

CHAPTER 7



Jose and Linda Corchado are new homeowners who purchased a postwar house in Tonawanda, but it was not until their first winter that they discovered a variety of insulation issues. With the help of Home HeadQuarters – a non-profit organization that partners with the City of Buffalo, Erie County, and New York State to offer a variety of programs – the Corchados applied for low-interest loans and grants to help fund an insulation project to increase the sustainability, resiliency, and comfort of their home.

“Due to the lack of investment tools available to these homeowners, many homes are particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change because of the age and design of the major components of their home,” says Home HeadQuarters Deputy Executive Director Anna Falicov. “Homeowners should know that there are many affordable ways to make the necessary repairs that will allow them to stay safe or reduce damage during extreme weather events such as blizzards, stormwater flooding, and sewer overflows.”



Housing and Neighborhood Resiliency



GOAL: Zero-emission homes and neighborhoods that promote health and protect residents from extreme weather.

Housing comprises 25% of Erie County’s GHG emissions, primarily from natural gas use for space heating, gas appliances, and electricity use. Therefore, reducing GHG emissions from homes is key to meeting the community’s climate goals. Housing also overlaps with other critical issues and County program areas, including those focused on health and poverty. Efforts to electrify homes with electricity produced from renewable energy and reduced fossil fuel use can also help the County government achieve related goals, especially by improving indoor air quality. However, the County’s electrification efforts need to ensure that residents are safe during power outages,⁷⁴ including that residents have access to emergency heating. During this electrification transition, it is important for our electrical grid to be upgraded and made more resilient.⁷⁵

The County will support efforts to

protect vulnerable residents from changes in our climate through resiliency and efficiency efforts. Resiliency and efficiency can be achieved through home weatherization strategies and encouraging heat pump adoption, which can provide heating and cooling, protecting residents from both extreme heat and extreme cold. The installation of more green spaces and trees, along with the development of a robust utility grid that is less subject to blackouts, will also be important.

The County will support development and conservation strategies that curb sprawl and aim to make neighborhoods healthier and more livable, which is a family of strategies sometimes called Smart Growth. These strategies promote dense, mixed-income, walkable neighborhoods developed in coordination with public transit and greatly reduce the County’s carbon footprint while making our community healthier and more equitable.

DEFINITIONS

FOR ACTIONS SPECIFICATIONS

Short-term:

By or before 2030

Medium-term:

By 2040

Long-term:

By 2050

Direct:

County government can directly control the action - relating to County government operations and infrastructure

Indirect:

Regional agencies and municipalities have control and/or County government can support/influence

Finally, there are many opportunities to transition our homes to clean energy, but it is a priority for the County to make sure that these initiatives are affordable, especially for low- and moderate-income residents. Current programs in Erie County, such as Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) are methods to

help vulnerable residents withstand the effects of climate change, address energy poverty, and decarbonize housing. The Erie County Low-Income Program for Sustainable Energy (ECLIPSE) is a grant-funded program currently in development at Erie County that is working in partnership with HEAP⁷⁶ and CDBG⁷⁷ to reduce energy costs and access to renewable energy

for low-income residents, including community solar projects. Erie County is also a partner of the WNY Clean Energy Hub, which provides local staff to connect residents of all income levels to residential clean energy incentives and technical assistance programs.⁷⁸

Resilient Energy System for Erie County

Erie County has always experienced severe storms, but extreme weather events are becoming more common with climate change. Therefore, making sure that homes and businesses have reliable energy sources is a critical consideration as we transition to technologies that avoid climate pollution. Our existing infrastructure already makes us vulnerable. For example, most homes rely on electricity to run heating systems, and as we saw with the Blizzard of 2022 when four substations in Buffalo went offline from snow and wind, many aspects of our aging

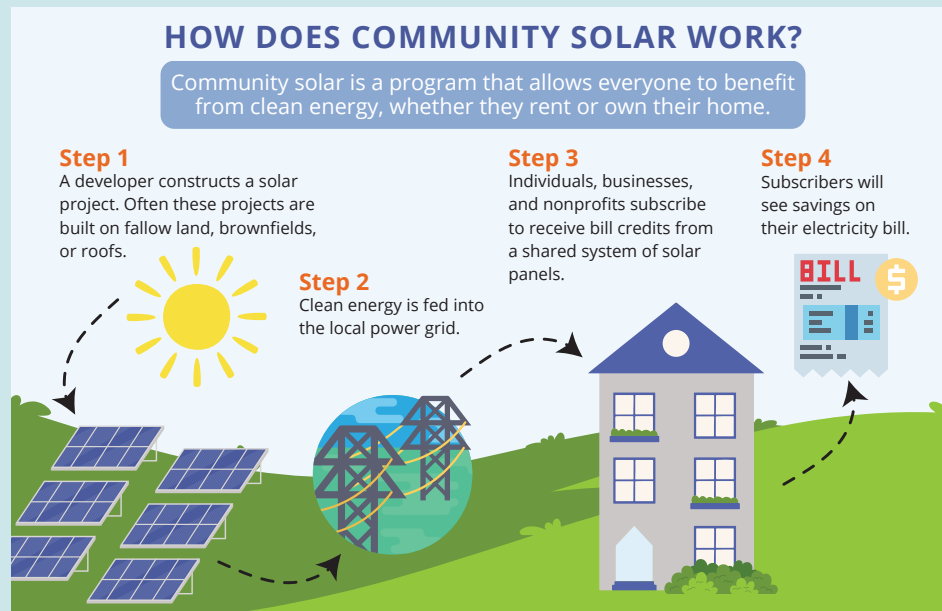
electric infrastructure are not designed to handle severe storms. As Erie County experiences more frequent storms and as heat waves become more common, it is especially important that we improve the reliability of our power grid.

