

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

April 2020



Michael Winka

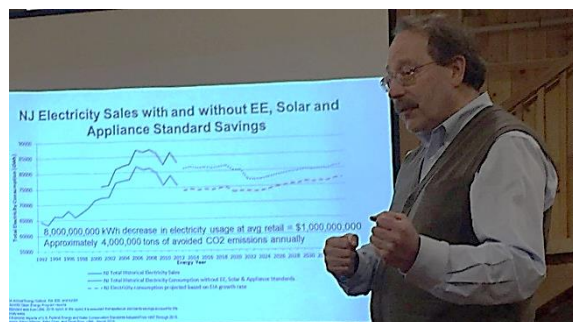
Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Policy and Planning
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities

Serving under ten New Jersey governors, Michael Winka has worked for the state of New Jersey for nearly four decades, first at the [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection \(NJDEP\)](#) and then for the [New Jersey Board of Public Utilities \(NJBU\)](#). He is the quintessential sustainability hero—modest, smart, extremely capable and always at the forefront of the most important sustainability initiatives in New Jersey and beyond.

Mike drafted and adopted NJDEP’s solid waste disposal engineering and environmental impact regulations, including the recycling regulations that helped to establish the first statewide mandatory curbside recycling program nationwide. He served as a member of the New Jersey Solid Waste Task Force that established the solid waste disposal and recycling plans in each New Jersey county. He was part of an interstate agency team that developed the first statewide Sustainability and Greenhouse Gas Action Plan in the United States and the initial New Jersey team that developed the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative \(RGGI\)](#) CO2 cap and trade program among the ten northeast states.

Mike assisted in the development of New Jersey’s solar program and the transition from solar rebates to the New Jersey Solar Renewable Energy Certificate financing programs. Mike said, “I’m proud of the projects and programs I worked on with all of the dedicated people at NJDEP and NJBPU to change New Jersey from a state known for pollution, in which you could not even see New York City on a summer’s day, back into the sustainable, Green Garden State. Earth Day is celebrating 50 years of environmental advocacy and I can say I have been involved since day one.”

Mike is a long-term partner, collaborator and supporter of the Sustainable Jersey program. He assisted in helping to secure the initial funding to establish the program and is an ongoing member of the Sustainable Jersey Energy Task Force. Mike said, “I recognized that Sustainable Jersey could be the boots on the ground, to help implement the NJBPU clean energy goals by multiplying our reach.” Known as the go-to guy, he is willing to provide technical insight and background context on the often very complex world of New Jersey energy policy and program issues. In April 2020, Mike is retiring after 39 years working for the state of New Jersey; Sustainable Jersey is thankful for his tremendous contributions to making New Jersey more sustainable for future generations.



A dedicated public servant, Mike’s long career with the NJBPU exemplifies his commitment to helping New Jersey and its business owners, local governments and residents to address climate change by helping to craft policy agendas and programs that help them save energy, money and the environment. He explained, “One of the fun things about working on clean energy was that regardless of the administration, there was always support for clean energy. The key was recognizing where the emphasis was being placed and helping to implement those areas around your own ideas.” Gary Sondermeyer, the vice president of operations at Bayshore Recycling and Sustainable Jersey Board Trustee explained, “Mike always possessed extraordinary technical knowledge in both the environmental and energy fields which allowed

him to excel in public service for almost 40 years in working at both the NJDEP and NJBPU. His contributions to environmental and utility public policy are immeasurable.”

In His Community: Mike also demonstrates his commitment to sustainability at the local level in his community. He is a founding board member of [Sustainable Lawrence](#), a member of the Lawrence Township Green Team and the [Mercer County Sustainability Coalition](#). He is an active participant on the green team of St. Ann’s Catholic Parish in Lawrenceville, which has made progress identifying and implementing projects to reduce the parish’s carbon footprint, including the installation of ground mounted solar panels in the parking lot. Pam Mount, the former Lawrence Township Mayor and a Sustainable Jersey Board Trustee said, “Mike would call himself a policy wonk, but he is more than that. He understands how to connect to people and explain issues to them. People trust him because he is straightforward, honest and practical.” Mike has served as a resource to the community providing many presentations and lectures including a recent workshop on how to decide what kind of energy is best for your home and how to calculate and reduce your carbon footprint.



