

Climate work getting noticed beyond MDI

Liz Graves

Mount Desert Islander

February 13, 2019

<https://www.mdislander.com/maine-news/climate-work-getting-noticed-beyond-mdi>



A ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the solar array on the site of Tremont's former landfill is set for Saturday, Feb. 23 at noon, weather permitting. A video created by Sundog Solar about the project will be screened and light refreshments will be provided. The video premiered at Sunday's A Climate to Thrive summit. PHOTO COURTESY OF SUND OG SOLAR

BAR HARBOR — An annual summit held by A Climate to Thrive Sunday afternoon — part education, part celebration and part strategy session — drew about 250 people.

A Climate to Thrive, a group working toward a goal of energy independence for Mount Desert Island by 2030, began in 2015 as a group of friends and neighbors gathering for potlucks, Gary Friedmann told the group. Friedmann chairs the nonprofit's board of directors.

“Climate change is such a big issue,” he said, and it’s easy for people to feel daunted or overwhelmed. “The whole notion of A Climate to Thrive turns that on its head,” focusing on effecting change locally, in towns, businesses, schools and homes.

Since the group began its work, the island’s solar power generation capacity has tripled and all four island towns have installed solar arrays on or near public buildings. Plastic carryout bag and polystyrene to-go food container bans have been adopted in two towns. Six public electric vehicle charging stations have been installed and more are planned. An initiative to support

home weatherization was launched and a group of restaurant and hotel owners and managers are working together to reduce waste, especially plastic trash. And ACTT staff, interns and volunteers have been involved in state policy advocacy, especially energy policy.

Those accomplishments have been getting noticed. “We had a dozen visitors from off-island communities [at the summit] interested in learning how to organize ACTT-like efforts in their towns,” Friedmann said after the event.

Newly-elected state Rep. Chloe Maxmin (D-Nobleboro) discussed how she became a climate activist and how she won her 2018 election in a conservative, rural district. She won her Democratic primary for the seat overwhelmingly, and her campaign drove record primary turnout, she said. She won the general election with 52.4 percent of the vote in a district considered to have a 16-point Republican advantage, mirroring the national trend in rural areas across the country.

She said the demonstrations she helped organize when she was an undergraduate at Harvard, aimed at pressuring the university to divest from fossil fuels, marked the first arrests of protesting Harvard students since the Vietnam war.

Maxmin expressed frustration that the national Democratic Party appears to have largely given up on rural areas. She doesn’t feel strongly attached to a political party, she said, but thinks “we need to inject a lot of energy to make sure that we win [the presidency] in 2020,” calling that election “perhaps our last chance to do something at a national level” on climate policy.

In Augusta, Maxmin is the lead sponsor of a bill to create a Green New Deal for Maine. She and Rep. Brian Hubbell (D-Bar Harbor) also led a workshop on that bill and other climate policy in progress.



Presenters Amanda Kendall of Sassafrass Catering, left, and Tasha Higgins of Mother’s Kitchen discuss the impact of food choices on the carbon footprint for a family or a business. PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD SASSAMAN

Other workshops focused on local food, electric vehicle infrastructure, eliminating plastic pollution, parenting and climate change and solar energy.

Matt Prindiville, who leads the Damariscotta-based nonprofit “think/do tank” Upstream talked about the relatively short history of drive-through and to-go food businesses (the first McDonald’s drive-through opened in 1975) and the enormous amount of trash they generate. Starbucks Coffee, he said, goes through 4 billion disposable cups per year.

Increasing recycling and switching to compostable plastics are not the solution, he said, suggesting businesses and consumers must change systems so that fewer items are meant to be thrown away. He challenged the group to consider an island-wide system of reusable to-go containers for local restaurants and coffee shops.

A wide array of short “success stories” from local students, business owners, farmers, builders, nonprofit leaders and school officials highlighted the wide array of past and current efforts.

Chuck Piper of Sundog Solar showed a short documentary video his company made about the recently-installed solar array in Tremont on the site of a former landfill.

Katy Longley, COO of The Jackson Laboratory and a former executive at Bowdoin College, discussed her experience with the college’s 2011 water bottle ban and large solar array at the former Brunswick Naval Air Station.

Jeremy Dougherty, general manager of the Bar Harbor Inn, says the inn now collects the partially-used shampoo and conditioner bottles in guest rooms (25,000 bottles a year) and ships them to a company that recycles and reuses the bottles and their contents.

Mount Desert Island High School students played live jazz to kick off the afternoon. Food was provided by Sassafras Catering, Milk & Honey Café, Bar Harbor Farm, Open Table MDI, Clark Point Catering, Blue Ox Blueberries, Peekytoe Provisions, Garden Side Dairy, Old Dog Baking Company and Gather.

The summit was sponsored by Witham Family Hotels, Emera Maine, Sundog Solar, ReVision Energy, First National Bank and others.