



Erie County Environmental Management Council



Times Beach Nature Preserve

2016 Annual Recommendations Report

July 2016

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Executive Summary

The Erie County Environmental Management Council's (EMC) Annual Recommendation Report provides information for strategic planning and priority setting for the allocation of resources to address environmental issues facing Erie County. The report is divided into ten sections: Air Quality, Climate Change, Contaminated Sites and Brownfields, Ecosystem Health, Energy, Land Use, Solid Waste Management, Toxic Hazards, Transportation, and Water Quality.

Whereas there are several recommendations under each of the above sections, below are the key recommendations of the Council. They are not in any particular order except to group them in similar or related areas.

Solid Waste, Contaminated Sites/ Brownfields, and Toxic Hazards:

- **Work with municipalities within the County to address their need for more household hazardous waste collections, as well as assist them with the challenge of electronic waste.** The County should pursue grant funding for a regional study to look at how to better address these issues, which are a burden to municipalities and can result in pollution if not properly managed. The two or three household hazardous waste events annually hosted by the County and its partners are important, but they are not sufficient. Residents need a more consistent and accessible program.
- **Establish a Regional Compost Facility.** Efforts to establish a regional compost facility in the Town of Tonawanda on an existing brownfield should be made a priority to meet the yard waste management needs of several municipalities in Erie County and the surrounding region.
- **Continue to expand and support programs that work to create lead-safe homes in Erie County.** Lead contamination in homes is a toxic hazard which can create long term problems. The County should look to find additional grant funding which could provide lead safe certification and employment to veterans.
- **Continue to monitor contaminated sites and advocate for Brownfield clean-up funding.**

Energy, Air Quality and Climate Change:

- **Complete an energy policy and a public education component to the County energy office's work.** The County has accomplished significant energy savings through various conservation projects. By posting the energy policy and energy projects on the County web site, the public can learn about the efforts the County is making to save taxpayers' dollars, as well as protect the environment.
- **Continue to pursue renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County, as well as alternative fuels for the County Fleet.** By decreasing the use of fossil fuels air quality is improved through decreased emissions.
- **Complete the County's Greenhouse Gas Inventory.** The EMC commends the County Executive for signing the Climate Smart Communities pledge and securing funding to conduct a Greenhouse Gas Inventory.
- **Continue to seek funding for proactive planning to adapt to climate change.** This work should be coordinated across the County including emergency response agencies, as their work is influenced due to increased flooding and other more intense weather events.

Executive Summary

- **Take the steps to make PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing available to commercial and multi-family residences in Erie County.** PACE is an innovative way for property owners to pay for energy efficiency upgrades, on-site renewable energy projects, and water conservation measures. This national initiative has been used for decades in other parts of the country and has features that can solve barriers to the adoption of energy efficiency measures.

Ecosystem Health, Land Use

Transportation & Water Quality:

- **Pursue additional funding for habitat work at the Natural Habitat Pocket Park sites along the Buffalo River.** This work, combined with the efforts of Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, the Valley Community Association, and the Seneca-Babcock Community Association, is bringing the Buffalo River closer to being delisted as a United States Environmental Protection Agency “Area of Concern.”
 - **Continue to implement green infrastructure.** The New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation has grants to fund 90% of green infrastructure projects, such as pervious pavement parking lots, cisterns, and green roofs. The County should continue to pursue this funding for such projects, as the grants save taxpayer money by receiving 90% reimbursement for projects which may have been done anyhow and/or that will create multiple benefits.
 - **Work with local partners and agencies to reduce plastic pollution, which threatens our wildlife.** The County was a leader in the issue of microbeads. Other sources of plastic, such as single-use bag litter, are also a threat to wildlife in Lake Erie. The County should work with local partners to examine ways to reduce this issue of concern.
- **Adopt a native plant policy for County property.** Native plants have many advantages: they require less water and pesticides, as well as provide habitat for important species and pollinators within the ecosystem. The County should work with local partners to create a policy and a plant list.
 - **Find ways to invest more in County Parks.** The EMC applauds the County Executive for proposing and the County Legislature for approving the Park Ranger positions. More resources are still needed for this community asset. The soon to be updated parks master plan will illuminate priorities for the parks and the EMC commends County leadership for moving this forward. The EMC recommends that this planning document look at ways to bring outside resources into the County including grants and volunteers. In particular the EMC suggests that the County invest in grant writing/management for the Department, which could leverage a significant amount of additional resources for the Parks.
 - **Adopt a County Complete Streets Policy.** By adopting a Complete Streets policy, the County will design and operate transportation projects to enable safe access for all users including pedestrians and bicyclists. Special attention is needed to evaluate the adequacy and safety of road shoulders, as well as create signage about sharing the road.

