pocket Pledge

**MID-HUDSON Climate Smart Communities**  
10 PLEDGE ELEMENTS TO A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

The New York State **Climate Smart Communities (CSC)** program is a unique state/local partnership to meet the state's goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for a changing climate and save tax payers money. Local governments can participate by signing a voluntary pledge, which outlines climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in the **CSC program's 10 Pledge Elements**, as described in the following examples.

For more information and a list of current Climate Smart Communities, please visit [www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html)

**1** Pledge to be a Climate Smart Community

**2** Set goals, inventory emissions, plan for climate action  
EXAMPLE: The Village of Dobbs Ferry established an **Energy Task Force** to achieve a 20% emissions reduction in greenhouse gases for local government operations.

**3** Decrease community energy use  
EXAMPLE: Ulster County uses an **online energy management platform** to track energy consumption and benchmark local government buildings.

**4** Increase community use of renewable energy  
EXAMPLE: The Town of Somers' School District was awarded a grant to install a **50 kW solar photovoltaic system** on the Town's Middle School.

**5** Realize benefits of recycling and other climate-smart solid waste management practices  
EXAMPLE: The Town of Cortlandt encourages the re-use of gently used items by hosting an annual **Community Swap Event** and Furniture Drive.

In Year 2, CSC Pledge adoption has more than doubled with **5 new communities** including the Towns of Bethel, Delaware and Highland, and the Villages of Nyack and Tivoli. Through our existing partnerships with organizations such as the Northern Westchester Energy Action Consortium (NWEAC), Southern Westchester Energy Action Consortium (SWEAC), Sustainable Hudson Valley and others, we have identified 8 CSC Recruitment Targets for Year 3.

VHB leveraged our partnership with the EDGE Program Coordinator (Courtney Strong) to establish relationships with two recruitment targets in 2013 – Dutchess County and Poughkeepsie. We talked with both of the local governments about signing the pledge, and both of them are interested. We look forward to following up with them in Year 3.

## 5 New CSCs Adopted Pledge!



## Task 3: Define, Support, and Facilitate Local Climate Action Planning

Task 3 continued to be a large focus of VHB's work in Year 2. This Task included: In-Person Consultations; developing and executing the Custom Service Strategies. Due to the success of our one-on-one local support to Climate Smart Communities in Year 1 of the Climate Smart Communities Coordinator Pilot Program, VHB maintained our approach in Year 2. We used the same direct engagement process with some modifications for communities who were already familiar with the program: 1) Community Assessment; 2) Connect with the Communities; and 3) Deliver Customized Services. This framework allowed VHB to continue to provide quality, relevant services that responded to the local government's individual needs. Figure 3 outlines the modified direct engagement process that VHB used in Year 2.



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Figure 3 – VHB’s Direct Climate Smart Community Engagement Process



In Year 2, VHB connected with 42% of the Climate Smart Communities in the Mid-Hudson Region, or 21 local governments, including:

*Beacon, Bedford, Bethel, Clarkstown, Cortlandt, Greenburgh, Hastings-on-Hudson, Highland, Kingston, Mount Kisco, Nyack, Peekskill, Red Hook, Rosendale, Somers, Sullivan County (2 times), Tarrytown, Tivoli, Tusten, Ulster County, Yonkers.*

In-Person Consultations consisted of one-on-one meetings with local elected officials, staff and volunteers who were working on the local government’s climate protection efforts. At these meetings, VHB staff had an interactive discussion which confirmed the contents of their Community Profile, discovered other actions that had been accomplished, and learned about local priorities and needs. From those discussions, VHB determined the type and delivery method of technical assistance that could be provided. After each In-Person Consultation, VHB updated the Community Profile and created a Custom Service Strategy that outlined the technical assistance we would deliver, who would deliver it and what the timeline was for completion. The local elected official signed the Strategy and assigned a local staff person or other liaison, and the project began. The accompanying spreadsheet (Mid-Hudson Year 2 Activity) outlines all of the Custom Service Strategies that were created. In Year 2, VHB created 10 Custom Service Strategies, received 8 signed Strategies from local elected officials, and completed 13 projects.<sup>1</sup> Three projects are in progress and should be completed this summer. We anticipate signed strategies from three

<sup>1</sup> The Town/Village of Rhinebeck’s Custom Service Strategy was combined. Also, of the 13 projects that were completed, 6 were from Year 1: Yonkers, Mamaroneck, Rhinebeck, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, and Ulster County.



