



Erie County Environmental Management Council



2017 Annual Recommendations Report

July 2017

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	6
Air Quality.....	9
Climate Change	10
Contaminated Sites and Brownfields.....	12
Ecosystem Health	13
Energy.....	15
Land Use.....	17
Solid Waste Management.....	18
Toxic Hazards.....	19
Transportation.....	20
Water Quality	21
Conclusion.....	22

Executive Summary

Background

The Erie County Environmental Management Council (EMC) is made of representatives from 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 to advise county government on local environmental concerns, as well as provide a liaison between the community and county government. To that end, the EMC prepares an Annual Recommendations Report that provides information for strategic planning and priority setting for the allocation of resources to address environmental issues facing Erie County.

It is important to note that many of the EMC's 2016 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:

- Committing to the greenhouse gas reduction goals outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement through an Executive Order, as movement on this important issue shifts to the state and local level; and
- Permitting a solar installation at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden; and
- Adding electric vehicles to the County's fleet; and
- Providing Lead Safety for Renovations, Repair, and Painting (RRP) training and certification to veterans free-of-charge.

Over the past year, the EMC has also overseen some of its own programs:

The 3rd annual EMC Environmental Excellence Awards (www.erie.gov/emc) were distributed at a ceremony in April. This program was designed to bring attention to municipal and not-for profit projects with a positive environmental impact.

The EMC also recently rolled out an updated

healthy lawns campaign, called "Home for the Gnome" (www.erie.gov/healthylawns).

Moreover, the EMC worked with County staff to implement recommendations that were made in last year's report. For example, the Lead Committee of the EMC worked with the Departments of Health, Environment and Planning, and Veteran's Services to offer free Lead Safety for Renovations, Repair, and Painting (RRP) Certification to veterans. This certification can be helpful for veterans looking for employment.

Recommendations

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

- **Renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County**, and the use of alternative fuels for the County Fleet. Decreasing the use of fossil fuels saves money and improves air quality through decreased emissions.
- **Support of Smart Growth/Main Street projects** that are bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly. Well-designed bikeable and walkable communities offer expanded transportation options beyond driving. Bicycling and walking decrease driving which, in turn, decrease air pollution by reducing vehicle emissions and improve the health and quality of life for residents.
- **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.

Executive Summary

- **Update of the 2003 Forest Management Plan**, which was drafted but never adopted, in order to guide proper forest management practices based on sound biological, economic, recreational, educational, and public safety considerations.
- **More investments in the County Parks system.** Additional resources are 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.
- **Assistance to municipalities within the County to address their need regarding electronic waste collections.** This issue has become a financial and logistical burden for many municipalities. A more coordinated, county-wide effort is needed.
- **Revamping the Erie County Highway Department's procedures for cleaning, reshaping and vegetating road ditches** to reduce soil erosion, improve visibility and safety, and reduce future maintenance.
- **Legislation to ban single-use bags and polystyrene foam**, often referred to as Styrofoam, food containers.
- **Creation of a Community Climate Change Task Force** to advise the County on policies and projects. At a minimum, this task force should include: representatives from municipalities, environmental advocacy groups, businesses, emergency response agencies, and advocates for low to moderate income residents.
- **A program to incentivize the use of public transportation for County employees.** A program to buy bus passes tax-free should be established to encourage employees to take public transportation.

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

- **PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy)** financing for 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.
- **A native plant policy for County property.** Native plants have many advantages: they often are more resistant to drought and pesticides, as well as provide habitat for important species within the ecosystem.
- **Advocacy for the expansion efforts of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority of Metro Service** to the airport and University at Buffalo North Campus.

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, improving quality of life and creating a place where people want to stay and/or relocate.

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 Recommendations 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 (www.erie.gov/emc) is working to make this report a more useful 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.