While we expand our electric infrastructure to accommodate uses like electrified space heating and transportation, it is also an important opportunity to modernize and decentralize the system with technologies, such as rooftop solar, battery storage, vehicle-to-grid, demand management, and microgrids — all of which are discussed

later in this Plan. A smart, decentralized energy system is much less vulnerable to disruption than our current centralized “hub and spoke” distribution system and the result is a grid that is much more resilient to extreme weather.

Finally, while we work towards modern electric distribution and storage systems, equipment that protects our community, such as fossil fuel-powered backup generators and emergency space heaters, will continue to be important in Erie County. Fortunately, using fossil fuels as back-up power is not a large source of climate pollution.

Figure 23 How Does Community Solar Work?



ECLIPSE and Community Solar

The Erie County Low-Income Program for Sustainable Energy (ECLIPSE) is currently developing an energy program that prioritizes clean energy benefits for low- to moderate-income (LMI) residents. ECLIPSE has the following goals:

- Reduce energy burden for LMI residents
- Increase access to clean, renewable energy
- Promote energy efficiency and weatherization

One of the key program types being investigated by ECLIPSE is an Erie County community solar program focused on LMI residents. **Community solar** is a purchasing program where users, such as individuals, businesses, and nonprofits, subscribe to a shared system of solar panels and receive the benefits of solar power.¹

LMI and minority residents disproportionately face energy burdens. **Energy burden** is the percentage of household income that goes toward energy costs (electricity and home heating), which causes extra financial stress on households.² Residents must make difficult decisions to pay for energy bills or other necessities, such as food and medical care. To lower energy bill costs, residents may reduce energy use, such as not heating their home and use inadequate lighting, which causes unhealthy and unsafe living conditions.

Sources:

1 USDOE, "Breaking Barriers to Community Solar Development with the Community Power Accelerator™ Learning Lab," Energy.gov, February 16, 2023, <https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/articles/breaking-barriers-community-solar-development-community-power-accelerator>; USDOE Solar Energy Technologies Office, "Community Solar Basics," Energy.gov, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://www.energy.gov/eere/solar/community-solar-basics>.

2 American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, "Low-Income, Black, Hispanic, and Native American Households Face High Energy Burdens," ACEEE, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://www.aceee.org/energy-burden>.

3 Erie County, "2023 Budget: Book A Operating Funds," December 1, 2022, https://www3.erie.gov/budget/sites/www3.erie.gov/budget/files/2023-01/adopted_2023_a_book-searchable.pdf.

As we continue to electrify, those that struggle with energy burden will need more relief from assistance programs, such as the Erie County Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). Currently, about 85,000 homes are authorized to receive HEAP benefits in Erie County.³ One method to provide extra assistance to HEAP residents is to implement a community solar program. Some benefits for community solar include:

- Both homeowners and renters can participate
- Bill savings are guaranteed
- No upfront costs
- If you move within your utility area, you can transfer your account
- Opportunity for workforce development
- Environmental and health benefits from burning less fossil fuels
- Opportunity for asset ownership and wealth building for low-income communities

Erie County is in the process of working with community-based organizations and solar developers in the region to build out community solar to encourage enrollment from our HEAP recipients. This will lead to lower energy bills, economic development, and better health for individuals and the environment.

STRATEGY 1: Efficiency & Conservation

Promote the transition to energy efficient and weatherized buildings to reduce GHG emissions, minimize energy costs, and improve health.

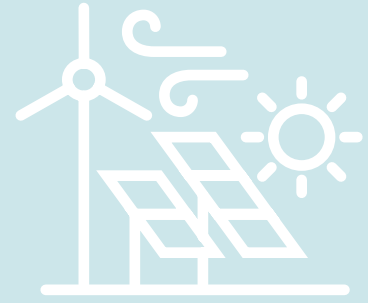
The buildings sector is the largest source of GHG emissions in New York State. Overall, the combustion of fossil fuels in residential buildings was responsible for 11% of statewide GHG emissions in 2019.⁷⁹ Energy conservation and weatherization reduce fossil fuel use, make buildings healthier, and greatly reduce the amount of new clean energy that needs to be generated, keeping energy costs in check. Reductions in energy consumption can be achieved through actions including energy tracking, weatherization, and upgrades to energy efficient technology. An initial step to reducing energy consumption in existing buildings is to begin tracking energy use to better understand consumption patterns while identifying opportunities for energy retrofits such as weatherization and energy-efficiency upgrades. Weatherization includes insulating walls and roofs, improving doors and windows, and using air sealing. Energy efficiency upgrades include energy-certified appliances, high-efficiency light bulbs, and heat pump technologies, which are further detailed in the Electrification & Renewable Energy Strategy.