The EMC commends County leaders for recognizing the importance of environmental protection and supporting many environmental initiatives. Indeed, progress had been made on the majority of the EMC’s 2015 recommendations.

Introduction

The Erie County Environmental Management Council (EMC) was established in the Erie County Charter in 1971 under Article 47 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law. Members of the Council represent many of the cities, towns and villages within Erie County, as well as 12 at-large members from throughout the County.

The EMC's mission is twofold:

- 1) Advise county government on local environmental concerns; and
- 2) Provide a liaison between the community and county government.

The EMC's Annual Recommendation Report provides information for strategic planning and priority setting for the allocation of resources to address environmental issues facing Erie County. The report is divided into ten sections: Air Quality, Climate Change, Contaminated Sites and Brownfields, Ecosystem Health, Energy, Land Use, Solid Waste Management, Toxic Hazards, Transportation, and Water Quality.

To prepare this report, the EMC used each monthly meeting to listen to and engage with County personnel, concentrating on the issues addressed in the sections above. From these conversations, recommendations were developed.

It is in our best interest that government leadership and the public in Erie County have convenient access to additional information in order to understand the issues and recommendations in this report. The EMC is working to make this report a "living" document by including links to websites, which are situated within the text about the particular issue being addressed. A person using this document electronically can simply click on the links in the report to access additional information.

It is important to note that many of the EMC's 2015 Recommendations have been acted on; the EMC congratulates County leadership and staff for their work in improving the environmental quality of Erie County. In particular the EMC wants to recognize the County's work on:

- Banning microbeads
- Creating an internal Green Team and hiring Sustainability Coordinator
- Initiating a Greenhouse Gas Inventory
- Pursuing renewable energy installation on county property
- Proposing the pursuit of a single use bag ban

Over the past year, the EMC has also completed the second year of its Environmental Excellence Awards. This program was designed to bring attention to municipal and not-for profit projects with a positive environmental impact. There were 5 awardees this year: Village of Depew; Village of Hamburg; Town of Tonawanda; Tiff Nature Preserve; and the Urban Habitat Project at the Central Terminal. The EMC is planning to continue this award program next year.

The EMC looks forward to working with County staff and leadership to support and implement the 2016 recommendations.