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*more communities in the upcoming week, including Kingston, Red Hook, and Ulster County. The completed projects are outlined in Table 1.*

**Table 1: Completed Climate Smart Communities Projects**

CSC	Date Completed	CSC Contact	Custom Service Strategy	Status
<b>City of Yonkers</b>	8/20/2013	Brad Tito	A memo outlining the options for upgrade of City Hall’s cooling system (from individual air units to a centralized system) including the benefits, challenges, costs, resources, and next steps.	Completed
<b>Town of Bedford</b>	10/11/2013	Mary Beth Kass	A Climate Smart Communities Action Report Card that measures the Town's progress and benefits of implementing actions outlined in Bedford's Climate Action Plan.	Completed
<b>Town of Clarkstown</b>	2/21/2014	Joe Simoes	A joint training with Cortlandt to learn how to identify vulnerabilities, determine appropriate stakeholders to engage in the process, and understand what resources are available to local governments to successfully complete this process.	Completed
<b>Town of Mamaroneck</b>	6/21/2013	Nancy Seligson	Prioritize the Sustainability Initiatives that were in the Mamaroneck Energy and Sustainability Initiatives - Technical Memorandum -Task 1. Existing Initiatives and Activities from July 2012 and the accompanying spreadsheet of initiatives from September 2012. Deliverables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criteria for the Town to use to prioritize future sustainability initiatives and projects</li> <li>• Map of available resources (funding, staff, volunteer expertise etc.)</li> <li>• Spreadsheet of prioritized initiatives based on the developed criteria</li> </ul>	Completed
<b>Town of Rhinebeck</b>	7/19/2013	Suzanne Kelly	A greenhouse gas emissions inventory for local government operations for the Town/Village. They were a Pilot community to test the local government operations emissions inventory tool.	Completed
<b>Village of Dobbs Ferry</b>	10/15/2013	Nina Orville	A guide that can be used by departments to weigh the cost ranges and benefits of a variety of fuel efficient, low-emissions, and cost effective vehicles that can be procured to replace existing vehicles in the Village’s fleet.	Completed



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CSC	Date Completed	CSC Contact	Custom Service Strategy	Status
Village of Irvington	7/5/2013	Nicola Coddington	Compilation of best practices on multi-family residential recycling campaigns and bulk item disposal programs. The final product made recommendations, based on Irvington’s resources and capacity, regarding which programs might work best for the Village.	Completed
Village of Rhinebeck	12/23/2013	Suzanne Kelly	Assisted the Town and Village with conducting a local government operations greenhouse gas emissions inventory using the tool the ICF created. We helped them find an intern as well.	Completed
Village of Tarrytown	3/25/2014	Michael Blau	A guide that outlines the suggested methods the Village can use to begin right-sizing the municipal fleet.	Completed
Ulster County	7/19/2013	Amanda LaValle	A greenhouse gas emissions inventory for local government operations for the County. The County was a Pilot to test the local government operations inventory tool	Completed
Town of Bedford	2/7/2014	Chris Burdick	Part two of their Progress Report, assisted the Town with developing messaging for communicating the results of the Progress Report to the community to continue to inspire and challenge them to stay or get involved in achieving the 20/20 goal.	Completed
Town of Cortlandt	2/21/2014	Dani Glaser	A joint training with Clarkstown to learn how to identify vulnerabilities, determine appropriate stakeholders to engage in the process, and understand what resources are available to local governments to successfully complete this process.	Completed
Sullivan County	3/21/2014	Carol Roig	Reviewed the strategies of Sullivan County's CAP and summarized the estimated GHG reduction benefits expected of each.	Completed



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## Task 4: Assist with Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventories

Building off the momentum of the completion of the Mid-Hudson Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, VHB was determined to find a way to communicate these results and make them useful for local governments to use. In order to make them useful, we found that it was necessary to develop a fact sheet that communicated what was measured in the Regional GHG Inventory, how the results can be used and what the local government should do next (i.e., measure their local government operations GHG emissions). A *Mid-Hudson Region Inventory FAQ* (Frequently Asked Questions) document was created that answered the common questions local governments have about the Regional GHG Inventory. To accompany this document, reduce the mystery around how to access their GHG emissions results, and to make the information user-friendly, VHB created a *Mid-Hudson Regional Inventory Spreadsheet* with data broken down by local government by sector, which includes tables and pie charts that they can use for their own reports. All of this information is easily accessible on the [Mid-Hudson CSC website](#).

In Year 2 of the Regional Coordinator Pilot program, VHB worked with two local governments to pilot the *Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory Tool* and determine the appropriate guidance and assistance necessary to build local capacity to conduct government operations GHG inventories. Once the tool was piloted, VHB worked with 2 additional communities to train them on the tool and develop their GHG inventories.