Local governments have tremendous influence on what Erie County's future building stock will look like. Prioritizing energy efficiency and proper weatherization will reduce GHG emissions and energy bills, while improving occupant health and well-being by increasing resilience to extreme temperatures and decreasing exposure to combustion-related indoor air contaminants that can cause respiratory distress. Furthermore, energy-efficient homes reduce the energy burden on disadvantaged communities by reduc-

ing electric and heating bills.

While new construction offers opportunities to utilize modern technologies and design approaches, the majority of the existing buildings in the Western New York region are aging and will need to be retrofitted to achieve full energy efficiency potential. The Erie County Low-income Program for Sustainable Energy (ECLIPSE) is currently investigating how it can administer clean energy in the region and use the funds brought in from the program to invest in energy efficiency upgrades in disadvantaged communities. Additionally, the newly-formed WNY Clean Energy Hub⁸⁰ provides local staff to connect residents of all income levels with incentive programs during this transition.

To ensure success, Erie County will educate homeowners and multi-family building owners on the value of efficiency improvements and look for ways to incentivize energy benchmarking to better understand consumption patterns and accurately identify opportunities for improvements. The County will look for opportunities to work with landlords to support increasing the efficiency of residences throughout the County while assuring that protections are in place for renters to keep rent affordable after upgrades. Financing weatherization work on homes in disadvantaged communities will be prioritized as well as developing new, affordable, energy efficient apartment buildings. The County will develop and strengthen its programs to assure that building owners are connected to the resources necessary to make energy-saving and cost-saving retrofits.



Clean Energy and Health

Many aspects of public health research highlight how burning fossil fuels negatively affects the health of individuals and communities globally and locally. The transition to clean energy has positive health outcomes. Using cleaner energy in households and communities has been seen as a sustainable way of reducing childhood and adolescent asthma prevalence and preventing certain health conditions (e.g., stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, adult asthma, and lung cancer).¹ A recent study found that 12.7% of current childhood asthma in the United States (18.8% in New York State) is attributed to gas stove use.² Not only will the transition to clean energy benefit the environment, but also society as a whole.

Sources:

1 American Lung Association Editorial Staff, "The Importance of Transitioning to Clean Energy," American Lung Association, August 3, 2020, <https://www.lung.org/blog/transitioning-clean-energy>.

2 Talor Gruenwald et al., "Population Attributable Fraction of Gas Stoves and Childhood Asthma in the United States," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 1 (December 21, 2022): 75–79, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010075>.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD RESILIENCY GOAL: Zero-emission homes and neighborhoods that promote health and protect residents from extreme weather.

STRATEGY 1: Efficiency & Conservation	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
ACTION ITEM 7.1.1:	Engage and alert the public about access to free or low-cost energy assessments offered by New York State.			
	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	PUSH Buffalo, WNY Clean Energy Hub, Heart of the City Neighborhoods (HOCN)
ACTION ITEM 7.1.2:	Leverage CDBG and other resources available to the County and residents to increase support for energy efficiency and weatherization improvements.			
	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)
ACTION ITEM 7.1.3:	Educate homeowners on energy and cost savings from weatherization and upgrades to energy efficient technologies, including heat pumps.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	PUSH Buffalo, WAP, WNY Clean Energy Hub, HOCN, ECEMC
ACTION ITEM 7.1.4:	Work with programs including WAP, HEAP, and Empower to improve resilience and energy efficiency outcomes, including creating incentives for homeowners and renters for energy conservation.			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	DSS, NYSERDA, WAP
ACTION ITEM 7.1.5:	Investigate opportunities to develop a weatherization program through the Erie County ECLIPSE program.			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	DSS, WAP, PUSH Buffalo, HOCN
ACTION ITEM 7.1.6:	Support rules for retailers requiring minimum efficiency standards for appliances and equipment that can be sold in the County.			
	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	State initiatives, environmental advocacy groups
ACTION ITEM 7.1.7:	Support local benchmarking and disclosure programs that help renters and home buyers identify energy-efficient properties.			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	City of Buffalo Rental Registry Program, Office of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), local municipalities

STRATEGY 2: Electrification & Renewable Energy

Transition buildings to affordable zero-emission energy sources by promoting renewable energy and electrification.

A key strategy to achieve zero-emission buildings is electrification paired with renewable energy sources. WNY is already starting strong on this mission since we have the lowest GHG emission rate of any region in the country.⁸¹ Similar to energy transitions in the past, such as the transition from natural gas lighting to electric lighting, as well as the transition from coal to natural gas for building heating, this transition will take decades and must be conducted carefully. Furthermore, like those earlier transitions, this change is supported by a tremendous wave of innovation by engineers and businesses, which is resulting in opportunities to make our homes healthier and more resilient while creating local clean energy jobs. The transition will also require full consideration of costs so that we remain economically competitive as a region while disadvantaged communities are not negatively impacted. In addition, it is important to carefully consider resiliency strategies so that homes and residents are safe during extreme weather events.

