

CHAPTER 4



Springville Middle School social studies teacher Drew Beiter and science teacher Kristin Hughey are part of a growing national movement among educators to teach students about climate change across multiple subject matters. Beiter – cofounder and executive director of the Academy for Human Rights and an inductee into the National Teachers Hall of Fame – says that education is a crucial component of the transition toward green energy.

“The younger the better,” Beiter says. “It’s an all-hands-on-deck movement. Ultimately, classrooms, businesses, and governments have to show future generations that we can do this. We’ve done great things in the history of this country before – like going from horses to Model Ts – so there’s always room for hope that we can do it again here.”



Communicating Progress



This Plan prioritizes community input and government transparency and was developed with guidance from the Communicating Progress Working Group. Public input has made the Plan robust while encouraging buy-in from residents that will be impacted by the strategies and actions recommended by the Plan. The priorities of community input and government transparency will continue to be critical as the Plan is implemented. Below is a description of how the County sought input from community residents and organizations throughout the creation of the Plan, made the process transparent, and will continue these efforts during Plan implementation.

Outreach and Transparency While Developing the Draft Plan

To ensure that this Plan addressed the needs of community residents, the County and its partners sought community input in a variety of ways before the draft Plan was released. These included:

- **Press releases and events.** A press event was held to kick off the planning process.³⁶ County press releases included information about public meetings and updated reports.³⁷
- **Climate action website.**³⁸ The County's Sustainability Team frequently updated its website outlining the planning process and ways for community residents and organizations to get involved, which included signing up for email updates, taking a survey, requesting a meeting, and becoming a climate ambassador.
- **A brochure³⁹ describing climate change impacts and opportunities in Erie County.** This brochure continues to be posted on the Climate Action website and has been distributed to all libraries throughout the County, as well as at events and presentations. The brochure was translated into Spanish,⁴⁰ Swahili,⁴¹ Burmese,⁴² and Arabic⁴³ to reach a larger group of community residents beyond native English speakers.
- **Email updates.** More than 1,400 people signed up to receive regular updates on the Plan, which included information on the overall Plan, invitations to presentations, the opportunity to invite the County to present to local organizations, and notifications of when draft goals and strategies were available for public comment. The email recipients covered nearly every corner of the County. Updates were also sent through a more general Erie County Environmental Updates newsletter with a subscription list of 8,500 addresses.
- **Public presentations.** The County held public presentations that were open to the public at the Central Library in downtown Buffalo, both in-person and online.
- **Private presentations.** More than 75 presentations were given to community groups, municipal officials, not-for-profits, universities, senior centers, and businesses. The County continues to welcome invitations to present on the Plan.
- **Outreach at public events.** The County Department of Environment and Planning (DEP) tabled at more than 100 events throughout the County. Through these events, the DEP intentionally sought to reach a variety of age groups from small children to senior members as well as diversity in race and ethnicity to ensure there were ample opportunities for engagement. These events included the County Parks Department's Fall Fest and Winter Fest, the Erie County Fair, Kuleta Pamoja at the Johnnie B. Wiley Amateur Athletic Sports Pavilion, the Elmwood Festival of the Arts, Borderlands Music + Arts Festival, and the Lunar New Year Festival.

- **Social media.** The CCAP planning process was promoted on Facebook,⁴⁴ Instagram,⁴⁵ and Twitter.⁴⁶ Every time part of the Plan was ready for review, a notification was sent out via social media. Posts also included informational videos, brochures, and invitations to events.
- **Climate Ambassador Program.**⁴⁷ The ambassador program serves as a connection between the community and Erie County. It gives community members a chance to learn about

our programs and educate groups on the impacts of climate change to gather feedback on what is needed in their communities.

As the Plan was developed, draft chapter outputs were available for public feedback for 30 days on the Climate Action website.⁴⁸ Outputs that were available for public feedback were announced via email and through social media posts. All feedback received was presented back to the Working Groups and incorporated where appropriate.

