



Erie County Environmental Management Council

2018 Annual Recommendations Report



Buffalo River - Rene T. van Ee, Photo

July 2018

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Air Quality.....	9
Climate Change	10
Contaminated Sites and Brownfields	12
Ecosystem Health	13
Energy.....	15
Land Use.....	17
Solid Waste Management	19
Toxic Hazards.....	20
Transportation	22
Water Quality	24
Conclusion.....	26

Cover photo by Rene T. van Ee, and was the winner of Buffalo River Remedial Action Committee's "Signs of Spring" photo contest.

Executive Summary

Background

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. There are also 12 at-large members from throughout the County.

It is important to note that many of the EMC's 2017 Recommendations have been acted on; the EMC congratulates County leadership and staff for their work on improving the environmental quality of Erie County. In particular the EMC wants to recognize the County's:

- Leadership regarding the Paris Climate Agreement, including issuing the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report in response to the 2017 Executive Order, which included both internal operations and community-wide greenhouse gas inventories; and
- Completing a feasibility study to improve the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program; and
- Connecting a solar installation at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden; and
- Promoting solar energy to residents across the County with a Solarize Campaign; 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, including an inspirational project called *Pollution Prevention through Art*; and
- Creating an outreach piece regarding waste latex paint, as this is a problematic waste stream at the household hazardous waste collection events; 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 4th 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 expanded its Healthy Lawns Campaign, called "Home for the Gnome" (www.erie.gov/healthylawns), including distributing door hangers throughout the community. The EMC also designed and will be distributing "Home for the Gnome" lawn signs in 2018.

Executive Summary

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 additions to the budget to fund (in no particular order):

- **Renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for the County**, including 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, decreases air pollution by reducing vehicle emissions.
- **Proactive community 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 impacted by 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 and household hazardous 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 pests, as well as provide habitat for important species within the ecosystem. This policy, once established, could be adopted by municipalities within the County.
- **Advocacy for the expansion efforts of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority of Metro Service**, as well as the incorporation of electric vehicles into their fleet.

Executive Summary

- **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 and other alternative commuting options for County employees.** For example, a program to buy bus passes tax-free should be established to encourage employees to take public transportation.

The EMC urges County leaders to continue to invest 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 our quality of life and creating a place where people want to stay and want to 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. There are also 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 within the text for specific issues for access to additional information.

It is important to note that many of the EMC's 2017 Recommendations have been acted on; the EMC congratulates County leadership and staff for their work on improving the environmental quality of Erie County. In particular the EMC wants to recognize the County's:

- Leadership regarding the Paris Climate Agreement, including issuing the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report in response to the 2017 Executive Order, which included both internal operations and community-wide greenhouse gas inventories; and
- Completing a feasibility study to improve the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program; and
- Connecting a solar installation at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden; and
- Promoting solar energy to residents across the County with a Solarize Campaign; 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, including an inspirational project called *Pollution Prevention through Art*; and
- Creating an outreach piece regarding waste latex paint, as this is a problematic waste stream at the household hazardous waste collection events; 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.

Introduction

Over the past year, the EMC has also overseen some of its own programs. The Fourth 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 five awardees this year:

- Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Buffalo River Habitat Restoration,
- Buffalo Zoo Waste Reduction and Composting Program,
- Tri-Main Center's Recycling Program Coordinator,
- Village of Williamsville Spring Street Project, and
- WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable Solarize Campaign.

The EMC is planning to continue this award program next year.

The EMC also recently added to its updated Healthy Lawns Campaign, called “Home for the Gnomes”. The EMC distributed door hangers with the slogan “Make your Lawn a Home for the Gnomes”, designed by students at Daemen College, through our partners including the library branches. The door hangers include simple tips and a link to a county web site which hosts excellent resources from Cornell Cooperative Extension on lawn care and Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper 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. This year the EMC will be distributing lawn signs with the same informational link, which residents can use to indicate that their lawns are pesticide free and serve as positive examples for their neighborhoods.