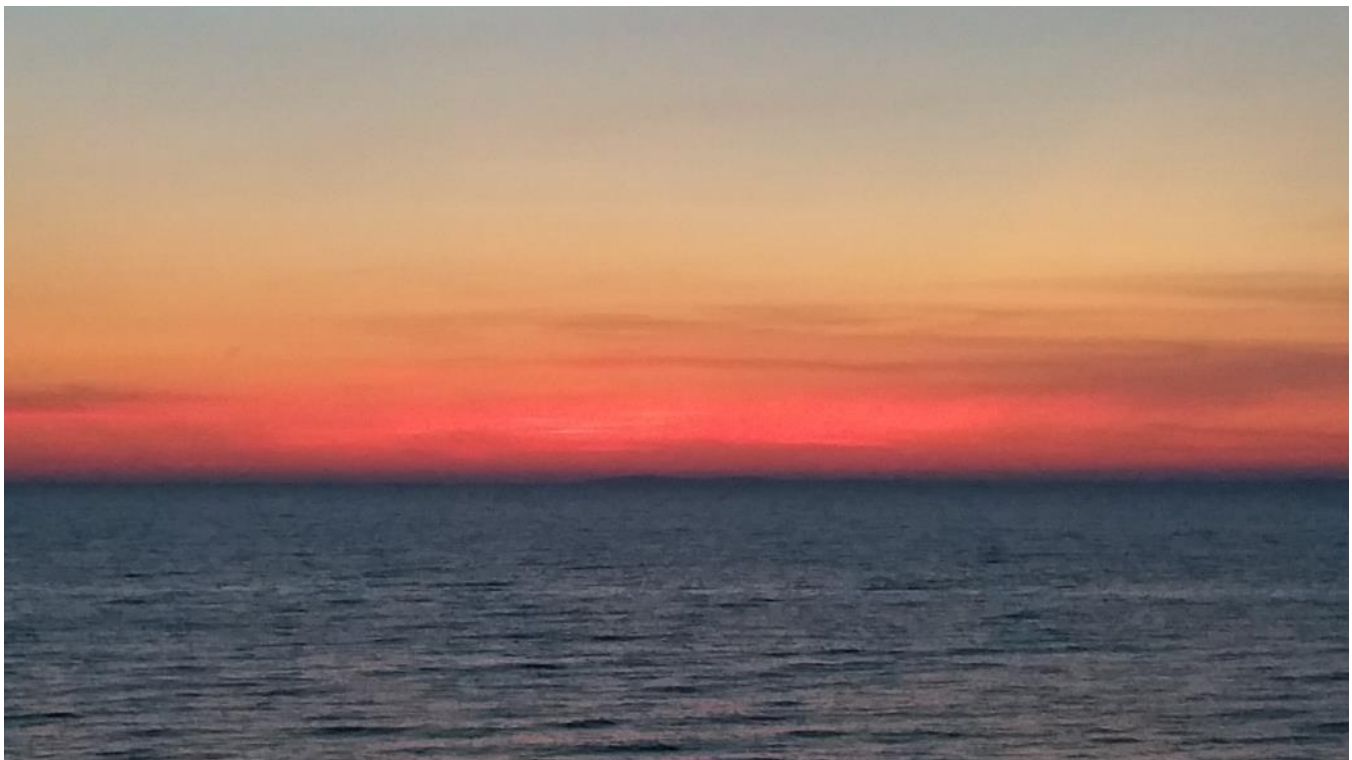
Air Quality

Erie County does not play a role in the enforcement of air quality issues as these matters are regulated by state and federal agencies. However, the EMC recommends that the County increase public awareness about outdoor air quality issues and contribute to a reduction in air pollution in the following ways:

- **Continue to pursue opportunities to conduct public outreach to improve air quality.** This effort could focus on issues such as the health and safety concerns, as well as restrictions, associated with outdoor burning and/or transportation issues, such as reducing the single occupancy vehicles through commuting programs.
- **Continue to support environmental non-profit organizations, such as the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York (CACWNY), <http://www.cacwny.org/> that are dedicated to reducing air pollution.**

The EMC commends the County for its support of this work in the past.

- **Complete the County's Greenhouse Gas Inventory.** The EMC commends the County Executive for starting its greenhouse gas inventory and looks forward to viewing the final product.
- **Continue to pursue renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County, as well as alternative fuels for the County Fleet.** By decreasing the use of fossil fuels air quality is improved through decreased emissions.
- **Support Smart Growth/Main Street projects which will increase walkability.** Like the recommendation above, walkability decreases driving which in turn decreases air pollution.



Lake Erie Sunset

Climate Change

Climate Change could have devastating impacts on the region especially as it relates to more intense weather events, extreme changes in lake levels, increased appearance of invasive species, altered growing cycles, and increased displacement of populations. This is particularly due to either rising sea levels or the ability to obtain adequate drinking/bathing water, and changes in distribution of vector borne diseases. It is already apparent that Erie County is experiencing an increased frequency of more intense storms in all seasons - more precipitation and stormwater runoff in a shorter period of time. These extreme weather events are increasing occurrences of flooding, severe erosion, sedimentation, and debris accumulation in stream corridors which is resulting in increasing costs for repair, remediation and replacement of public and private infrastructure.

