

# THE Islip Bulletin

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Pictured (l-r): Melissa Parrott, Harrison Bench (Sayville), Olivia Davidson (Sayville), Victoria Creviston (Sayville) and Sarah Sciortino (West Islip).

*Melissa Parrott*

# Focused on the future

Story By: **ANTHONY PERROTTA**

3/8/2018

**ISLIP TOWN**—High school students from the Suffolk Student Climate Action Committee first got our attention when they spoke during last month's Islip Town Board meeting, where they implored elected officials to act to reduce the town's carbon emissions and reduce the impacts of climate change.

The students from Sayville and West Islip high schools' SSCAC chapters asked for a designated staff person to work on renewable energy, the creation of a renewable energy task force, a line item in the capital budget for renewable projects and to perform greenhouse gas inventory for the town. They said these are the steps towards a more renewable future.

Sayville High School senior Harrison Bench was the first student that Melissa Parrott, founder of SSCAC, contacted about joining the group. He had already been doing scientific research for three years at the time and was instrumental in getting other students to join the committee. After high school, Bench hopes to be a biology/environmental studies double major, with concentrations in economics or political science. "Although I may gravitate towards a pre-med program, I know

my devotion to fighting the climate crisis will never expire," he said. "I hope to learn more and gain more skills that will help me make a change.

Sayville High School senior Olivia Davidson has been with SSCAC since its founding last year. "Climate change affects all of us in so many ways, especially on Long Island," she said. "With climate change, our businesses are in jeopardy, storms are more devastating, and we are in danger if we don't make a change soon." Davidson plans on majoring in environmental studies after graduating high school.

Parrott started the organization after attending her second Climate Reality Project Leadership Corps training by Al Gore. "Going into my second training, I knew I wanted to do more than provide presentations on the climate crisis to the general public," she said. "I wanted to include students."

She has been working in the environmental education field for 25 years and is currently the director of education and outreach for the Central Pine Barrens Commission, a role separate from her personal activism. SSCAC is currently part of Al Gore's Climate Reality Project: Long Island Chapter. Last year, the committee spoke at the Youth Assembly at the United Nations, where they gave a presentation, "Our Planet's Future: How Youth Can Take Action Now to Tackle Climate Change," and discussed 10 action items we could do now to combat climate change.

Parrott said SSCAC is a bipartisan committee, working to develop ongoing partnerships with elected officials to reach their goal—100 percent renewable energy by 2030. She says the organization is grateful for Gov. Andrew Cuomo's state mandate of 50 percent renewable energy by 2030, as well as 80 percent by 2050. However, they want our towns to exceed this goal. The towns of East Hampton and Southampton are already committed to 100 percent by 2030 and 2025, respectively. The Town of Southold is also making notable strides when it comes to clean energy.

Parrott says the Town of Islip has been "very open" to the organization. Supervisor Angie Carpenter, councilwoman Trish Bergin Weichbrodt, councilman John Cochrane and councilwomen Mary Kate Mullen have all spoken with students from the program. They were all "supportive" and "impressed," according to Parrott. "We have still yet to see any action come out of these meetings and discussions, but that is why we spoke during February's meeting, to continue the dialogue and let them know we need our town to move towards a renewable transition and fast," she said. "We will keep at it and work with them behind the scenes and in public forums."

West Islip High School senior Sarah Sciortino first heard about the SSCAC from her friend who attended a Climate Reality Project conference in Pittsburg. "I knew it was for me because I'm so passionate about climate change, and the committee

was already doing big things when I heard about it," Sciortino said. She plans on attending either the University of Vermont or SUNY New Paltz after graduation. "My goal is to be a campaign manager, lobbyist or journalist," Sciortino said. "Whatever it is, I will be doing something about climate change."

The Town of Brookhaven came close to meeting their 50 percent renewable energy goal last year. This spring, the Patchogue-Medford School District SSCAC chapter will begin the same process local high school students have done with the Town of Islip, such as meeting with Brookhaven Town officials and speaking at town board meetings. Sachem East has also expressed interest in joining the committee.