Environmental Excellence Award Ceremony, Village of Williamsville's East Spring Street Improvements



Gnome Lawn Signage

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. Many of the ways that the County can impact air quality are related to transportation and energy sources. This report does contain separate chapters on both energy and transportation. This chapter will highlight how the County can help to improve air quality based on energy and transportation initiatives. For example, the County owns a fleet whose emissions impact air quality. The County recently purchased electric vehicles for its own fleet and is in the process of setting fuel efficiency goals.

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.
- **Encourage and support Niagara Frontier Transit Authority's conversion to electric vehicles.** For example, the County could provide letters of support for grant funding for electric vehicles.
- **Work with the Greater Buffalo Niagara Transportation Council to ensure that transportation plans include improved air quality as a priority,** as outlined in *Erie County Commits to Paris*.
- **Create an anti-idling campaign to educate the public** about the air quality issues related to idling vehicles.
- **Continue to pursue renewable energy and energy efficiency projects,** including 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.** Complete Streets (<https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>) and 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.



Boston Forest - Kevin Preischel, Photo

Climate Change

Climate Change is one of the most pressing issues of our time. The EMC is grateful for Erie County's leadership on this important topic. As mentioned earlier in this report, Erie County released its *Erie County Commits to Paris* report early this year in response to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz's Executive Order #17. This report includes greenhouse gas inventories for both the community as a whole and Erie County's internal operations. The report also outlines a series of initiatives to reduce these greenhouse gas emissions. The EMC commends the leadership of the County and is actively participating in the *Erie County Commits to Paris* working group.

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>). Through the work of its Green Team and the *Erie County Commits to Paris* working group, Erie County is now on its way to becoming a certified Climate Smart Community

In addition to the climate change mitigation initiatives outlined in its report, the EMC recommends that the County:

- **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 Recommendations Report. Such a plan will be helpful for municipalities within the County to use as an example as they examine their own operations.
- **Implement the newly funded food-composting project at the Erie County Correctional Facility.** This project, discussed 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. Once implemented, the County should consider how to expand this to other facilities.
- **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' ability to 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.

Climate Change

While the County should continue to work to mitigate the impacts of climate change, it needs to simultaneously plan for its impacts. The EMC is hopeful that the County is headed in the right direction regarding adaptation to Climate Change. For example, the Department of Environment and Planning recently wrote and was awarded a Climate Change Vulnerability Planning grant for its internal operations. This planning is needed as 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.

As the County has done with the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report, the County should also begin to examine the community aspect of this issue. For example, increased temperatures can cause health issues for vulnerable populations. There is also concern that due to our ample supply of fresh water, the region may deal with an influx of climate refugees from other areas of the country.

Regarding Climate Change Adaptation, the EMC recommends that the County:

- **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, due to predicted 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. Moreover, the County should work with partners on this issue, such as the Designing to Live Sustainably - Buffalo State College who recently issued a report entitled [Weathering Change in WNY](#), which examines local impacts of climate change.



Contaminated Sites and Brownfields

Since the mid-1990s, Erie County has been a leader in addressing the issue of brownfields where private sector redevelopment has not occurred. Brownfields are 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 County's purchase of over 100 acres of the former Bethlehem Steel site for redevelopment and the start of the construction for the Bethlehem Shoreline Trail.



Aerial Photo of Bethlehem Steel

Despite this success, funding from the State needs to be secured and increased to continue redevelopment infill, smart growth and land recycling. The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Advocate for renewal 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.
- **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, completion of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and ultimately, complete removal of site radioactive waste at the West Valley Demonstration Project;** and
 - o **Cleanup of radioactive waste at contaminated sites designated under the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP)** (<https://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/FUSRAP.aspx>) by the US Army Corps of Engineers including the Seaway and Tonawanda Landfills; and
 - o **Remediation of Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), contaminated areas** (<https://www.epa.gov/rcra>) 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 year, the County worked with the Buffalo Zoo, the Buffalo Museum of Science, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, the Alliance for the Great Lakes and many others to coordinate a project called *Pollution Prevention through Art*, which was funded by a grant from the New York State Pollution Prevention Institute. The artwork, created by students from single-use bags, was on display at the Buffalo Museum of Science from Earth Day 2018 through the end of May. 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 Lawns 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 website link with more detailed information. Students at Daemen College designed the graphics for the campaign. The next step for this campaign will include signage for yards to acknowledge those who are adopting a pesticide-free landscaping practice.