The EMC congratulates the County on being a Climate Smart Community <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html>. Erie County is in the process of completing a greenhouse gas inventory as part of this New York State program. Since joining the program, New York State has added additional requirements in order to become a Certified Climate Smart Community. The EMC recommends that the County take these steps to become a certified Climate Smart Community.



Polar Bear Buffalo Zoo

The EMC also recommends that the County take several other actions to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, as well as prepare for adaptation to the impacts of Climate Change:

- **Continue to seek funding for proactive planning to adapt to climate change.** This work should be coordinated across the County including emergency response agencies and municipalities within the County, as their work is influenced due to increased flooding and other more intense weather events.
- **Finalize the greenhouse gas inventory associated with the Climate Smart Communities pledge** and then work to implement projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Assist municipalities within the County to become Climate Smart Communities.** This may involve assisting them with their greenhouse gas inventories, or identifying funding to assist them with some of the above projects required to become Certified Climate Smart Communities.
- **Continue to support Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District www.ecswcd.org in its delivery of agricultural programs to assist Erie County farms respond to Climate Change.** ECSWCD is working with farmers on this issue through a Climate Resilient Farming Program provided by New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee which allows New York Soil and Water Conservation Districts to work with farmers on greenhouse gas mitigation and climate resiliency efforts in the areas of manure storage cover and flare systems; on-farm riparian, floodplain and upland water management systems; and soil health systems.

Contaminated Sites and Brownfields

Erie County has been a leader in addressing the issue of brownfields, contaminated or potentially contaminated sites where chemical or other hazardous materials are concentrated to such an extent that the environment and human health are, or could be, impacted. The Erie County Department of Environment and Planning has been successful in working with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Erie County Industrial Development Agency and local municipalities in remediating 14 contaminated sites since the program inception in the mid-1990s. Despite the success, funding for this program at the State level needs to be secured and increased to continue this important work. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Advocate for continued funding of the New York State Department of State Brownfield Opportunity Area Program** <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8447.html>, which provides local governments the necessary funding and technical support to undertake market studies and detailed planning to address economic redevelopment of brownfields and adjacent neighborhoods on an area-wide basis. In 2015 only \$2,000,000 was dedicated to this program. More funding is needed to do this important work.
- **Continue to advocate for reestablishing/refinancing the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Environmental Restoration Program (ERP)** <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8444.html>, which provides local governments the necessary matching funding to undertake the assessment, investigation and remediation of brownfield properties.
- **Monitor and advocate for:**
 - **Full State and Federal funding for the Phase 1 remedial activities at the West Valley Demonstration Project**, and ultimately, complete removal of site radioactive waste;
 - **Cleanup of radioactive waste contaminated Formerly Utilized Remedial Action Plan (FUSRAP)** <http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/FUSRAP.aspx> sites by the US Army Corps of Engineers; and
 - **Remediation of Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)** <https://www.epa.gov/rcra>, contaminated areas and redevelopment of the Bethlehem Steel site.



Polymer Applications Remediated Brownfield

Ecosystem Health

Ecosystem Health refers to the well-being of our living environment, which includes plants and animals. Society is dependent on a healthy ecosystem as it produces the clean air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the soil we stand on. Thus, this section could include many issues which threaten the ecosystem, such as pollution and invasive species. In fact, Erie County has been doing excellent work protecting our ecosystem. For example, last year the County provided leadership in banning microbeads, which led to a ban at the federal level. The County is also working on habitat restoration projects along the Buffalo River, tree inventories in County Parks, stormwater pollution prevention education, Emerald Ash Borer outreach and education, and being an in-kind sponsor for the recent Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper “Western New York Guide to Native Plants for your Garden,” <http://bnriverkeeper.org/nativeplantguide/>. The Erie County EMC recommends that the County continue that good work and also:

- **Work with local partners and agencies to further reduce plastic pollution in our waterways, which threatens our wildlife.** The County has addressed microbeads, but other sources of plastic, such as **single-use bag litter**, are also a threat to wildlife in Lake Erie. The County should fund an environmental impact study to identify the way to most effectively prevent this type of pollution, as well as work with partners to educate the public on the importance of reusable bags and proper recycling.
- **Adopt a native plant policy for County property.** Native plants have many advantages: they require less water and pesticides, as well as provide habitat for important species within the ecosystem. The County should work with local partners to create a policy and a plant list.