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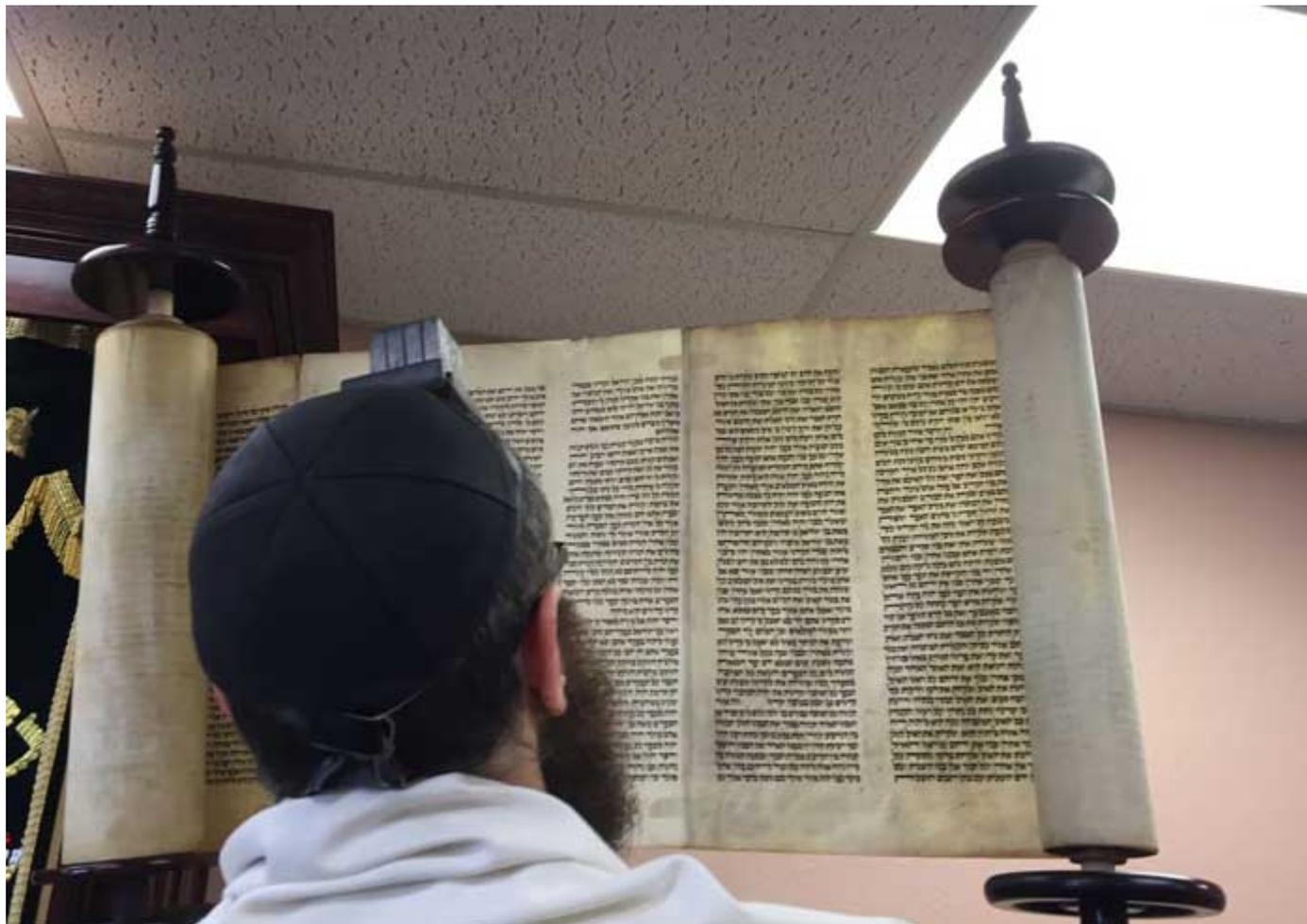
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# THE Islip Bulletin

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