County Executive Mark Poloncarz signs Executive Order regarding Enforcement of the Paris Climate Agreement

It is important to note that many of the EMC's 2016 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:

- Committing to the greenhouse gas reduction goals outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement through an Executive Order, as movement on this important issue shifts to the state and local level; and
- Permitting a solar installation at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden; and
- Adding electric vehicles to the County's fleet; and
- Providing Lead Safety for Renovations, Repair, and Painting (RRP) training and certification to veterans free-of-charge; and
- Expanding the recycling program in County office buildings; and
- Promoting a paper reduction contest within County departments; and
- Working with partners to continue to creatively remind the community to bring reusable bags to the store in order to reduce pollution from single use bags; and

Introduction



2016 EMC Award to WNY Earth Day presented to Sharon Benz (middle) by Anne Bergantz, EMC Chair (left) and Deputy County Executive Maria Whyte (right)

- Securing state and federal funding to conduct a study to improve the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program; and
- Securing state funding to establish a food composting project at the County Correctional Facility; and
- Continuing habitat restoration and protection of ecosystems at Erie County's Natural Habitat Parks, including seed collection and propagation of native plant communities; and
- Securing state funding to continue providing technical assistance to 44 municipalities to aid them in complying with the requirements of the NYS SPDES MS4 Stormwater General Permit.

Over the past year, the EMC has also overseen some of its own programs. The 3rd annual EMC Environmental Excellence Awards (www.erie.gov/emc) were distributed at a ceremony in April. This program was designed to bring attention to municipal and not-for profit projects with a positive environmental impact.

There were four award-ees this year: WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable, WNY Earth Day Committee, GoBike Buffalo, and the Erie County Natural Habitat Parks. The EMC is planning to continue this award program next year.

The EMC also recently rolled out an updated healthy lawns campaign, called "Home for the Gnome". The EMC is working with partners to distribute door hangers with the slogan "Make your Lawn a Home for the Gnome",

designed by students at Daemen College. The door hangers include simple tips and a link to a county web site which hosts two excellent resources from Cornell Cooperative Extension on lawn care and Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper on native plants. The EMC pursued this project because reducing lawn care chemicals and increasing native plantings is something that can be done by all homeowners. Moreover, these actions directly impact water quality, pollinators and human health. For example, by reducing chemical run-off to our waterways through storm sewers, we can reduce nutrient loading to Lake Erie thus reducing the likelihood of a toxic algal bloom. By planting native plants, we can improve the habitat for pollinators on which many of our agricultural crops depend. The EMC will continue to build on this project over the next year by engaging more groups to distribute the door hangers and if possible create lawn signs as well.

Introduction

Finally, the EMC worked with County staff to implement two recommendations that were made in last year's report. First, the Lead Committee of the EMC worked with the Departments of Health, Environment and Planning, and Veteran's Services to offer free Lead Safety for Renovations, Repair, and Painting (RRP) Certification to veterans. This certification can be helpful for veterans looking for employment. Second, the EMC is working with the Department of Environment and Planning on a campaign to educate residents about the proper disposal of latex paint. Latex paint, which is water based, is not hazardous, yet it is frequently brought to the household hazardous waste collections days adding to traffic volume and overall disposal costs. The EMC looks forward to working with County staff and leadership to support and implement the following 2017 recommendations.



Air Quality

Erie County government does not play a role in the enforcement of air quality issues since these matters are regulated by state and federal agencies. However, the County does work on projects that impact air quality. Over the past year, the County has purchased electrical vehicles and is assisting 13 municipalities in updating their comprehensive plans, with a focus on smart growth initiatives.

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 funding opportunities to conduct public outreach to improve air quality.** This effort should focus on the health and safety concerns associated with outdoor burning and/or transportation issues.
- **Finalize the County's Greenhouse Gas Inventory.** The EMC commends the County for drafting its greenhouse gas inventory and looks forward to reviewing the final product.
- **Continue to pursue renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County, and the use of alternative fuels for the County Fleet.** Decreasing the use of fossil fuels saves money and improves air quality through decreased emissions.
- **Support Smart Growth/Main Street projects which are bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.** Well-designed bikeable and walkable communities offer expanded transportation options beyond driving. Bicycling and walking decrease driving which, in turn, decrease air pollution by reducing vehicle emissions.
- **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.



