



Executive Summary

Draft Community Climate Action Plan – March 2023

The consequences of climate change are all around us. Warmer lake temperatures are causing more intense storms while high wind speeds, seiches, and extreme temperature events are becoming more common. In 2022, the United States experienced \$165 billion in weather and climate disasters, the third highest amount ever.¹ Erie County, like the rest of the world, is faced with the threat of a climate emergency, which is compounding the long-standing challenges of economic inequality and racial injustice.



The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, an international scientific assessment of the threats presented by climate change, was released in 2022 and indicates that the window in which to act and reduce the intensity of climate change impacts continues to shrink.²

But there is much to be hopeful about. Erie County alone cannot prevent the climate from changing, but action and support from the state, federal, and local

governments, together with community residents and local businesses both here in Erie County and around the globe, can make a significant contribution towards limiting worldwide GHG emissions. Because the effects of climate change are already being experienced, we must also prepare ourselves to be more resilient to current and future impacts.

This Erie County Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) is focused on creating opportunities to address climate change while also protecting our residents, creating jobs, protecting productive farmland, and addressing issues of inequity. This Plan outlines goals, strategies, and actions that the County can take, whether directly or indirectly, to address this important issue.

To better address climate change and reduce GHG emissions in the community, the County convened the Community Climate Change Task Force to advise the County, and began a planning process to create this equity-focused CCAP.

The Task Force identified ten topic areas, and formed working groups of diverse experts to develop plan chapters for these topics. Between March 2020 and February 2023, Erie County coordinated the development of the CCAP with over 100 volunteers from the Task Force and the community.

¹ <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/>

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

The chapters were written to include goals, strategies, and tangible action items that Erie County can take to reduce GHG emissions and make the community more resilient to climate change. A website, www.erie.gov/climateaction, was created to house documents for public comment as well as communicate ways for community members to get involved.

Regional and State Plans

This Plan rests on the foundations of earlier regional plans, such as the WNY Regional Sustainability Plan (2013)³ and **One Region Forward**. Not long after the Task Force started meeting in 2019, the New York Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) was passed. While, Erie County's plan is separate and distinct from the state plan, the state plan will likely result in funding opportunities, and was given careful consideration.

Commitment to Equity

The legacy of inequity that has been inherited from previous generations is still present today in Erie County, as well as the rest of the country. **Erie County has approached this Plan with a commitment to using an equity lens while developing the Plan's strategies and action items.** More information about this topic can be found in Chapter 2: Climate Justice.



Erie County Government Levers

While Erie County has more residents than some countries and manages more roads than some states, Erie County's role is more limited than a federal or state government. Erie County's many responsibilities include providing social services and public health programs, coordinating emergency services, as well as maintaining important infrastructure. Therefore, protecting our community and especially vulnerable residents from the impacts of climate change is a natural role for the County. Erie County can also expand these programs to help support municipalities and households in their efforts to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to a changing climate. In cases where Erie County may not have the jurisdiction to control or implement an action directly, it has the ability to advocate and provide leadership.

Benefits to Public Health

Public health and climate change are deeply connected. Health issues resulting from poor air quality, poor water quality, and extreme weather events are putting pressure on those who already struggle with cardiovascular disease, respiratory issues, and other medical conditions. Ongoing health issues coupled with Erie County's older building stock magnify the public health threat of extreme heat and cold, especially to our most vulnerable populations, children and seniors, in communities that experience the most health disparities and inequities.



³ <https://regional-institute.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2020/10/Western-New-York-Regional-Sustainability-Plan.pdf>

Implementation

Successful implementation of this plan will require a multifaceted approach, including engaging with our community, securing state and federal funding sources, and leveraging partnerships.

Creating programs that communicate the actions that we can take as a community to reduce the impacts of climate change, while at the same time preparing for the impacts of a changing climate, is vital to all the chapters within this Plan. The development of education and outreach should also ensure that we are trying to reach all residents by considering access, distribution, translation, accessibility considerations, and more. It will be essential for the County to help our community become aware of opportunities to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to climate change to fulfill many of the goals, strategies, and actions outlined in this Plan.



Erie County will need to find ways to braid financial resources and leverage state and federal funding programs to address climate change. Recently passed state and federal legislation, like the Environmental Bond Act and Inflation Reduction Act, will be critical sources of funding.



Just as this Plan involved the work of partners across the community, Erie County will not be able to achieve the objectives of this Plan alone. Erie County will need to work with municipalities, school districts, businesses, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and residents to actualize its full potential.

Acknowledgement

This effort was conducted without technical consultant support and relied on the efforts of volunteer stakeholders and County staff. The County is grateful to the chair of the Task Force, Dr. Susan Clark, our Working Group Leads and our many stakeholder participants who volunteered their leadership and expertise, and were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. Staffing was partly funded by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

Next Steps

The full draft CCAP is available at www.erie.gov/climateaction and is open for public comment through May 2023. Public comment will be incorporated and the plan will be presented to the legislature for adoption in the early fall of 2023.

Community Climate Action Plan CHAPTER WORKING GROUPS

OVERARCHING ADVISORY GROUPS



Climate Justice

Reviewed Outputs with a justice lens and made suggestions where equity may be missing to ensure that equity was the focus



Climate Resiliency

Assured that there was a coordinated and comprehensive treatment of resilience topics within the plan.



Communicating Progress

Sought input from the community and made that process transparent to address the needs of community members



Agriculture & Food Systems

Goal: Promote agriculture and food system solutions



Commercial Energy Conservation & Renewable Energy

Goal: Moving toward net zero carbon emission buildings and supporting the transition to a decarbonized electrical grid



Consumption & Waste Reduction

Goal: Responsible production and consumption of resources and sustainable management of waste



Economic & Workforce Development

Goal: Fostering an equitable and robust green economy



Housing & Neighborhood Resiliency

Goal: Support efforts to protect vulnerable residents from changes in our climate, through resiliency and efficiency efforts



Nature Based Solutions

Goal: Protect intact landscapes, restore degraded ecosystems, and improve equitable access to green infrastructure, tree canopy, and open space



Transportation

Goal: Creating a safe, equitable, and affordable multi-modal transportation system