In order to encourage a transition to zero-emission buildings, the County will work to increase access to clean, renewable energy sources County-wide by encouraging the development of neighborhood solar installations, wind, geothermal, and energy storage that prioritizes community ownership and investments at the neighborhood level. Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) is also

being investigated by the County, which would allow local governments to provide energy supply services for residents and small businesses. CCA can be an important tool to increase renewable energy uptake while reducing electric costs.

Heating and cooling make up the largest use of energy by homes, and most of the housing units in Erie County are heated with natural gas. High-efficiency heat pump technologies are

To learn more about the different heat pump options to install in your home, please see the Building Performance & Efficiency Education Strategy in the Commercial Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy chapter.

now available that work well in cold weather climates and provide affordable electric heating and cooling. The transition to heat pumps will be challenging and take time, but changing to heat pumps is the most effective way to reduce fossil fuel use in our homes. As the County works to advance this transition, it will need to make sure that heat pump programs are implemented so that household costs do not increase, especially for low- and moderate-income residents. Erie County has partnered with the WNY Clean Energy Hub⁸² to help guide residents as they transition to heat pumps and other clean energy upgrades.

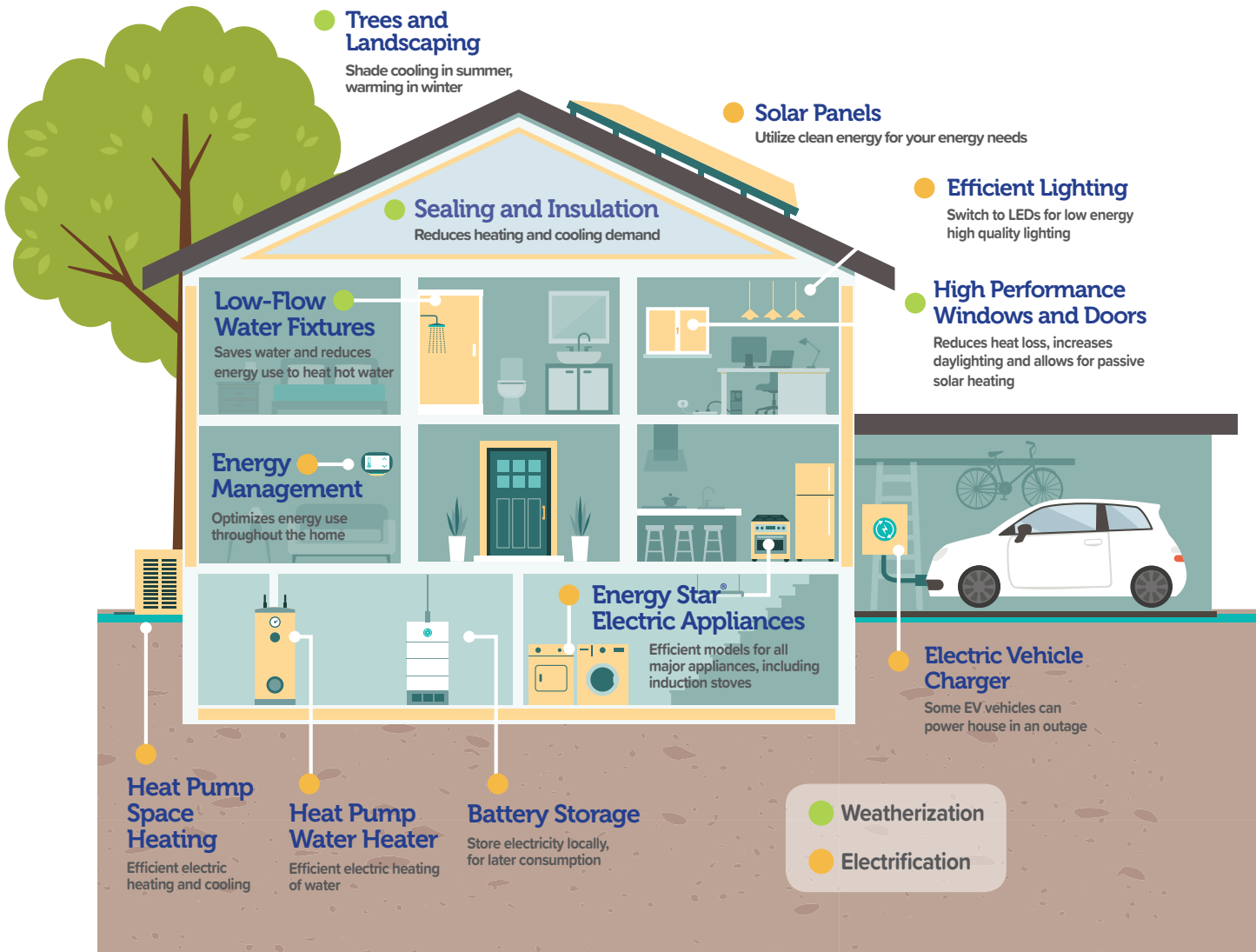
By advocating for additional funding at the state-level, the County will work to improve the access and utilization of clean energy technologies, such as

renewable energy, demand management, and heat pumps, while addressing the upfront cost of this transition. Erie County is located in a storm-prone area, so the County will advocate that the transition to electrification is done in a way that ensures residents are protected during power outages. It is important to have a back-up plan to make sure residents have heat and power during outages, and for the foreseeable future, backup power may need to be fossil-fuel-based. Also, it is important that electric utilities increase the storm-readiness of the electric distribution system, including by looking for opportunities to move more of the electric distribution system underground.