- **Pursue additional funding for habitat work at the Natural Habitat Pocket Park sites along the Buffalo River.** This work, combined with the efforts of Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, the Valley Community Association, and the Seneca-Babcock Community Association, is bringing the Buffalo River closer to being delisted as a United States Environmental Protection Agency “Area of Concern.”
- **Support an educational campaign for municipalities regarding lawn chemicals and fertilizers** that informs on the risks of use/overuse of these chemicals including the connection to algal blooms.
- **Seek additional funding through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to conduct tree inventories at more County Parks**, as it has for Akron Falls, Como Park, Ellicott Creek, and Elma Meadows.
- **Seek grant funding for tree replacement.**
- **Continue the eradication of giant hogweed on any County property.** The EMC commends the County for working with the NYSDEC to remove this noxious weed, <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html>.



Times Beach Pollinator Garden

Energy

The EMC would like to congratulate County Executive Poloncarz for his leadership on, and the County Legislature's support of, energy conservation and renewable energy projects. The County has been working on an energy plan, as well as energy conservation and renewable energy projects. This work has been coordinated by the Energy Director, whose position the County Executive championed and the County Legislature approved. This position is an excellent investment and has already resulted in energy savings. The result of this work also reduces the County's greenhouse gas emissions. There is much that the County can do to build upon this investment. The EMC recommends that the County :

- **Finalize the County energy plan and do some public education about it.** This document should create the framework for furthering work within county facilities operations as well as how to lead broader community sustainability efforts. The County has accomplished significant energy savings through various conservation projects. By posting the energy policy, benchmarking results and energy projects on the County web site, the County could leverage a "lead by example" approach that demonstrates its commitment to save taxpayers' dollars, protect the environment, and mitigate the impacts of climate change among vulnerable populations.
- **Participate in the Public Service Commission's REV Proceedings.** The REV (Reforming the Energy Vision, <https://www.ny.gov/programs/reforming-energy-vision-rev>) is a redesign of the State's energy system that presents an unparalleled opportunity for Erie County, in cooperation with other municipalities, to play a vital role in localizing the benefits of a clean energy economy. Erie County should play an active role in the REV and related proceedings - leading the promotion of increased resiliency, greater integration of renewable energy resources, greatly increased access to energy efficiency and a more affordable energy system.
- **Continue to promote the use of renewable energy installations on County property, as well as examine energy storage projects.** Recent policies like Community Shared Solar, http://apps3.eere.energy.gov/greenpower/community_development/community_solar_faq.html, allow County sponsored renewable energy investments to support recommendations within the Greener Cleaner Communities Western New York Sustainability Plan funded by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, <http://www.nyserda.ny.gov/Statewide-Initiatives/Cleaner-Greener-Communities.aspx>, while increasing access to clean energy for those who have been unable to participate in the national renewable energy bonanza.
- **Take the steps to make PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy, <http://www.pacenation.us/about-pace/>) financing available to commercial and multi-family residences in Erie County.** PACE is an innovative way for property owners to pay for energy efficiency upgrades, on-site renewable energy projects, and water conservation measures. This national initiative has been used for decades in other parts of the country and has features that can solve barriers to the adoption of energy efficiency measures.
- **Continue to work with community partners to help residents access resources for energy conservation projects** and seek ways to help fund projects for those residents that cannot qualify for existing loan programs.