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:

- **Continue to work with local partners and agencies to further reduce plastic pollution in our waterways** which threatens our wildlife 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. This policy should also indicate banned invasive plants. Moreover, once established, the County should share this policy with municipalities.
- **The County should use its available green space to grow native plant species for transplant throughout the region.** A growing problem regarding native plants is not only convincing people of their importance, but having an available stock of native plants for use. The County, along with the towns, should develop in-house growing programs to have readily available plant stock for transplant and beautification throughout the county.

Ecosystem Health

- **Pursue additional funding for habitat work at the Natural Habitat Pocket Park sites along the Buffalo River** (<http://www2.erie.gov/environment/index.php?q=habitat-restoration>). This work, combined with the efforts of Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, 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. Public support and understanding of the social, biological and economic benefits of Erie County Forests are the critical components to successful implementation of any plan.
- **Erie County must take the lead in being known for environmental stewardship and it must expand internships for college students.** All components of the EMC Annual Recommendations Report will need people to monitor its operations and hopeful outcomes. The County should seek college and university partners (faculty and students) to build mutually beneficial opportunities.
- **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. The County, through the Town-County conservation and park coalitions, should work with each town to develop and implement a “town-wide” tree census. Town based tree censuses will generate involvement by the public which then can be utilized to help with a county-wide tree inventory.
- **Seek grant funding for tree replacement in County Parks through NYSDEC and other entities.** The county should use its available green space to grow native trees for transplant throughout the region and this should be developed through the work of Town-County conservation and park coalitions.
- **Educate the public regarding pollinators and their importance.** Education could take place at County Parks including the natural habitat parks, such as Times Beach. All County parks and green space should have pollinator gardens in their design and should be developed through the work of Town-County conservation and park coalitions.
- **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, (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.nyimapinvasives.org) to map invasive species.



Spotted Bee Balm at Bell Slip - Jay Burney, Photo

Energy

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz's leadership on, and the County Legislature's support of, energy conservation and renewable energy projects, continue to be commendable. Even before the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report, the County had been working on implementing energy conservation and renewable energy projects under the coordination of the County Energy Director. For example, 2 megawatts of solar panels have been brought on line at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden. As outlined in the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report, in addition to reducing the cost of County operations, energy conservation efforts also reduce the County's greenhouse gas emissions. The EMC understands that, at the time of writing this report, Erie County's Energy Director position is vacant. The EMC encourages the County to refill this vital position as soon as possible.

There is much that the County can do to build upon these accomplishments and many of those are spelled out in the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report. The EMC would like to point to a few recommendations from that report as priorities, Erie County should:

- **Educate both the public and municipalities within the County about its energy conservation and renewable energy work.** The County has accomplished significant energy savings through various conservation projects. By posting its 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. Moreover, the County could hold an event for municipalities interested in learning about its progress.
- **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, (<https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy12osti/54570.pdf>), allow County sponsored renewable energy investments to support recommendations within the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report.
- **Take the steps to make PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy), (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.
- **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.

Energy

- **Promote training sessions for municipalities regarding energy code enforcement.** Energy Code Enforcement Training (www.nysersda.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.



2 MW Solar Array, Alden

Land Use

Community land use decisions impact quality of air, water life, 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 is also including land use as a chapter in its soon to be released Climate Action and Sustainability Plan.

The EMC recommends that the County:

- **Find ways to invest more 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. The EMC suggests that the following sub-recommendation could be a possible solution:
 - o **Examine possible public, private and academic sector partnerships for stewardship opportunities** within Operations and Maintenance plans to support professional and volunteer services to Department of Environment & Planning and the Parks Department that would be consistent with the updated Parks Master Plan.
- **Raise awareness of landowner impacts and good stewardship practices as they relate to private land use** by encouraging less chemicals, less monoculture lawns and more native species to create a public/private corridor that encourages a balanced ecosystem. This is important because homeowners control about 900,000 acres (75%) of lawns in NY State alone.
- **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.
- **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.** In 2017 and 2018 the District developed two new conservation programs with grant funding from the Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance (LEWPA) to promote environmental protection through land use improvement. In 2017 the District initiated a hydroseeding program to assist the Erie County Highway Department to vegetate critical areas related to road ditch cleaning and other disturbed work sites for reducing soil erosion and sedimentation of local waterways and water bodies. In 2017, the District hydroseeded approximately 21,000 linear feet (or 6 acres) of road ditches in 12 towns within the County. In 2018, the hydroseeding program is now being offered to Highway Departments in all municipalities within Erie County. In 2018 the District also initiated a riparian buffer program to establish vegetated buffer zones along Erie County waterways for erosion control, stormwater infiltration and filtration, and ecosystem enhancement. The District completed its first riparian forested buffer along 500 feet of Cayuga Creek in the Town of Alden.