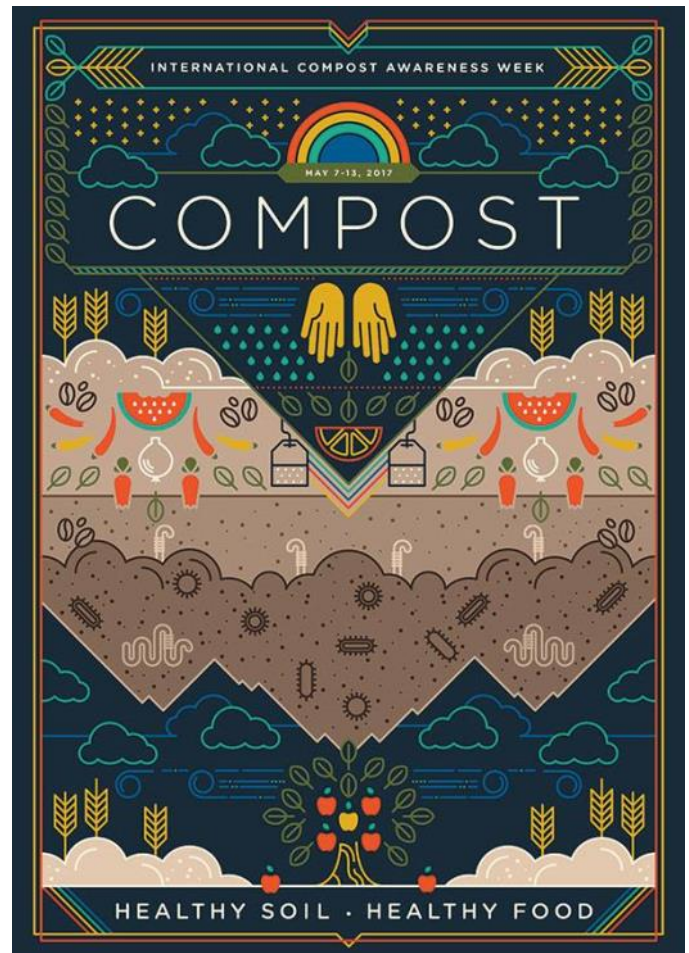
View of Sunset from Rath Building

Climate Change

It is well understood that 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 rising sea levels, 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, resulting in increasing costs for repair, remediation and replacement of public and private infrastructure.

The EMC sincerely appreciates the County Executive's Executive Order to stay in compliance with the Paris Climate Agreement. The signing of this executive order one day after President Trump announced his decision to withdraw from the agreement demonstrated the administration's leadership and strong commitment to protecting Erie County residents from the impacts of global warming and climate change. The EMC is committed to be involved in the initiatives that come out of this order.

Erie County is also to be commended for making a commitment on the state level to be 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. As recommended by the EMC in its 2016 report, the County is in the process of becoming a certified Climate Smart Community.



The EMC applauds these accomplishments and 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:

- **Complete the Erie County Climate Action and Sustainability Plan and share this plan with the public.** This plan, which examines internal County operations, is in process and a final plan is anticipated before the next EMC recommendation report.
- **Implement the newly funded food-composting project at the Erie County Correctional Facility.** This project, covered more in the solid waste chapter of this report, will help to reduce the production of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, by preventing organic waste from being landfilled.

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. For example, a vulnerability plan should be developed, which outlines how the County operations can best respond to the impacts of climate change. Such plans often include sheltering for residents during extreme weather events and moving infrastructure away from shorelines.
- **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 and natural resource inventories, or identifying funding to assist them with some of the above projects required to become Certified Climate Smart Communities.
- **Establish a Community Climate Change Task Force to examine what can be done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the community level.** At a minimum, this task force should include: representatives from municipalities, environmental advocacy groups, businesses, emergency response agencies, and advocates for low to moderate income residents.
- **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.