Solar Strand at SUNY at Buffalo

Land Use

The decisions a community makes regarding land use impacts quality of life, water quality, air quality, and ecosystem health. Although New York State is a home rule state, meaning municipalities have control over land use decisions, there are still several ways the County can have a significant impact on land use. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Find ways to invest more in County Parks.** The EMC applauds the County Executive for proposing and the County Legislature for approving the Park Ranger positions. More resources are still needed for this community asset. The soon to be updated parks master plan will illuminate priorities for the parks and the EMC commends County leadership for moving this forward. The EMC recommends that this planning document look at ways to bring outside resources into the County including grants and volunteers. In particular the EMC suggests that the County invest in grant writing/management for the Department, which could leverage a significant amount of additional resources for the Parks.
- **Partner with existing efforts to minimize destruction of plantings by browsing animals.** This is especially important for the work for the County's habitat restoration work at its natural habitat pocket parks along the Buffalo River and at Times Beach.
- **Continue to support Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District** in its delivery of programs and technical assistance for the management of riparian (streamside) buffer zones which are critical management areas for erosion control and floodplain protection.

- **Encourage all economic development efforts in areas with existing infrastructure to discourage sprawl.** Despite municipal home rule, the County should, when it can, encourage development that minimizes increases in vehicle miles traveled that result in increased air pollution and creates a tax burden by creating more infrastructure to maintain.
- **Identify alternatives to the creation, expansion, and public acquisition of new roads** created in suburban communities. Instead of adding to a road network that is already difficult and costly to maintain, or automatically taking over care and maintenance of new developer-built roads, help suburban communities identify alternatives to road creation or expansion that are used in other counties or states.



Urban Habitat Project at Central Terminal

Solid Waste Management

The EMC applauds Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz for his addition of a Solid Waste/Recycling Coordinator for County operations, as well as the County Legislature for their approval of this position. Operations of the County's size require a point person for their solid waste and recycling. The need for such a position was highlighted in a recent waste audit. In addition Erie County is also pursuing New York State funding for a Recycling Coordinator to assist municipalities. The Recycling Coordinator plays a critical role in education about waste reduction and recycling, while working with both the solid waste management boards as well as the public. The work done by these positions could be enhanced through some County-wide initiatives. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Reduce single-use bag litter in the County.** The EMC commends the County Executive for recognizing the need to reduce this source of litter which clogs storm drains, harms wildlife, drains municipal resources to clean up, and impacts property values. Several steps can be taken to address this issue.
 - **The EMC urges the County Legislature to fund an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) to examine the best way to reduce this source of litter.** An EIS will examine the impacts of a law and other possible laws or actions. It will also offer an open process for the public to comment on this issue. Other communities across the Country and in our state have taken action on this matter and Erie County should follow suit and do its part to protect our resources.
 - **Educate the public about reducing waste by bringing reusable bags to the store.**
- **Consider a recycling program in the County Parks.** The new County Solid Waste/Recycling Coordinator should create a committee with the Parks Department to assess the need for a recycling program for County Parks.
- **Ban polystyrene foam, often referred to as Styrofoam, food containers.** Many areas of the country, including Albany County, have banned these containers for environmental reasons; the containers take many years to break down and disperse easily in the wind. These communities have also cited health concerns associated with the containers.
- **Consider a deconstruction policy for its internal projects.** Instead of demolishing buildings and landfilling the waste, the County should work to make sure these building materials are recycled.
- **Update NYSDEC-mandated Solid Waste Management Plans.** The Solid Waste Management Plans (SWMPs) for each of the two Solid Waste Management Boards in Erie County are in need of updating. The Plans will outline goals and objectives for solid waste reduction, recycling sustainability and problem-waste-stream management for the next 10 to 15 year period.
- **Establish a Regional Compost Facility.** Efforts to establish a regional compost facility in the Town of Tonawanda on an existing brownfield should be made a priority to meet the yard waste management needs of several municipalities in Erie County and the surrounding region.