To accompany the tool and build capacity for developing their own GHG inventories, VHB created a *Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory manual and guide*. A separate page was also created on the [Mid-Hudson CSC](#) website to serve as a one-stop-shop for local governments who want to measure and plan for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, to continue to support ongoing questions and inquiries related to conducting a GHG inventory, VHB created a hotline and office hours called Dr. GHG. Local governments can call during the office hours with specific questions. VHB created a short survey to ensure we are providing relevant, top-notch assistance that truly assists local governments with their efforts. We will continue to monitor this approach and provide updates on the effectiveness and success.

## Task 5: Identify and Support Anchor Projects

One of the topics that local governments identified in the fall 2013 survey was outdoor lighting, specifically LED streetlighting. In the summer of 2013, the City of Yonkers executed a contract to convert all of its streetlights to LED through a unique performance contract. In the spirit of documenting best practices for other communities to follow, VHB developed the *City of Yonkers LED Streetlight Installation Anchor Project*. This case study outlines the steps Yonkers took, the project outcomes, and lessons learned so that other local governments can learn from and imitate the process.



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## Task 6: Educate and Train

In 2013 and 2014, VHB found several opportunities to educate and train local governments on climate protection related issues, including:



### Local and Regional Options for Energy and Climate Change Resiliency Conference

VHB presented the CSC program at the *Local and Regional Options for Energy and Climate Change Resiliency Conference* in September 2013 at Vassar College.

Attendees included local municipal and elected officials, planners, environment and conservation advisory council members, planning board members, professors, students, community leaders and more. The presentation highlighted how CSCs are approaching resiliency through community-based energy planning and strategic decision making processes.



### Town of Cortlandt and Town of Clarkstown: Vulnerability Assessment Training

In February 2014, VHB organized and conducted a joint vulnerability assessment training for the Towns of Cortlandt and Clarkstown. Community leaders learned how to identify vulnerabilities, identify and engage key stakeholders in the process, and what resources are available to local governments to complete a vulnerability assessment.



### CSC Local Government Operations GHG Accounting Tool Trainings

To assist the Town and Village of Rhinebeck, Ulster County, City of Beacon, Village of Hastings-on-Hudson in completing GHG emission inventories for local government operations, VHB hosted in-person trainings on how to use the CSC Local Government Operations GHG Accounting Tool and answered GHG inventory-related questions throughout the data collection process as a part of their custom service strategies.



### CSC Webinar Training: CSC GHG Accounting Tool for Local Government Operations

VHB participated in a CSC Webinar to provide an overview of the CSC GHG Accounting Tool and instructed local governments on how to use the tool to develop a GHG emissions inventory for local government operations.

## Reflections on Year 2

VHB experienced a couple of challenges in Year 2. We continue to revisit these challenges in an effort to be as successful as possible in engaging the Climate Smart Communities participants and



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provide them the technical assistance they need to advance their efforts. Some of the challenges we experienced include:

- **Finding the Right Person** – it continues to be a challenge to find the right person to contact. Several of our communities experienced staff turn-over this past year which inhibited our ability to meet with them because they did not designate another CSC contact. We remain committed to find the right contact and update our database regularly to reflect these changes.
- **Jump-starting the Projects** – getting the Custom Service Strategies signed by the highest elected official continued to be a challenge, although not as significant as Year 1. We are attributing this to changes in leadership this past year (new town supervisors and mayors). In every case, the local government received emails reminding them about the Custom Service Strategy, provided a timeline for needing a signature, and next steps. Of the strategies that we sent out, only two have not been signed. However, we assured them that they will still be eligible for services in Year 3 and that we looked forward to working with them.

## Looking Forward to Year 3

On the heels of a very successful Year 2, VHB is already planning for the final year of the Regional Coordinator Pilot Program. Some of the highlights will include:

- Develop Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation resources, including conducting more trainings
- Finalize a recruitment flyer (*see draft in Marketing and Recruitment folder*)
- Monthly newsletters
- Conduct a training on developing a Climate Action Plan
- Create an Anchor Project focused on micro-grids
- Recruit 10 new Climate Smart Communities
- Continue engage the existing Climate Smart Communities through the website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn sites
- Conduct another survey to determine the changing needs of the CSC participants
- Update the Community Profiles
- Conduct In-Person Consultations, with a focus on meeting with CSCs that we have not met with yet
- Organize a Climate Smart Communities Conference that will be open to statewide CSCs

In anticipation of this final year of the pilot program, we will be working closely with NYSERDA and NYSDEC to ensure that there is a transition plan for all documents and resources (i.e., the website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) created through this program. We look forward to another successful



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year to provide much needed climate protection and sustainability technical assistance and guidance to the local governments in the Mid-Hudson Region.