

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

November 2021



Kathleen Johnson Caccavale
Chair, Sustainable Madison Advisory Committee (Morris County)

For over eight years, Kathleen Johnson Caccavale has been a member of the Sustainable Madison Advisory Committee and is currently serving as its dedicated leader. Kathi oversees the annual renewal of Madison Borough’s Sustainable Jersey certification and implementation of an impressive sustainability program. Madison Borough is a two-time recipient of the Sustainable Jersey Sustainability Champion award, receiving the most points for a municipality in the medium (5,000 to 39,999 population) category in 2013 and 2020.

Kathi said the key to success is having a town with abundant and talented volunteers, strong ties between Sustainable Madison and the Madison Environmental Commission and a council, mayor and department heads who champion and support sustainability efforts.

Known for her adventurous spirit and ability to get things done, Kathi keeps the green team focused and organized. She said she is grateful to spearhead a group that chooses to submit for Sustainable Jersey certification every year in order to keep the actions up to date and the momentum going. Kathi explained, “In the beginning, we were mostly reactive, meaning that we submitted for the sustainability actions the town was already doing. Now we are more proactive; we plan for the year by thinking about how we can grow and improve our sustainability impact. The Sustainable Jersey program serves as a springboard that helps us explore and implement sustainability measures that we may not have considered.”

Madison Mayor Robert Conley said, “I’m so proud of our Sustainable Madison committee for their work on certification, but more importantly, proud of our residents, the Borough Council and employees, committing to a sustainable future for Madison and New Jersey.”



Active in the outdoors, Kathi enjoys hiking, cycling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and leading outings for local groups. At home, she maintains a backyard no-mow zone, native plant borders and newly installed solar panels. “Sustainability is important to me because I love nature and want to be a good steward while I am here. I am happiest when I am outside,” said Kathi. She has been a planning consultant with The Land Conservancy of New Jersey for many years and currently plays a small role in their efforts as part of the New Jersey Highlands Cluster Delaware River Watershed Initiative, which seeks to preserve and restore lands along critical waterways in the region.

Owning her own communications business since 1993, she has been a writer, editor, publications and web designer for organizations such as the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition and Essex County CASA. She has served on the Executive Committee of the New Jersey Chapter of Sierra Club and as editor of The Sierran newsletter.



Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified: Created by ordinance in 2012, the Sustainable Madison Advisory Committee of the Borough of Madison is an eleven-member committee charged with encouraging sustainable practices throughout the municipality. With 825 points, Madison was the Sustainability Champion for mid-sized communities for 2020, and is currently in the running for the 2021 Sustainability Champion Award with 850 points. For more information, read the [2021](#)

[Borough of Madison Certification Report](#) and visit the Sustainable Madison Committee [webpage](#), the Sustainable Madison [webpage](#) and Green Madison [Facebook page](#).

Multi-town Partnerships Support Plastic Bag Ban: Madison Borough passed its single-use plastic bag ban, ordinance #4-2020, that went into effect on March 1, 2020. Kathi explained, “To pass our plastic bag ordinance, the Environmental Commissions of Madison and the Chathams worked closely together, with the support of their mayors, and found that collectively, we could really make a difference. Multi-town partnerships strengthen our ability to put effective sustainability measures in place.” In advance of the plastic bag ban, the Madison Environmental Commission hosted a Plastic-Free Week. Residents were encouraged to take an online pledge and do a different sustainability action each day of the week. This was supported by plastic use education events. The Borough of Madison received Sustainable Jersey certification points for this work with the action: [Reusable Bag Education Program](#).

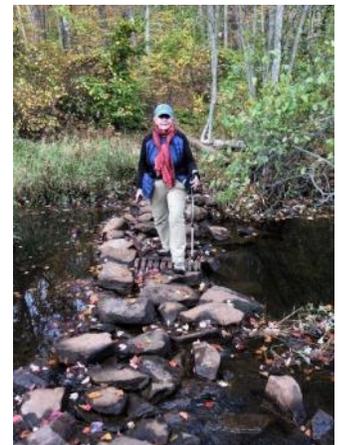


Thanks to Madison's plastic bag ban and 129 other local municipals bans, New Jersey's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act ([S864](#)) became the strictest single-use plastics law in the United States. It prohibits all single-use bags (both plastic and paper), as well as disposable polystyrene foam cups and food containers. To support the on-going partnership work, Madison Borough, Chatham Borough and Chatham Township have five multi-town working groups, under the umbrella of the North Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance (NJSMA): 1) green building and energy efficiency, 2) electric vehicles and green municipal fleets, 3) energy aggregation, 4) pollinators and pesticides and 5) climate action. The NJSMA also sponsors the “North Jersey Green” newspaper column that appears monthly in many area papers.

Virtual Student Internships: COVID-19 changed the trajectory for many green teams, while also upending opportunities and plans for young people in the summer of 2020. In trying to make the best of a difficult situation, Sustainable Madison volunteers worked together to organize, advertise and implement a virtual internship program. The effect of this program was to extend the volunteer base of environmental groups, and create systems of mentorship for many people new to volunteer work. Kathi said, “This innovative community engagement helped us collaborate with young people in creative and productive ways that further environmental stewardship.” Kathi served as the mentor to a student from the Vassar College School of Cognitive Science, who worked on the green infrastructure and planning implementation actions for the Borough of Madison. Kathi also worked with three high school student-interns as they assisted with updating Madison walking tours.