Finally, the switch to electrification and clean, renewable energy will improve health, reduce environmental degradation, and create jobs. Continued investment into fossil fuel energy will lock us into infrastructure that is not emission-free. Newer technology has made electrification more practical, reliable, and cost-effective, and future technological advancement will make electrification even more affordable and effective. This transition will bring job creation, but requires workforce and local supply chain investments to take advantage of this opportunity, which is further discussed in the Economic and Workforce Development chapter.

Figure 24 Clean Energy Options

Clean energy options for your home



**STRATEGY 2:
Electrification
& Renewable
Energy**

	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
ACTION ITEM 7.2.1:	Create a County-wide community energy program that utilizes 100% clean energy that prioritizes disadvantaged community residents as first adopters.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA
ACTION ITEM 7.2.2:	Encourage responsible community solar project development on agricultural land to make clean, renewable energy more accessible to rural communities without losing our most productive farmland.⁸³			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, solar developers, community-based organizations
ACTION ITEM 7.2.3:	Advocate for expanded state utility (NYSERDA, National Grid, NYSEG) programs to help homeowners and residents electrify new and existing buildings (including appliances) and to install residential renewable energy systems.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, utilities
ACTION ITEM 7.2.4:	Look for opportunities for ECLIPSE to subsidize electric heating and cooling technologies and home weatherization, especially for disadvantaged communities.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, utilities
ACTION ITEM 7.2.5:	Provide homeowners and landlords access to affordable capital, such as low-interest loans, to make the switch to fully electric residential solar systems with energy storage.			
	Medium-Term	Indirect	DEP	Private banks and State Green Bank
ACTION ITEM 7.2.6:	Work to assure that energy and housing costs are affordable for the County's low- and moderate-income residents.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSERDA, WAP, DSS
ACTION ITEM 7.2.7:	Support the wide-spread implementation of heat pumps in homes throughout Erie County.			
	Short-Term	Direct/Indirect	DEP	Local municipalities, WNY Clean Energy Hub
ACTION ITEM 7.2.8:	As part of ECLIPSE, investigate creating a land trust to develop neighborhood solar installations and energy storage in vacant lots in urban and suburban neighborhoods.			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	NY Green Bank, Private banks



Photo credit: PUSH Buffalo

PUSH Buffalo West Side Homes Project

PUSH Buffalo West Side Homes is a project that proposes to develop 49 units of affordable rental housing.¹ The project plans to have two rehabilitated and 14 newly-constructed buildings. These units are designed to fit in with the neighborhood's style to retain with the character of the neighborhood. Residents will primarily be from the West Side, but all people are welcome to apply. In addition, the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Company has partnered with Best Self Behavioral Health to designate 30% of the apartments for homeless individuals and families that include an individual with a substance use disorder or serious mental illness.

Construction of West Side

Homes began Spring 2022. The apartments will be all electric (no natural gas will be incorporated), have rooftop solar, and energy efficiency beyond code. One location will be net-zero and

another will meet passive house standards. To learn more about passive design, check out the Commercial Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy Goal.



Photo credit: PUSH Buffalo

Source:

¹ PUSH Buffalo, "West Side Homes," PUSH Buffalo, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.pushbuffalo.org/developments/west-side-homes/>.

STRATEGY 3: Resilience

Minimize exposure and build capacity to address climate driven hazards, such as extreme heat, flooding, and wind.

Erie County faces increasing weather impacts from climate change, and the County government's highest priority is to make sure we protect our residents and their homes from harm. To better assess these threats, the County's DEP conducted the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA), which is described in Chapter 3. The CVA found that extreme heat and storms causing extreme precipitation and wind are key threats related to housing in Erie County. Low- and moderate-income residents, who may live in uninsulated housing without air conditioning or backup power in neighborhoods with less green space and trees, are more at risk from these climate threats. Erie County residents are less accustomed to extreme heat, and as a result, our community is more vulnerable. The CVA also found that the County has gaps in our capacity to respond to these threats, such as an inadequate number of properly equipped cooling centers.

The County will consider climate adaptation and resilience in future planning and development decisions, informed by the CVA and Erie County Hazard Mitigation Plan.⁸⁴ By resilience, we refer to our region's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover

from significant climate-related threats, such as extreme heat. Minimizing exposure includes enacting initiatives that protect residents and County assets from climate impact risks, such as increasing tree canopy and green space along commuting routes, walkways, and bike paths on County roadways. In addition, the County can prioritize green infrastructure that helps improve stormwater management and can help reduce local summer-time temperatures on County-owned lands.⁸⁵ Green infrastructure includes natural and manufactured green space to collect stormwater runoff, improve habitat, and provide shade. The County will need to build capacity by enhancing programs, training staff, and building infrastructure to address inequities and improve public health.