Students at the Omega Mentoring Program Learning About Climate Action



Solar smoothies



Repair cafe

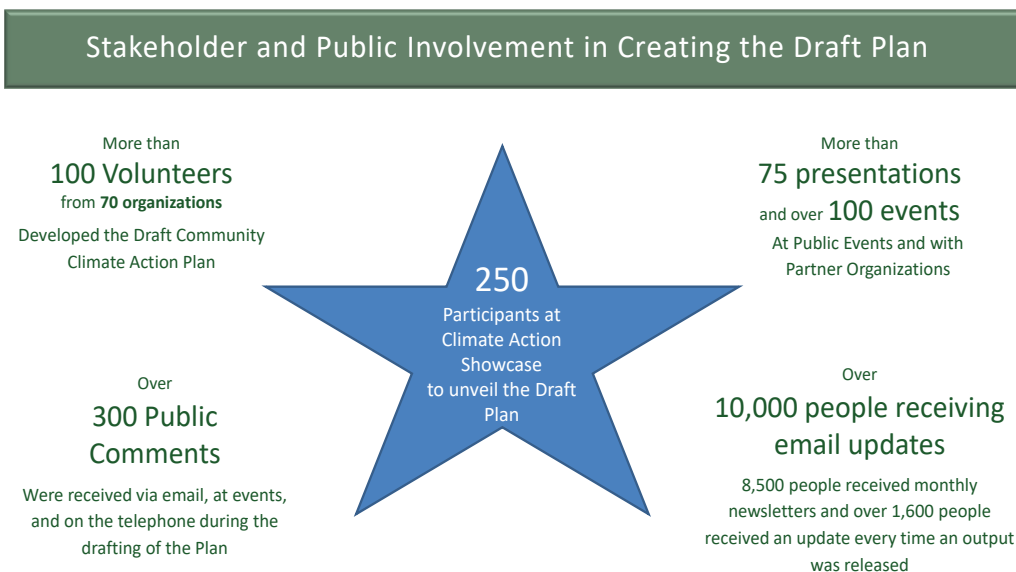


Composting



Recognition of completion of the Climate Connections Project

Figure 15 Stakeholder and Public Involvement in Creating the Draft Plan



Finalizing the Plan

The Draft CCAP was released at a public event on March 18, 2023 at D'Youville University in conjunction with a WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable (WNY SBR) educational event. There were approximately 250 participants at the event, which featured a youth art showcase, children's activities, refreshments, presentations, and tabling on each of the chapter Working Groups. Volunteers from the University at Buffalo scribed public comments at each Working Groups' table.

The Draft Plan was open for public comment for 90 days and made available on the County's Climate Action website. During the comment period, the County hosted public meetings, continued to conduct outreach at local events, and presented to community groups. Various showcase events were hosted by Erie County, which included in-person and virtual events across the County. Outreach about the finalization of the Plan and the opportunity to comment on the Draft Plan included:

- **Public presentations** – Three public presentations of the Draft Plan were held: the event at D'Youville University mentioned above and two virtual presentations.
- **Presentations to community groups** – More than 20 presentations were made to groups after the Draft Plan was released. These groups included the NAACP, the Buffalo Jewish Federation, the West Seneca Town Board, the Association of Supervisors, the League of Women Voters, Frontier Middle School, and Westminster Presbyterian Church of Buffalo.
- **Tabling at community events** – The County presented the Draft Plan at more than 15 community events including the Tiff Nature Preserve Egg-stravaganza, Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve Earth Day celebration, Say Yes to Education Buffalo Saturday Academies, and the Juneteenth



City of Buffalo leaders such as Cedric Holloway, executive director of the Omega Mentoring Program, believe that the shift toward cleaner and greener technologies needs to be equitable for historically disadvantaged communities. That starts with informing residents about the resources available and about how they can help.

"Most folks may be interested, but they don't know that they can make a difference," Holloway says, "so I think what we need to focus on is communicating this is what we're doing, this is how we can do it, and this is how it saves us, our community, and our climate."

Festival of Buffalo.

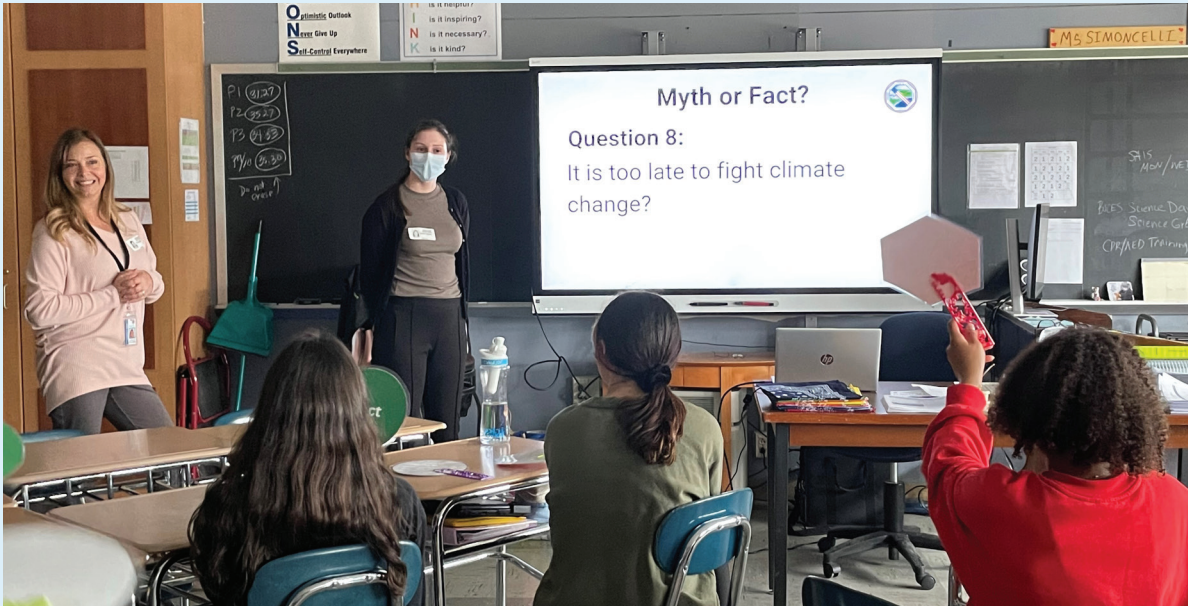
- **Email and social media updates** – The County continued promoting the public comment period on social media and through the email newsletter updates mentioned above.
- **Paid and earned media** – Sponsorships were purchased on the radio station WBFO, as well as a paid advertisement in The Challenger News. The County's efforts were also featured in a front-page article in The Buffalo News, on Channel 2 WGRZ, and on the NAACP's radio program on WUFO.
- **Climate Connections Project** – Erie County received a grant from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network to help build a relationship with the Omega Mentoring Program, which operates out of the Johnnie B. Wiley Amateur Athletic Sports Pavilion on Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo. The