New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP): Mike spent 22 years working at the NJDEP. In 1981, he started as an environmental specialist in the Solid Waste Administration and then worked 12 years in the NJDEP’s Division of Solid and Hazardous Waste.



He was responsible for drafting, and adopting NJDEP’s solid waste regulations that included the recycling regulations that helped to establish the first statewide mandatory curbside recycling program. These rules helped to change landfills from open dumps to engineered facilities that prevent pollution. As Chief in the Bureau of Resource Recovery, his team developed the first one-stop permit coordination for waste-to-energy facilities consolidating 27 NJDEP permits and three public hearings into one process. He served as a member of the New Jersey Emergency Solid Waste Task Force when New Jersey was closing all of the municipal open dumps to help establish the long-term solid waste disposal and recycling plans in each county.



In 1989, Mike became the Executive Assistant in the Division of Solid Waste where he managed special projects, including everything from product lifecycle assessment modeling to heavy metal source reduction and recycling programs to reduce mercury in products and the disposal stream like batteries, fluorescent lamps and switches. He helped to expand household hazardous waste (HHW) programs and assisted in the formation of the [Association of New Jersey Household Hazardous Waste Coordinators](#).

In 1994, Mike moved to the Division of Science and Research in the Office of Innovative Technology and Market Development to share and advance innovative technologies across the state by cutting down on pilot testing time. The office received Vice President Al Gore’s Hammer Award for Innovation in State Government. In 1995, Mike helped to establish an electronic product de-manufacturing program to remove toxic heavy metals from the disposal stream.

In 1999, as part of an interagency team, Mike developed the first statewide Sustainability and Greenhouse Gas Action Plan in the United States. The plan was unique in that it linked energy efficiency and renewable energy projects and solid waste

recycling to greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals. He worked with several New Jersey and Dutch utilities to implement several GHG emissions trades. With the [New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability \(NJHEPS\)](#), Mike worked with 44 college presidents to have them sign a pledge to reduce GHG emissions and establish an office of sustainability in each college. With a NJDEP team, he established the High-Performance Building Partnership to go beyond building codes. Mike assisted in the development of the clean energy/environmental provisions in the 1999 Electricity Discount and Energy Competition Act. He was the environmental consultant to NJBPU that established the [societal benefits charge](#) that fund clean energy programs and the Renewable Portfolio Standards.

New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU): Mike is a senior policy advisor in the NJBPU Office of Policy and Planning. He advises NJBPU President Joseph Fiordaliso on clean-energy issues, including developing a system of combined heat and power facilities and advanced microgrids for storm response and emergency preparedness and smart grid/distribution automation.



Mike joined NJBPU in 2003 as the first director of the newly organized Office of Clean Energy, where, through 2012, he managed [New Jersey's Clean Energy Program](#) and the State Energy Plan for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. He also managed NJBPU's alternate fueled vehicle program that provided grants to local governments to assist in development of alternate fueling stations and to procure alternate fueled vehicles.

Mike served as a member of the 2003 Governor's Renewable Energy Task Force, which established the first statewide solar goal of 90 Megawatt (MW) by 2008 and increased the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) to 20 percent by 2020. The 90 MW solar goal was achieved in Energy Year 2009. At that time, New Jersey's solar program was second in the country and among the top ten solar programs in the world. Mike said, "When we started the program there were nine kW of solar installed in six facilities that year. Now, New Jersey installs nine kW of solar every ten minutes."

Mike helped propose and adopt the NJBPU Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard regulations that increased the RPS to 20 percent with a two percent solar requirement. He worked with the Mid-Atlantic States through the Mid-Atlantic Demand Response Initiative and PJM to develop a standard distributed generation interconnection process across the states and at PJM. PJM is a regional transmission organization that coordinates the movement of wholesale electricity in all, or parts, of 13 states and the District of Columbia. Because of this work, New Jersey was awarded the highest rating for its net metering program by the [Interstate Renewable Energy Council \(IREC\)](#).