Leopard Frog

Contaminated Sites and Brownfields

Since the mid-1990s, 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. During that time, 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. Of note this past year was the sale of the brownfield at 3445 River Road in Tonawanda to support the expansion of a local manufacturing facility. The County program also acquired a new brownfield along River Road in Tonawanda for remediation and possible reuse as a regional yard waste management facility.

Despite the success of these programs, 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 and increased 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.



Brownfield Cleanup on River Road

- **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 in preparation for redevelopment.
- **Monitor and advocate for:**
 - o **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;
 - o **Cleanup of radioactive waste at contaminated sites designated as Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP)** <http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/FUSRAP.aspx> by the US Army Corps of Engineers; and
 - o **Remediation of Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)** <https://www.epa.gov/rcra>, contaminated areas and redevelopment of the Bethlehem Steel site.

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, and the soil we farm. Thus, this section could include many issues which threaten the ecosystem, such as pollution and invasive species.

Erie County has been involved in several efforts to protect and enhance ecosystem health. For example, the County has been working with many partners to promote bringing reusable bags when shopping in order to reduce disposable bags which can result in litter, risk to wildlife and pollution of our water. This work with the community involved a partnership with the Buffalo Zoo, BOCES and Citizens Campaign for the Environment to work with students to create short videos about this issue. Information about these efforts can be found at www.erie.gov/byobag.

Another example is the County's work with the EMC to promote its updated healthy lawn campaign called "Home for the Gnome" (www.erie.gov/healthylawns). This public outreach effort encourages concerned citizens to share tips with their neighbors on how to have a healthy lawn with minimal use of chemicals. The EMC chose a door hanger design which includes a web site with more detailed information. Students at Daemen College designed the graphics for the campaign.

The County is also continuing many other efforts including habitat restoration projects along the Buffalo River, a pollinator garden at Times Beach Nature Preserve, stormwater pollution prevention education, and invasive species outreach and education.

Of course, more could be done and the Erie County EMC recommends that the County continue the good work outlined above and also:



Monarch Butterfly

Ecosystem Health

- **Continue to work with local partners and agencies to further reduce plastic pollution in our waterways, which threatens our wild life.** The County has done good work but should continue to find ways to reduce plastic pollution through local legislation, advocating for state-wide policy, or through education.
- **Adopt a native plant policy for County property.** Native plants support biodiversity and are thought to be more resilient to drought and pests because they have evolved and adapted to local or regional conditions. The County should work with local partners to create a native plant policy and a plant list, while also considering the impact of a changing climate on this issue.
- **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 Great Lakes “Area of Concern.”
- **Update the 2003 Forest Management Plan,** which was drafted but never adopted, in order to guide proper forest management practices based on sound ecological, economic, recreational, educational, and public safety considerations.
- **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** in County Parks through NYSDEC and other entities.
- **Educate the public regarding pollinators and their importance.** Education could take place at County Parks including the natural habitat parks, such as Times Beach.
- **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>.
- **Share visual aids regarding invasive species through the County’s web site and social media.** Encourage residents to use iMap (www.nyimainvasives.org) to map invasive species.



Riverwalk

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 implementing energy conservation and renewable energy projects under the coordination of the County Energy Director. For example, solar panels will soon be installed at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden. Energy conservation has taken many forms, including the conversion to LED lights in many County buildings. The result of this work also reduces the County's greenhouse gas emissions.

There is much that the County can do to build upon these accomplishments. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Finalize the County energy plan and educate both the public and municipalities within the County by sharing it.** This document should create the framework for furthering work within county facilities operations and guide

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 -



Site Preparation for Solar Panels at Erie County Correctional Facility

Energy

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://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy12osti/54570.pdf>, allow County sponsored renewable energy investments to support recommendations within the Greener Cleaner Communities Western New York Sustainability Plan (<https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/regions/westernny/Western-NY-CGC-Plan-Report.pdf>) funded by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, 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 overcome barriers to the adoption of energy efficiency measures. Once adopted, the County should also advocate for PACE funding availability for single family homes.

