

Summary Notes

Opportunities for Synergistic Research among Atkinson Center Working Groups in Upstate New York: A Conversation with Paul Beyer

November 19, 12-1pm, Rice Hall 300

On Nov. 19, the Atkinson Center hosted a topical lunch with guest Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth for New York State. The conversation asked the following questions, though we only got to discuss the first bullet.

- Which working group topics have the greatest potential for exploration in NYS? What synergies and differences do they share?
- What is the geographic scale of interest to different working groups? What geographies in NYS may be promising places for collaborative research given topical and geographic alignment?
- What are some of the risks, limitations, and challenges to this kind of place-based collaborative research? How do these affect whether and how collaborative research is designed?

We've summarized participants' comments into the following possible areas of collaboration:

- **Aggregating research areas to form a systemic whole.** For instance, working within a watershed/sub-watershed to address why farms (and urban areas) aren't able to reuse waste streams for energy and fertilizer; connecting this to efforts to enhance wastewater management and reducing combined sewer overflows that will only get worse with climate change; and efforts to promote decentralized, distributed energy.
- **Identifying comparable policy components.** Some research and extension questions center on shared issues such that if research is designed in comparable ways may allow Atkinson to synthesize research from multiple sectors. For instance, how do we communicate with the public and target audiences? How do we aggregate across providers or consumers of alternative waste, water, or energy services? How do you bridge consumers (e.g. of distributed energy) and providers (e.g. utilities)? At what scale do we conduct research and influence policy and planning? How much is context (e.g. watershed) specific, how much is generalizable?
- **Focusing on bridging the rural-urban divide.** Numerous participants indicated this is a huge problem in New York, for instance in the 241 Climate Smart Communities for Agriculture, or the demand for solar energy in urban areas and provision of solar in rural areas on prime ag land. Combinations of the first two points or something else entirely could focus on addressing this dimension.

Main comments from Paul Beyer:

- Governor Cuomo is a regionalist and has formed regional sustainability clusters. For instance, NYSERDA delivers programs on regional basis through regional planning councils. It's a big step from there to metro governance, but our interim step is to move as many planning dollars to the county level as possible. Many counties now do the planning and show what do we want to do as a region.
- How to get people to live with energy (or other "invisible", off-site infrastructure)? We need to get energy into comprehensive plans for communities, get new energy plans for cities embedded into local comp plans and zoning so that you begin to be able to say it's part of our community.

- Making the connection to how this affects fiscal policy and municipal budgets is really key to spurring local action.
- Try to follow bizarre lines, collaborations and connections that others aren't yet seeing.