Environmental Justice in Planning and Zoning: Sustainable Madison volunteers collaborated with Madison Borough Councilperson Astri Baillie and Mayor Conley to develop and promote an educational program on environmental justice, with the goal of initiating an ongoing dialogue about diversity and equity in planning. A professional planner delivered a presentation and training materials for the Planning Board. Additional environmental justice training is planned for this winter. Kathi said, “The purpose of the training was to initiate a continuous and ongoing dialogue in our community about environmental justice and how knowledge about racial inequities in exposure to environmental toxins can inform the Madison Master Plan and decision-making by the Planning Board moving forward.” Madison Borough received Sustainable Jersey certification points for this work with the action: [Environmental Justice in Planning & Zoning](#).



Environmental Commission Site Plan Review: When a project or proposal for development or redevelopment is proposed for a municipality, a site plan review is completed to assure that the developer meets all requirements of the town’s land use ordinances, as well as county, state and federal regulations. The Madison Environmental Commission plays an active role in the review of development applications in order to help protect environmental resources from the negative impacts of development. “With support from the Sustainable Madison Advisory Committee, the Environmental Commission has been working with the town to better integrate the Environmental Commission into the review process,” Kathi explained. In addition, inspired by a 2020 Master Plan that calls for the town to be an environmental leader, the Madison Environmental

Commission is reframing its recommendations through a “climate critical lens,” referencing the New Jersey Energy Master Plan for support. It is recommending all buildings be electric-ready, all roofs be solar ready and no impervious coverage variances be granted without a plan for compensating pervious coverage. The Madison Environmental Commission worked with the town planner to create a stronger Preliminary Environmental Checklist, required for all site plan applications. Madison Borough received Sustainable Jersey certification points for this work with the action: [Environmental Commission Site Plan Review](#). Madison has submitted documentation that is under review for the action: [Create a Green Development Checklist](#).

Energy Actions: Madison Borough has done an outstanding job implementing the slate of Sustainable Jersey energy actions in three broad areas: renewable energy generation, vehicle fleet management and building energy efficiency. In the 2021 Sustainable Jersey certification report, the Borough of Madison completed the following actions: [Energy Efficiency for Municipal Facilities](#); [Energy Tracking and Management](#); [Buy Electricity from a Renewable Source](#); [Commercial Energy Efficiency Outreach](#); [Residential Energy Efficiency Outreach](#); [Fleet Inventory](#); [Purchase Alternative Fuel Vehicles](#) and [Public Electrical Vehicle Charging Infrastructure](#). Kathi said she is lucky to have green team member Peter Fried, who is the Sustainable Madison Advisory Committee ‘energy guru’ and a professor of Physics at New York University. Peter leads the certification action documentation for most of the energy actions that Madison Borough achieves. He also leads a number of actions in the Sustainability and Climate Planning category, including Municipal and Community Carbon Footprints, and was instrumental in securing a \$10,000 [Sustainable Jersey grant](#) funded by the Gardinier Environmental Fund to do planning for several solar carport installations on municipal parking lots. Data for the carbon footprints was collected and analyzed by the Sustainable Madison Committee, key Borough employees Robert Duffy and Kevin O’Keefe, and a Drew University intern, Max Drucker. Kathi said, “Madison seeks to reduce energy consumption and emissions and plans on updating the Footprints annually, as a metric for emissions reduction and Sustainable Jersey Gold Star–Energy certification.”



Save the Drew Forest: Kathi is on the steering committee of [Friends of the Drew Forest](#), which is raising awareness about the value of the Drew Forest and supporting the municipal government in its work toward preservation through a market value conservation sale. Located in Madison, Drew University is considering selling land to raise funds. This includes a 53-acre forest that is a biodiversity hotspot with a rare understory of native plants and trees. In May 2021, Madison Borough Council passed a resolution in support of conserving the Drew Forest and the town government entered into discussions with Drew. The Friends are urging people to sign their petition to save the Drew Forest [here](#).



More About Kathi: Kathi’s father was an active minister who studied at Yale University and later moved the family to Madison to study and work at Drew University. She grew up on the college campus, including living in the historic Sycamore Cottage, which was built in 1834. She left New Jersey for college in Wisconsin where she majored in religion and mythology. After college she returned to Madison, where she lives in her late husband’s family home and enjoys the walkability, bikeability and public transportation opportunities afforded by her home town.

In her spare time, Kathi volunteers doing communications work for various organizations she participates in, including Montclair Early Music, The Folk Project and Morristown Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. She feeds her love of music by participating in community bands, an intergenerational orchestra, flute choirs and a recorder group and attending Folk Project concerts. Travel is high on her list; she most recently returned from six weeks in France, where she studied French and wine and explored the countryside of southwestern France and the Pays Basque.