- **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.
- **Continue to support state and federal incentives for energy conservation and renewable energy.** These incentives help in the promotion of these two vital methods for mitigating climate change.
- **Promote training sessions for municipalities regarding energy code enforcement.** Energy Code Enforcement Training (<https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Energy-Code-Training>) is freely available to interested communities to help code enforcement officials practically apply the 2015 International Building Code (IBC) Energy Code. Training includes site plan reviews and on-site inspections to help officials get hands on training for best practices when applying the code to new construction as well as renovation projects at existing buildings. The County should help to promote this to municipalities.

Land Use

Community decisions regarding land use impact quality of life, water and air quality, and ecosystem health for years to come. 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. For example, the County is in the process of finalizing a Parks Master Plan and has also provided assistance to 13 communities to complete their comprehensive planning process.

The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Find ways to invest more in County Parks system.** Additional resources are 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.
- **Continue to support the state-certified agricultural district program,** administered through the County Department of Environment and Planning, with right-to-farm provisions. Agricultural Districts keep land in agricultural production by protecting farmland, helping a new generation to farm, and improving the viability of all farms in the County.
- **Partner with existing efforts to minimize destruction of plantings by browsing animals and invasive species.** This is especially important 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, critical management areas for erosion control and floodplain protection.
- **Encourage all economic development within existing infrastructure to discourage sprawl beyond existing sewer districts.** 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 a greater 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.



Hunters Creek

Solid Waste Management

At its meetings, the EMC learned about the initiatives the County is pursuing to address solid waste issues. For example, the County has markedly expanded its recycling program in County facilities in the past year. The County has also worked internally, through its Green Team, to promote paper reduction through a contest between teams.

Members of the County Green Team also developed a grant proposal for a food waste composting project at the Erie County Correctional Facility. That proposal was funded and should start before the end of the year.

- The County Department of Environment and Planning has also been working with the Solid Waste Management Boards to update their Solid Waste Management Plans. 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.

The EMC recommends that the County also:

- **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. Although there hasn't been support for local legislation, steps can be taken to address this issue.
 - **Continue to educate the public about reducing waste by bringing reusable bags to the store or skipping a bag altogether.**
 - **Support legislation at the State level to reduce single use bag litter.**



Education and Outreach at 2017 Elmwood Festival of the Arts

- **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.
- **Adopt a deconstruction policy for internal projects.** Instead of demolishing buildings and landfilling the waste, the County should work to make sure these building materials are recycled.
- **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.

Toxic Hazards

The County's Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) 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 remain within households causing problems if there is a flood or fire. As of the writing of this report only one event has been held this year. At the June 3, 2017 household hazardous waste event at Erie Community College (ECC) South Campus, more than 1,334 households were serviced and the following items were collected: 15,000 gallons of paint; 8 cubic yard boxes of aerosol products; 2,420 gallons of corrosives and oxidizers; 1,238 gallons of waste oil; 500 gallons of antifreeze; 175 gallons of gas and 13,561 lbs. of pesticides. A second event is scheduled for August 5, 2017 at ECC North.

As recommended by the EMC, the County has pursued state and federal funding to conduct a study to determine ways to improve the HHW program's efficacy, as well as increase participation. As of the writing of this report, a Request for Proposals has been issued to consultants and it is anticipated that the report will be completed near the beginning of 2018.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, the County is now providing Lead Safety for Renovations, Repair, and Painting (RRP) training and certification to veterans free-of-charge. This action was a recommendation from the EMC in its 2016 report and the EMC thanks the County Health Department for providing this job training opportunity.

This year the EMC recommends that the County:

- **Work with municipalities within the County to address their need regarding electronic waste collections.** This issue has become a financial and logistical burden for many municipalities. A more coordinated, county-wide effort is needed.



June 2017 Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event

- **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, soil and/or air. The EMC is starting to work with the County on a campaign, but additional resources are vital to help get the message out.
- **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.
- **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.