A key strategy for minimizing exposure from the impacts of climate change and building capacity is through the development of resilient housing. This involves designing housing and promoting policy and regulatory standards that incentivize construction of new housing and retrofitting existing housing. These designs will include energy efficiency and conservation methods, renewable energy production, and energy storage.

At the neighborhood level, strategies include implementing more green space, building capacity for renewable energy, and investing in battery backup systems to ensure critical community services are maintained during disaster events with power outages. Fully integrating EVs into the utility grid will eventually allow the vehicle's battery to provide energy to homes and businesses during power outages while helping make communities more resilient.

Every action the County government, businesses, organizations, and residents take now to protect homes and infrastructure should better prepare us all for the future and protect us against climate impacts and their disproportionate burden on disadvantaged communities. The County's work also requires actively promoting and facilitating community engagement to ensure everyone has a voice in the decision-making process. The County must encourage collaboration and coordination of climate resiliency planning with action implementation among all Erie County municipalities in order to streamline costs, integrate systems, and maximize impact.

**STRATEGY 3:
Resilience**

	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
ACTION ITEM 7.3.1:	Support the development of climate-resilient housing (both new housing and retrofitted existing housing) while preventing the displacement of current residents.			
	Medium-Term	Indirect	DEP	Housing organizations, private philanthropy, local municipalities, developers, NYS Homes and Community Renewal (NYSHCR), PPG
ACTION ITEM 7.3.2:	ECLIPSE will investigate creating neighborhood microgrids to increase resilience to disasters while prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged communities throughout the County.			
	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	UB, utilities, local municipalities, developers, neighborhood organizations
ACTION ITEM 7.3.3:	Developing or securing opportunities to support re-treeing, creating green spaces in neighborhoods (including the use of existing vacant lots when possible), and allowing community members to have a say in how green space is used.			
	Short-Term	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	Buffalo Sewer Authority (BSA), neighborhood organizations, local municipalities, PPG
ACTION ITEM 7.3.4:	Work with local governments to ensure that new housing (including public housing) protects residents from climate change threats, such as flooding and extreme heat.			
	Medium-Term	Indirect	DEP	Local municipalities, NYSHCR, developers
ACTION ITEM 7.3.5:	Expand the Erie County Healthy Neighborhoods Program⁸⁶ to include climate resilience aspects.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	ECDOH, local municipalities, private philanthropy, housing organizations, NYSHCR
ACTION ITEM 7.3.6:	Create an education program for residents on extreme weather event preparedness.			
	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	Erie County Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Services, Erie County Sheriff's Office, ECDOH, local municipalities

STRATEGY 4: Smart Growth

To effectively steer development and growth in a planned and coordinated manner using Smart Growth principles to curb urban sprawl, such that all communities become more economically stable and prosperous, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable.

How and where development occurs within Erie County directly affects many facets of our everyday lives from peoples' homes, schools, taxes, place of employment, commute, health, surrounding natural environment, and economic status now and into the future. All of these facets of life are influenced by how well a community plans and invests in its future. The Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth ("Regional Framework") has sought to guide such development in an orderly and coherent manner over the past few decades.⁸⁷ While much progress has been made in mitigating extensive sprawl throughout Western New York, work is still needed on other housing issues, such as affordability and adaptability (e.g., turning whole homes into multi-unit homes so elderly residents can age in place). The affordability crisis, where American resi-

dents are paying more than 30% of their gross income for rent or mortgage and utilities, continues to hinder residents locally and nationally.⁸⁸ Affordability gaps exacerbate climate mitigation efforts by constraining the ability of disadvantaged communities to make needed improvements that adapt to climate change and increase resiliency in the face of climate change impacts.

In seeking to address issues such as housing affordability, the County plays a unique role in that it has an overarching influence 44 municipalities located within its boundaries. While the County does not control most development, it can guide and shape the direction of how the Western New York region grows through investments in infrastructure and housing, the General Municipal Law §239-M/Integrated Review Process, training opportunities, and support of

municipal planning.

Erie County will continue to focus on creating more compact, walkable, and vibrant neighborhoods in the region's urban and developing areas. The County will encourage new housing development in areas that have existing infrastructure, transit systems, employment, and amenities, while taking into consideration both affordable and market-rate housing options. Existing programs within the County that provide housing rehabilitation assistance will continue to be prioritized, while also seeking out additional funds for climate resilience and mitigation measures, such as weatherization and electrification. Also, most importantly, the County will continue to take the lead in addressing climate change for our region via the action items contained within this section and the broader Plan.



The Village of Lancaster saw its first new development in 60 years due to the West Main Street Extension Project. "Not only retail, but people want to live here now, too," says Mayor Lynne Ruda. "The infrastructure completely transformed the downtown core."