*Terra - A Polar Bear Sculpture at the Buffalo Zoo
Made of 3,000 Plastic Bags.*

Toxic Hazards

The County's Household Hazardous Waste program holds two to three collection events every year. This program works to remove a significant amount of hazardous and toxic products that might otherwise go into the solid waste stream, to a sewage treatment plant, or stay for years within households causing problems if there is a flood or fire. At the 2016 May and June household hazardous waste events, more than 1,900 households were serviced and the following items were collected: 25,763 gallons of paint; 5,200 lbs. of aerosol products; 2,110 gallons of waste oil; 318 gallons of gas and 4,150 lbs. of pesticides.

Funding for this program has been reduced over the years, but demand has increased. Very often, due to a death in the family or the sale of a home, the spring events do not meet the needs of County residents. In addition, the wait times at these events has discouraged some residents from participating. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Work with municipalities within the County to address their need for more household hazardous waste collections, as well as assist them with the challenge of electronic waste.** The County should pursue grant funding for a regional study to look at how to better address these issues which are a burden to municipalities and can result in pollution if not properly managed. The two or three household hazardous waste events annually hosted by the County and its partners are important, but they are not sufficient. Residents need a more consistent and accessible program.
- **Pursue funding to create an education campaign, tied to the HHW program, to educate consumers on alternatives to hazardous products for their home and garden use.** Less purchasing of these chemicals would reduce the need for County collection events and lower the likelihood that these chemicals could contaminate our water and/or air.

- **Continue to expand and support programs that work to create lead-safe homes in Erie County.** Lead contamination in homes is a toxic hazard which can create long term problems. The County should look to find additional grant funding which could provide lead-safe certification and employment to veterans.
- **Consider initiating programs that safeguard the public from toxic emissions, such as:**
 - Use Toxics Release Inventory (TRI, <https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program>) data to publish an inventory of toxic hazards and threats to public health;
 - Investigate safe alternatives to current chemical use;
 - Identify at-risk communities;
 - Develop an awards program for businesses that significantly reduce/eliminate toxic emissions; and/or
 - Develop an environmental justice Initiative.



Household Hazardous Waste at an Erie County Collection Event

Transportation

Transportation conveys substantial socioeconomic benefits, but at the same time impacts environmental systems. Plans should be developed within the county to ensure a policy and design that addresses both. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Adopt a County Complete Streets Policy.** <https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, the County will design and operate transportation projects to enable safe access for all users including pedestrians and bicyclists. Special attention is needed to evaluate the adequacy and safety of road shoulders, as well as create signage about sharing the road.
- **Consider a program to incentivize the use of public transportation** for County employees.
- **Become a certified bike friendly employer.** Certification involves creating a work environment which supports employees who ride their bikes to work through secure storage and other means. The County should work with GObike Buffalo to attain this certification.
- **Seek funding and partnerships to develop a County transportation demand management plan.** Along with this plan specific performance measures should be adopted that measure the impact including, but not limited to:
 - Increase in the share of bicycles, pedestrians and transit users
 - Crash data -- Identify high risk areas using crash occurrence data.
 - Use of new projects by mode
 - Compliments and Complaints
 - Linear feet of pedestrian accommodations built
- Number of ADA accommodations built
- Miles of bike lanes/trails built or striped
- Number of transit accessibility accommodations built
- Number of street trees planted
- Number of building permits issued along new complete street
- **Continue to work with community partners to decrease the environmental risks, such as potential watershed impacts, and spill response capabilities for the exponential increase of Bakken oil shipments.** It is vital that our communities are prepared to respond to the risks associated with the transport of these oil shipments through our communities along the CSX and Norfolk Southern Railroad corridors.
- **Seek funding and partnership opportunities for alternative fuel vehicles for the County fleet, including installing electric vehicle charging stations on County property.** The EMC supports the work that the County Green Team is doing to this end and looks forward to hearing a report on its progress.



