

# **CAYUGA LAKE WATERSHED INTERMUNICIPAL ORGANIZATION**

## **Brief Organizational Description and Activities Update**

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (IO) was formed in the late 1990s as part of the preparation of a watershed management plan for Cayuga Lake. Each watershed municipality is invited to appoint a representative to the IO and asked to contribute annual dues.

The original watershed management plan was completed in 2001 and updated in 2017. Both plans were largely funded by the New York State Department of State, which provides funding to municipalities for watershed management planning initiatives. The plan provides a detailed description of the watershed, an assessment of water quality issues, and a number of recommendations for restoring and protecting water quality. The recommendations run the gamut from public education, to increased public access, to more frequent and routine monitoring, to regulations on private septic systems, to improvements in stormwater management, to regulations on agriculture. In the eyes of the State, the development of a watershed management plan is a first step in a watershed wide approach to addressing water quality issues. Once completed, the plan better positions watershed municipalities to access state funding for water quality projects.

The Cayuga Lake watershed contains 38 towns and villages, 1 city, and 6 counties. It is a challenging task to coordinate the efforts of these 45 individual municipalities. Many of the watershed municipalities do not border on the lake or have a significant percentage of their land in the watershed. The majority of municipalities within the watershed are small towns and villages and they are constrained by limited staff and limited budgets. Historically there has been no one entity charged with monitoring and protecting the health of the watershed; it has been the responsibility of the watershed's 45 municipalities to come together to collaborate their efforts in protecting water quality and it is the purpose of the watershed management plan to focus those collaborative efforts.

To help make this happen, the Town of Ithaca, on behalf of the IO applied for a NYSDOS grant to hire Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNYRPDB) to work with municipalities. The grant was awarded and the project is scheduled to begin in April. CNYRPDB's environment Planner, Kathy Bertuch, will be working to bring together municipal officials, professional staff, and regional state agencies to partner in identifying, planning, and implementing regional watershed improvement projects. An additional component of the grant is to look at the structure of the IO and make organizational recommendations.

The IO is sponsoring an April 19th Watershed Summit to kick off this initiative. Watershed mayors, supervisors, highway superintendents and appropriate county personnel have received an invitation to the event. TCOG member are also welcome to attend and an invitation is included.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, would like additional information, or would like to be part of this work.

*Tee-Ann Hunter*

Chair, Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization  
Councilperson, Ithaca Town Board