Housing Affordability

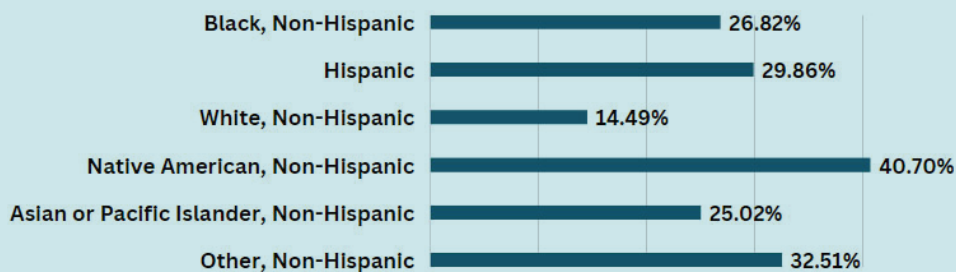
Housing affordability is when housing costs (including energy costs) do not exceed 30% of a household's gross income. A household is considered “cost-burdened” if they are paying more than 30% of their gross income toward housing, and “severely cost-burdened” if they are paying more than 50% of their gross income toward housing. Nearly one in every four renter households in Buffalo pay at least half of their household income toward housing costs, with households of color disproportionately impacted. Severely cost-burdened households face incredible strain with meeting other daily necessities, such as purchasing food and medicine. They are also the most vulnerable and unstable, facing ever-present threats of eviction and homelessness. Oftentimes, these households are forced to resort to substandard, unsafe, and inadequate housing because of lack of affordable alternatives. Renewable energy can create cost savings, which is important to achieve housing affordability.¹

Source:

¹ Sarah Wooton, “Rental Housing Costs in Buffalo” (Partnership for the Public Good, September 2018), https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/housing_neighborhoods/general/rentalhousingcostsinbuffalo.pdf.

Figure 25 Percent of Households in Buffalo, NY with Severe Housing Burden

Percent Households in Buffalo NY with Severe Housing Burden (spending more than 50% of income on housing costs) by Race and Ethnicity



Note: “Race and ethnicity” is determined by the Head of Household’s race and ethnicity.

Sarah Wooton, Percent Household in Buffalo NY with Severe Housing Burden, 2023, graph. Revised by Sandra Notaro.

Data source: US Housing and Urban Development Department, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Map Tool, <https://egis.hud.gov/affht/#>

Urban Sprawl

The dependence on the automobile has led to a cycle of relying on independent modes of transportation. The automobile was once a status symbol and now has become a necessity for most people. As a result, communities throughout Erie County are characterized by low density housing, shops, and offices surrounded by massive parking lots, roads, and highways that are unsafe for pedestrians, and discontinuous streets (e.g., cul-de-sacs). Consequently, walking and bicycling are less safe and more difficult means of transportation.

Sprawl has some of the following negative effects on society:

- **Increases reliance on single-occupancy vehicles:** Greenhouse gas reduction becomes more difficult as we drive more and commute longer.
- **Contributes to health issues:** Due to the lack of active transportation options, health issues, such as obesity, arise.

- **Leads to inefficient use of our land:** Growing less food locally from loss of productive farmland due to development and loss of greenery.
- **Disadvantages everyone:** It is harder to access shops and vital services without a private vehicle, especially for the poor, senior citizens, and people with disabilities.¹

In addition, having sprawl without growth has left many houses vacant, abandoned, and demolished as suburban development creeps into rural areas, causing farms to go out of business. As a result, older housing that is closer to cities is losing housing value.²

Sources:

¹ UBRI, “One Region Forward: A Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara,” February 2015, http://bap-home.net/solarize/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2017/05/1RF_A-New-Way-To-Plan-For-Buffalo-Niagara_FinalPlan_reduced.pdf

² UBRI.

**STRATEGY 4:
Smart
Growth**

HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
ACTION ITEM 7.4.1: Direct investment and new housing development to areas served by existing utility infrastructure and near public transportation, employment, and community services. Discourage sewer and water extensions in rural and/or developing areas, as per the Regional Framework.			
Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP; DSM	NFTA, GBNRTC, NYSHCR, local municipalities, (United States) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant programs
ACTION ITEM 7.4.2: Expand support for municipal comprehensive plan updates. Encourage increased densities and compact design, “live where you work” concepts, affordable housing, mixed-use development, multi-family housing, and migrant farmworker housing.			
Short-Term/ Medium-Term	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	Local municipalities, New York State Consolidated Funding Application (NYS CFA); HUD CDBG grant, New York State Department of State (NYSDOS)
ACTION ITEM 7.4.3: Work with local governments on obtaining and implementing smart growth planning and climate-mitigating grants, especially the County’s small municipalities with limited capacities.			
Short-Term/ Medium-Term/ Long-Term	Direct	DEP	NYSDOS DRI grants, UBRI, NYSERDA, HUD CDBG grant
ACTION ITEM 7.4.4: Fund additional Erie County CDBG Smart Growth Projects.			
Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NYS CFA, HUD CDBG grant
ACTION ITEM 7.4.5: Consider expanding the CDBG County Housing Rehab Program to include climate resiliency improvements.			
Short-Term/ Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	HUD CDBG & HOME grants, NYSERDA
ACTION ITEM 7.4.6: Explore the recreation of a Regional Planning Board, which would help coordinate smart growth initiatives throughout the County.			
Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	Niagara County, local municipalities, University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI)
ACTION ITEM 7.4.7: Update the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth.			
Short-Term	Direct	DEP	Niagara County, UBRI, GBNRTC