Land Use

- **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. For example, the County should consider creating a Smart Growth Check List for municipalities and share it through training events.



Franklin Gulf Erie County Park - Kevin Preischel, Photo

Solid Waste Management

Over the past few years, Erie County has been diligently working to increase recycling and waste reduction in its internal operations. For example, the County has markedly expanded recycling opportunities in County facilities and has been working to promote paper reduction through its Green Team. The County also works with the municipalities through the Solid Waste Management Boards to promote recycling and waste reduction to residents.

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 through a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) grant 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 plans must be reviewed and accepted by the NYSDEC.

The EMC recommends that the County also:

- **Reduce single-use plastic litter in the County.** The EMC is grateful that the County Executive has promoted the need to reduce single use bags which clog storm drains, harm wildlife, drain municipal resources for clean up, and impact property values. The EMC has continued to work with the County and other partners to educate the public on the simple solution to this issue – reusable bags. Outreach materials, including how to make your own bag from an old t-shirt, can be found at: (www.erie.gov/byobag). However, education can only go so far. As it appears that the state is not going to lead on this issue, it is important that the County do so. Legislation regarding single-use bags has been implemented around the country and in many areas of New York State. This is no longer a cutting edge issue. The County should learn from other communities' experiences and pass legislation to protect water quality and wildlife. Moreover, the EMC recommends that the County educate the public on other single use plastics, such as straws and take out containers. Erie County should promote the good work of companies such as Delaware North with their “last straw” campaign.
- **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. Erie County's continued efforts to clean up a former brownfield site on River Road in Tonawanda still offers a great opportunity to provide a site for a regional compost facility for municipal yard and leaf waste. The EMC encourages the Northwest Solid Waste Management Board to work with the Town of Tonawanda to develop this site.



Solid Waste, Dr. Sherri Mason, - Josh Wilson, Photo

Toxic Hazards



Toxic HHW Collection 2017 - Jeremy Rosen, Photo

The County's Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) program holds two 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 2, 2018 household hazardous waste event at New Era Field, more than 1,000 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 11, 2018 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, the report has been submitted and is recommending that the County pursue establishing a permanent site as well as holding a few smaller collection events.

The EMC is also very concerned about the issue of lead contamination in homes in Erie County. Most would agree that one of the most important issues facing Erie County's future is educating children. One of the challenges to effective education is the issue of lead poisoning of children who live in Erie County (<https://www.epa.gov/lead/learn-about-lead#effects>).

Toxic Hazards

Experts at the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (USCDC) have reported that the primary source of childhood lead poisoning is from paint contaminated with lead in old housing stock. Studies also clearly show that New York State (NYS) has the oldest housing stock in the country and thus children in our state are most at risk to lead exposure via paint (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1247624/>). Blood lead levels for tested children in Buffalo have been higher than many other cities in New York.

This year the EMC recommends that the County:

- **Pursue grant funding for a permanent household hazardous waste collection site as outlined in the Household Hazardous Waste Feasibility Study.** The location should include provisions for electronic waste, which is an ongoing concern for municipalities.
- **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.
- **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 EMC congratulates Erie County and the City of Buffalo for working with childhood lead poisoning prevention activists in the prevention process facilitated by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The EMC fully endorses the results of this process. Furthermore, the EMC commends Erie County for opening its eight hour **USEPA Lead Safety for Renovations, Repairs, & Painting Course** free-of-charge to veterans and expanding its investment in lead-safe home programs. The EMC encourages the County to continue and expand these efforts.