Black Rock Canal Park

Water Quality

Erie County is named after and has grown around Lake Erie. The importance of this connection and interdependence is highlighted in the County Executive administration's "Initiatives for a Smart Economy." In fact, the plan has a chapter on the Blue Economy, which recognizes that water restoration and protection projects are significant economic drivers. The County has been playing a leadership role in this topic by providing coordinators for both the WNY Stormwater Coalition and the Lake Erie Water Watershed Protection Alliance (LEWPA), as well as playing an active role with the Erie County Water Quality Committee. Going forward, the EMC recommends that the County:

- **Continue to implement green infrastructure.** The New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation has grants to fund 90% of green infrastructure projects, such as pervious pavement parking lots, cisterns, and green roofs, <http://www.efc.ny.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=461>. The County should continue to pursue this funding for such projects, as the grants save taxpayer money by receiving 90% reimbursement for projects which may have been done anyhow and/or that will create multiple benefits.
- **Work with community partners to increase understanding of the issue of phosphorous loading to reduce the chance of toxic algal blooms in this end of Lake Erie.** This could be tied to public education that is done by the stormwater program.
- **Create home and business incentive programs for water quality best management practices on private property.** Look to the Impervious Area Charge Incentive Program (Washington DC), Water Saving Rebates (Seattle), Stormwater Facility Credit Program (Seattle), Non-residential water efficiency incentive (Portland).

- **Increase promotion of the projects the Erie County Division of Sewerage Management (DSM) does to protect water quality.** DSM is investing in major projects to reduce sanitary system overflows in old sewage systems that have been taken over by the County. By increasing public understanding of the benefits of these projects, the public will have a better understanding of the need to upgrade infrastructure in the future.
- **Continue to support Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District.** The District's purpose under the Soil and Water Conservation District Law is to provide for the conservation and preservation of the soil, water and wildlife resources of the state through the delivery of technical assistance and education to farms, landowners and units of government for the control and prevention of soil erosion, the management of water, the control and abatement of agricultural nonpoint sources of water pollution, the maintenance of streams and corridors, and protecting and promoting the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the State.



Conclusion

It is generally understood that having clean air, land and water are vital to having a thriving community. The EMC recognizes and appreciates that the current County leadership has made environmental protection a priority. The EMC urges County leaders to continue to invest more in the protection and restoration of our environment. Not only is this good work important to our current and future health, it also can be an economic engine, creating a place where young people want to stay and/or relocate.

Erie County has many excellent environmental programs and is in the process of starting new ones, but there is a need for even more. As the County moves forward with its budgeting process, the EMC encourages the county to consider the following additions to the budget to fund:

- Prioritize improved solid and hazardous waste handling by studying and siting a permanent Household Hazardous Waste collection site location(s), as well as establishing a regional compost facility;
- Invest in County property by implementing green infrastructure projects, pursuing additional funding for habitat work at the Natural Habitat Pocket Park sites along the Buffalo River, and establishing an effective method for the Parks Department to better access and manage grants;
- Continue to expand and support programs that work to create lead-safe homes in Erie County;
- Take steps to reduce and prepare for climate change by: completing the greenhouse gas inventory and energy plan; pursuing renewable energy and alternative fuels for County operations; and seeking funding for proactive planning to adapt to climate change.

There are also several recommendations regarding County policies and local laws. The EMC encourages the County to pursue:

- PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing available to commercial and multi-family residences in Erie County;
- Local laws to ban or recycle single-use bags and polystyrene foam, often referred to as Styrofoam, food containers;
- The completion of a County Energy Plan and Greenhouse Gas Inventory; and
- A County Complete Streets Policy.

Many of the recommendations include education and outreach, which are vital public components that are necessary to help County residents understand the issues, and to encourage residents to become advocates and participants for promoting, protecting and sustaining a healthy environment. The EMC looks forward to assisting the County with this outreach, as well as supporting any grant requests to pursue resources for those projects.

The EMC appreciates the small budget that was allotted by the County for our work, which has been used to strengthen the County efforts. In particular, this budget has been used to recognize non-profits and municipalities for their environmental work and thus create more awareness for innovation and best practices. The EMC is also utilizing the funds for educational materials, and to attend the state-wide conference of Environmental Management Councils.