Transportation

Transportation conveys substantial socioeconomic benefits, but at the same time impacts environmental systems. Lack of access to reliable public transportation disproportionately impacts individuals with lower incomes. Plans should be developed within the county to ensure a policy and design that addresses both.

The EMC commends the County for their recent electrical vehicle purchases. This type of fleet purchase has been a recommendation of the EMC and will help reduce the County's greenhouse gas emissions.

The EMC also recommends that the County:

- **Support expansion efforts of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) of Metro Service** to the airport and University at Buffalo North Campus.
- **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, and the necessity of requiring road sharing.
- **Establish a program to incentivize the use of public transportation** for County employees. A program to buy bus passes tax-free should be established to encourage employees to take public transportation.
- **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.** The plan should include specific performance measures that would be adopted

to 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; and
 - 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 Bakken oil shipments, as well as nuclear waste shipments across the Peace Bridge.** It is vital that our communities are prepared to respond to the risks associated with the transport of these shipments through our communities.
 - **Seek additional funding and partnership opportunities for alternative fuel vehicles for the County fleet, including installing publically accessible 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.



Queen City Bike Ferry

Water Quality



Rain Barrel Painting Contest Winner – Buffalo Academy Of Science Charter School

The importance of the connection and interdependence of Erie County with Lake Erie is highlighted in the County Executive administration’s “Initiatives for a Smart Economy,” as well as the report’s recent update. In fact, both plans have a chapter on the Blue Economy, which recognizes that water restoration and protection projects are significant economic drivers. The County has been playing a leader-

ship role in this topic by providing coordinators for 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 funding for such projects, thereby receiving a 90% reimbursement for projects that are already identified as needed.
- **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 and through the EMC’s “Home for the Gnome” healthy lawns campaign.

- **Revamp the Erie County Highway Department’s procedures for cleaning, reshaping and vegetating road ditches** to reduce soil erosion, improve visibility and safety, and reduce future maintenance.
- **Increase promotion of Erie County Division of Sewerage Management (DSM) projects that 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.



Kayaking on the Buffalo River

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, most especially the Executive Order regarding the Paris Climate Agreement.

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 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 more. The following are the key recommendations of this report, in no particular order.

As the County moves forward with its budgeting process, the EMC encourages the county to consider the following additions to the budget to fund:

- **Renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County**, and the use of alternative fuels for the County Fleet. Decreasing the use of fossil fuels saves money and improves air quality through decreased emissions.
- **Support of Smart Growth/Main Street projects** which are bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly. Well-designed bikeable and walkable communities offer expanded transportation options beyond driving. Bicycling and walking decrease driving which, in turn, decrease air pollution by reducing vehicle emissions.
- **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.

- **Update of the 2003 Forest Management Plan**, which was drafted but never adopted, in order to guide proper forest management practices based on sound biological, economic, recreational, educational, and public safety considerations.
- **More investments in the County Parks system.** Additional resources are 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.
- **Assistance to municipalities within the County to address their need regarding electronic waste collections.** This issue has become a financial and logistical burden for many municipalities. A more coordinated, county-wide effort is needed.

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

- **PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy)** financing for 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;
- **A native plant policy for County property.** Native plants have many advantages: they often are more resistant to drought and pesticides, as well as provide habitat for important species within the ecosystem.
- **Advocacy for the expansion efforts of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority of Metro Service** to the airport and University at Buffalo North Campus.

Conclusion

- **Revamping the Erie County Highway Department's procedures for cleaning, reshaping and vegetating road ditches** to reduce soil erosion, improve visibility and safety, and reduce future maintenance.
- **Legislation to ban single-use bags and polystyrene foam**, often referred to as Styrofoam, food containers;
- **Creation of a Community Climate Change Task Force** to advise the County on policies and projects. At a minimum, this task force should include: representatives from municipalities, environmental advocacy groups, businesses, emergency response agencies, and advocates for low to moderate income residents.
- **A program to incentivize the use of public transportation for County employees.** A program to buy bus passes tax-free should be established to encourage employees to take public transportation.

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.