County worked with the mentoring program to connect the youth with climate action in the community. This included interactive sessions on green infrastructure, nature climate solutions, and building trades.

When the public comment period closed, the County worked with the Task Force to address more than 100 comments that had been received since the Draft Plan was released. It is important to note that these were in addition to the comments that were received earlier in the process and had already been incorporated into the Draft Plan. The document was then formatted so that it was easy to read and included photos and graphics. The final draft of the CCAP will be shared widely with the public, including hard copies sent to all mayors, supervisors, and libraries in Erie County.

Transparency Regarding Plan Implementation

As Erie County has done with its Climate Action and Sustainability Plan for internal operations, the County will issue an annual report regarding the implementation of the near-term action items outlined in this Plan. This will include feedback on the status of each action by its respective lead department. This update will be posted on the County's Climate Action website, as well as sent to the County Executive. The County will use the various outreach methods listed above to let the public know of the report.



Marie Simoncelli's sixth grade class at Frontier Middle School

Photo credit: Marie Simoncelli



Erie County Sustainability Coordinator, Tracy Skalski, presenting at the March 18th Climate Action Showcase at D'Youville University



Kenmore West High School's Earth Week event

Photo credit: Denise Amato



In May 2023, the American Planning Association New York Upstate Chapter selected The Erie County Community Climate Action Plan to receive an “Outstanding Planning Award” in the category of Public Outreach.

FOOTNOTES: Communicating Progress

- 36 To read about a public information session that was held at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library in October 2022, go to Erie County's website at <https://www2.erie.gov/exec/index.php?q=press/public-information-session-about-erie-county%E2%80%99s-community-climate-action-plan-take-place-buffal>
- 37 To read about the start of public participation for the CCAP, go to Erie County's website at <https://www2.erie.gov/exec/index.php?q=press/erie-county-details-community-climate-action-planning-process-requests-public-participation>
- 38 Erie County's climate action website: <https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/>
- 39 To access the English version of our climate change in Erie County brochure, go to <https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov/climateaction/files/2021-03/Erie%20County%20climate%20change%20infographic%20Rev.%203.6.pdf>
- 40 To access the Spanish version of our climate change in Erie County brochure, go to https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov/climateaction/files/2022-06/climate_11x17_3.22_for_translation_spanish_us_final.pdf
- 41 To access the Swahili version of our climate change in Erie County brochure, go to https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov/climateaction/files/2022-06/climate_11x17_3.22_for_translation_swahili_final.pdf
- 42 To access the Burmese version of our climate change in Erie County brochure, go to https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov/climateaction/files/2022-06/climate_11x17_3.22_for_translation_1_burmese_final.pdf
- 43 To access the Arabic version of our climate change in Erie County brochure, go to https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov/climateaction/files/2022-06/climate_11x17_3.22_for_translation_arabic_final.pdf
- 44 Erie County DEP Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ErieCountyDEP>
- 45 Erie County Climate Action Instagram: https://instagram.com/eriecounty_climateaction?igshid=NzAzN2Q1NTE=
- 46 Erie County DEP Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ericodep?s=21&t=0HBk5sPOxGVUXM-CnKIUjg>
- 47 To learn more about Erie County's Climate Ambassador Program, go to Erie County's website at <https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/get-involved#Ambassador>
- 48 Erie County's climate action website: <https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/>