Mike assisted in the establishment of the New Jersey Clean Energy Committee and the Energy Efficiency (EE) and Renewable Energy (RE) sub-committees that developed the recommendations to transition the utility EE and RE managed programs to the NJBPU, resulting in the creation of New Jersey's Clean Energy Program. With a team at NJBPU, Mike helped to establish the first solar renewable energy certificate (SREC) tracking and trading program. This team was instrumental in setting up the current SREC tracking and trading program (the Generator Attributes Tracking System) at PJM. As part of an interagency team, Mike helped develop the NJBPU 2008, 2011 and 2019 Energy Master Plan and the 2015 update.

Currently, Mike is excited about the development of Town Center Distributed Energy Resource Microgrid and Community Solar programs within a smart grid. "Microgrids and community solar are the future of energy and will enable communities to develop and sell their own energy," he said. "Community solar microgrids have the potential to bring clean energy advances to low income neighborhoods, especially thermal energy." Mike participated in the Rocky Mountain Institute accelerator lab for the Hoboken microgrid and helped to secure federal funding for the New Jersey Transit microgrid project.

Sustainable Jersey Energy Task Force: Mike has served on the [Sustainable Jersey Energy Task Force](#) since 2009. NJBPU and New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program partners with Sustainable Jersey to assist municipalities and schools in addressing energy efficiency and conservation challenges and to support the state energy goals to work towards a sustainable future. The collaboration provides the opportunity to take clean energy to scale in New Jersey by leveraging local action.



Donna Drewes, the former co-director of Sustainable Jersey said, “I remember when we were first creating the program, Mike helped us think through the energy program actions from the perspective of the NJBPU and New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program resources and policy agenda. His ideas helped us to craft the first set of energy actions. His input reflected not only his deep technical expertise but his practical personal experience as a volunteer with the Sustainable Lawrence program.” Mike worked with Highland Park Mayor Meryl Frank and Randall Solomon, Sustainable Jersey’s Executive Director, to help develop the first sustainable community as part of the Green Mayor’s Plan that preceded Sustainable Jersey. Mike has spoken at countless Sustainable Jersey events and panels over the years promoting clean energy to communities.

Education and Committees: Mike’s educational background includes graduating magna cum laude from Fairleigh Dickinson University with a BS in Environmental Science and work on a MS in Environmental Engineering at West Virginia University and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He serves on many committees and groups including: National Association of State Energy Officials, the National Association of Regulatory Commissions, Northeast Waste Management Officials Association, North America Hazardous Materials Management Association, Northeast Energy Efficiency Alliance, Clean Energy States Alliance, the Governor’s Blue-Ribbon Panel on Offshore Wind, the United States Department of Energy Combined Heat and Power Partnership and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission task force. He was a member of the Governor’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act task force and the Governor’s Sandy Recovery task force developing Town Center Distributed Energy Resource Microgrids. He assisted in the development of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and United States Department of Energy National Action Plan for Energy Efficiency – Vision for 2025: A Framework for Change.

What You May Not Know About Mike: Mike was born in Hoboken and raised in Guttenberg, East New Jersey; he now lives in Lawrenceville, West New Jersey. Most importantly, he sides with South Jersey on saying pork roll rather than Taylor Ham, but shows his North Jersey roots as he refuses to say pencil points for penna or jimmies for sprinkles. Mike has been married to his wife Christina, one year less than the years he has worked for the State. They have three children and two grandchildren.

In his free time, Mike likes to hike the trails of Lawrence and work to expand the greenway links between the open space in Lawrence. He is working to link the colonial history of Lawrence and Mercer County in a trails walking tour to help preserve more open space. He said, “My ultimate goal is to be on the beach down at West Cape May because we will turn back the impacts of climate change.” Although he is retiring from the NJBPU, Mike plans to continue to help communities develop their local energy and climate action plans and maybe teach courses on energy and the environment to give back what he has learned over almost 40 years at NJDEP and NJBPU. He said his advice for green team members and sustainability professionals is “Don’t fret about precisely measuring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions reduction in your community from an action. Just help to implement Sustainable Jersey’s energy actions and the emissions savings will come along. In short just do it, and in the end, New Jersey will meet its 80 percent GHG reduction and 100 percent clean energy goals.”