

Erie County Community Climate Action Plan - Scoping Document

Background

Climate change poses a serious threat to our community, and local governments across the world are mobilizing to reduce climate impacts and adapt to make their communities more resilient. In June 2017 Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz issued Executive Order #17, which commits Erie County to meeting the U.S. goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, which are 26-28% reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2025 compared to a 2005 baseline, both in its internal operations and community-wide. The County has made good progress within its own operations. However, the most recent community-wide GHG inventory shows only a 12% decrease in GHG emissions as compared to that 2005 baseline.

In order to address the community-wide emissions, Erie County's Environmental Management Council, which advises the County on environmental issues, formed a Community Climate Change Task Force in January 2019. The County Executive recognized this Task Force as its official climate change advisory committee through Executive Order #20. The Task Force has key stakeholders in a variety of sectors – municipalities, community-based organizations, not-for-profits, education, utilities, transportation, as well as youth representatives and the Buffalo Museum of Science, which until the pandemic hosted the meetings. The Task Force has been laying the groundwork for a larger Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) by meeting monthly to discuss how current programs can work together to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The group has agreed that a CCAP is needed and that climate justice and equity must be the lens through which that plan is based.

During the course of the County's work with the Task Force, New York State passed one of the most aggressive pieces of climate legislation in the country – the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). Many members of the County's Task Force had worked for years to get this critical legislation passed. The Act creates a Climate Action Council to develop a plan to achieve net zero GHG emissions. The bill requires 40% emissions reductions in absolute terms from 1990 levels by 2030 and 85% emissions reductions by 2050. To reach the target of net zero emissions, the CLCPA allows for any remaining emissions beyond 85% to either be directly reduced, or offset through projects that remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Moreover, the Act includes several environmental justice components, including a requirement to direct at least 35-40% of the program's benefits to historically disadvantaged communities.

The CLCPA is now the context within which the County should set goals for community-wide GHG emission reductions. While the State's Climate Action Council is in the process of creating its statewide plan, the County's community climate action planning process should dovetail

with the State's plans and be developed in the context of the CLCPA's emission reduction and environmental justice goals. To reach the CLCPA climate and equity goals, Erie County's CCAP will focus on place-based initiatives and solutions that are developed through community engagement. That is, the County is committed to working with the communities represented within its borders – urban, suburban, and rural – to discuss concerns and solutions that work for them. It is vital that the community is engaged throughout the planning process and implementation.

Goal

Create a Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) to achieve the GHG emission reduction goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) in Erie County in a way that creates jobs, opportunities and protections for the most vulnerable in our community.

Objectives

- *Engage the community* to involve them in the planning process in a way that considers issues of access and ability to participate for vulnerable populations. Provide ample opportunity for public input by using a place-based planning process with a public feedback loop
- *Identify issues and solutions* by working with the community in a transparent way from the beginning to the end of the program. Equity should be a focus in the planning process and the County should learn from similar efforts across the country.
- *Organize the plan around those issues and solutions which will have the biggest impact on the above goal of the Plan and which the County has the ability to address.* However, initiatives around which the County can play the role of convener or influencer, when it is not possible for it to pursue a particular program or regulation itself, should also be included.
- *Develop place-based performance metrics, and an accountability structure* to assure effective implementation.
- *Regularly inform County leadership*, including the County Legislature, and the public on the progress and process of the plan. Request adoption of the plan by the Legislature, as was done with the Climate Action and Sustainability Plan for internal operations.

Resources

Existing

NYSDEC Climate Smart Community grant - supports staffing to oversee the planning process through December 2021.

ECLIPSE – Erie County Low Income Program for Sustainable Energy – 3-year NYSERDA grant to reduce energy burden and improve access to renewable energy for low and moderate income residents, including via the Home Energy Assistance Program. The project calls for a 700kW community solar project, streamlining of energy efficiency programs, and possible implementation of a community choice aggregation project.

Climate Vulnerability Assessment – This Erie County project, a partnership with UB and funded by NYSDEC, is assessing the County’s ability to respond to climate threats such as vector-borne disease, temperature extremes, and flooding events. This assessment includes analysis to identify the most vulnerable populations in our County to climate related hazards. The project includes the involvement of many County departments who are on the frontlines of Covid-19 crisis.

Community Climate Change Task Force – as described, will provide guidance and expertise for the planning process, as well as assist with outreach.

County government resources – Support from County departments and the Buffalo & Erie County Library, as well as printing and other resources will be leveraged.

Potential

\$5,000 or greater NYSERDA Clean Energy Community funding

Other grant resources will be explored, as they become available.

Work Plan

1. Explore ways to prioritize equity in the planning process
 - a. Research other communities plans and processes
 - b. Meet with local community-based organizations who are working in this space to get their initial feedback
 - c. Equity discussions for C3TF; training for County staff and Chair of the EMC/C3TF.
 2. Plan to Plan
 - a. Secure initial resources to assist in the plan to plan process
 - i. Utility burden and equity mapping
 - ii. Climate Vulnerability Assessment
 - iii. Support from Buffalo & Erie County Library and County Departments of Health & Social Services
 - iv. Community Foundation Support of Plan to Plan
 - b. Develop Planning Documents
 - i. Draft Scoping Document and Plan Outline
 - ii. Review Scoping Document and Plan Outline with C3TF
 - iii. Review funding opportunities/support needed
-

- iv. Draft Outreach and Communication Plan
 - v. Review draft CCAP outline and outreach plan with C3TF
 - 3. Implement the Outreach/Community Participation Plan
 - a. Introduce CCAP, utility burden and equity mapping, and collect community input on outline
 - i. Revise outline based on community input
 - ii. Include initiatives suggested by community
 - b. Collect community input on initiatives developed by C3TF working groups
 - i. Revise initiatives based on community input
 - c. Collect community input on first draft
 - i. Revise first draft based on community input
 - d. Collect community input on final draft
 - i. Revise final draft based on community input
 - e. Present to public and County Legislature
 - f. Report out on results/progress annually
 - 4. Form C3TF working groups for CCAP chapter development
 - a. Identify experts missing from C3TF
 - b. Identify action items and initiatives
 - c. Draft chapter
 - d. Finalize chapter
 - 5. Final Phase 1 Plan
 - a. Adoption by County Legislature
 - b. Annual review and update
-