County Housing Rehab Program

“The Erie County Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program¹ assists owner-occupied one- to two-family households with essential repairs. Funded through CDBG and HOME Investment Partnership Program monies, the program aims to eliminate substandard living conditions and prolong the useful life of the housing stock occupied by low- and moderate-income households. Assistance is provided in the form of repayable loans of up to \$15,000 that are issued at a 0% fixed interest rate.”²

Repairs typically include roofing, energy conservation, siding repair and/or replacement, and upgrading mechanical systems, such as plumbing, heating, and electrical systems.³

Sources and Notes:

1 To see if your household qualifies for the Erie County Rehabilitation Loan Program, go to Erie County's website at <https://www2.erie.gov/exec/index.php?q=press/erie-county-housing-rehabilitation-loan-program-helps-homeowners-spruce-countywide>

To access the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program flyer, go to https://www3.erie.gov/environment/sites/www3.erie.gov/environment/files/2022-07/housing_rehabilitation_loan_program_6-15-2022.pdf

2 Erie County DEP, “Housing Programs,” Erie County, April 28, 2023, <https://www3.erie.gov/environment/housing-programs>.

3 Erie County, “Erie County Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program Helps Homeowners Spruce Up Countywide,” Erie County, December 9, 2022, <https://www2.erie.gov/exec/index.php?q=press/erie-county-housing-rehabilitation-loan-program-helps-homeowners-spruce-countywide>

Further Reading

Smart Growth Strategy

10 Principles of Smart Growth –

Learn more on how smart growth is helping every town and city become a more economically prosperous, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable place to live, helping everyone flourish.

<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-is-smart-growth/>

General Municipal Law §239-M/Integrated Review Process – NYS General Municipal Law, Sections 239-l, m and n, provide for the referral and coordination of certain Town, City, and/or Village proposed land use actions that may have more of a regional or inter-community impact. This law requires local municipalities to refer actions that meet a certain threshold to the County Planning Department for review and comment.

<https://www3.erie.gov/environment/municipal-referrals>

Resilience Strategy

Electrified Homes in Emergencies –

Learn more about resilience to disasters as homes are transitioning to electric power.

<https://climate.mit.edu/ask-mit/will-upgrading-our-homes-run-entirely-electricity-make-us-more-vulnerable-blackouts>

FOOTNOTES: Housing and Neighborhood Resiliency

74 To learn how to save money during this electrification transition, go to Rewiring America's savings calculator at <https://www.rewiringamerica.org/app/ira-calculator>

75 To learn how heat pumps can be effective in cold climates, check out the Heat Pumps call-out for the Building Performance & Efficiency Education Strategy in the Commercial Energy chapter

76 To learn more about HEAP, go to Erie County's website at <https://www3.erie.gov/heap/>

77 To learn more about CDBG, go to Erie County's website at <https://www3.erie.gov/economicdevelopment/community-development-block-grant-programs>

78 To learn more about Regional Clean Energy Hubs in New York State, go to NYSERDA's website at <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Regional-Clean-Energy-Hubs/Find-Your-Clean-Energy-Hub-Today>

79 NYSDEC, “2022 Statewide GHG Emissions Report,” 2022, https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/ghgsumrpt22.pdf.

80 To learn more about Regional Clean Energy Hubs in New York State, go to NYSERDA's website at <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Regional-Clean-Energy-Hubs/Find-Your-Clean-Energy-Hub-Today>

81 USEPA, “Power Profiler,” Data and Tools, United States Environmental Protection Agency, June 5, 2023, <https://www.epa.gov/egrid/power-profiler>.

82 To learn more about Regional Clean Energy Hubs in New York State, go to NYSERDA's website at <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Regional-Clean-Energy-Hubs/Find-Your-Clean-Energy-Hub-Today>

83 See the Balancing Agriculture and Development call-out in the Promote & Protect Agriculture Strategy in the Agriculture and Food Systems chapter.

84 To access the CVA, go to Erie County's Climate Action website at <https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/climate-vulnerability-assessment>

To access the Erie County Hazard Mitigation Plan, go to https://www3.erie.gov/dhses/sites/www3.erie.gov/dhses/files/2022-04/hazmit_2022_vol1.pdf

85 To learn more about green infrastructure, see the What are Nature-based Solutions call-out in the Goal for the Nature-based Solutions chapter.

86 To learn more about the Healthy Neighborhoods Program, go to Erie County's website at <https://www3.erie.gov/envhealth/healthy-neighborhoods-program-hnp>

87 To access the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth, go to Erie County's website at <https://www4.erie.gov/regionalframework/framework-regional-growth-final-plan>

88 Molly Cromwell, “Renters More Likely Than Homeowners to Spend More Than 30% of Income on Housing in Almost All Counties,” US Census Bureau, December 8, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/housing-costs-burden.html>.