Transportation

Transportation conveys substantial socioeconomic, health and quality of life 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 environmental impacts and access.

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 of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA)'s Metro Rail system.** A regional transportation network connected by Metro Rail will reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to vehicle miles traveled, provide car-free access to our region's most popular destinations, and increase Western New York's ability to bring in funding and transit-oriented development incentives that encourage smart growth principles. By encouraging the expansion of the existing Metro system to reach all communities, we can attract and retain population, reduce the demand for parking, provide essential access to jobs, shopping, health care, and education while reducing emissions directly related to cancer and asthma.
- **Update its existing Complete Streets resolution to a countywide Complete Streets Policy,** (<https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>). By adopting a Complete Streets policy, the County will design and operate context-sensitive transportation projects to enable safe access for all users including pedestrians and bicyclists. A countywide bicycle master plan should be developed to assist in the prioritization of future investments that is consistent with other municipal plans, evaluate the adequacy and safety of road shoulders, and assess the necessity of requiring road sharing.
- **Establish a program to incentivize the use of alternative modes of transportation for County employees.** By becoming a member of GO Buffalo Niagara (<http://gobuffaloniagara.org/>), the County will support employee transportation options with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by buying bus passes tax-free, having access to a guaranteed ride home program, car pool matching, bike sharing and other incentives with metrics to track progress.
- **Become a certified bike friendly employer through the National League of American Bicyclists Certification** (<http://www.bikeleague.org/business>). This involves creating a work environment that supports employees who ride their bikes to work through better infrastructure, education and encouragement programs. The County should work with GObike Buffalo, (<http://www.gobikebuffalo.org>), to attain this certification.

Transportation

- **Seek funding and partnerships to develop annual reporting metrics that achieve the goal of reducing transportation sector related greenhouse gas emissions.** The plan should include specific performance measures that would be adopted to measure the impact including, but not limited to:
 - o Increase in the share of bicycles, pedestrians and transit users;
 - o Crash data - - Identify high risk areas using crash occurrence data;
 - o Use of new projects by mode;
 - o Compliments and Complaints;
 - o Linear feet of pedestrian accommodations built;
 - o Number of Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations built;
 - o Miles of bike lanes/trails built or striped;
 - o Number of transit accessibility accommodations built;
 - o Number of street trees planted; and
 - o Number of building permits issued along new complete streets.
- **Continue to work with community partners to decrease the environmental risks from shipments of hazardous materials, such as enhanced spill response capabilities for trans-border Bakken oil shipments and nuclear waste shipments.** 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.



Erie County Electric Car - Josh Wilson, Photo

Water Quality

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 leadership 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 at County facilities.** 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, (<https://www.efc.ny.gov/GIGP>). 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 nutrient loading to reduce the chance of toxic algal blooms in this end of Lake Erie.** This could be tied to public education through the County stormwater program and the EMC's "Home for the Gnome" Healthy Lawns Campaign.
- **Work with community partners, such as the WNY Stormwater Coalition, to make the connection between pesticide use and water quality.** Again, this should be tied to the EMC's "Home for the Gnome" Campaign.
- **Work with the WNY Stormwater Coalition to train municipal planning boards on issues related to stormwater and compliance with stormwater regulations to aid them in evaluating project proposals.**
- **When developing educational materials on the issue of plastic pollution, discussed in the solid waste chapter, make the connection to water quality evident.**
- **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.** This effort should build upon the Conservation District's hydroseeding initiative which partners with Erie County Highway to vegetate cleaned road ditches as described under the Land Use section of the report.
- **Increase promotion of Erie County Division of Sewerage Management (DSM) projects.** The DSM is advancing several initiatives to invest in facilities that are approaching the end of their useful life and to require upgrades to ensure water quality continues to be protected. 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.

Water Quality

- **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.



*Runoff from rain or snow melt in cities is channeled to storm drains -
Tim Evanson, Photo*

Conclusion

Clean air, water and land 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 those initiatives outlined in the *Erie County Commits to Paris* report.

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.

As the County moves forward with its budgeting process, the EMC encourages the County to consider additions to the budget to fund (in no particular order):

- **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, decreases air pollution by reducing vehicle emissions.
- **Proactive community 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 by 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 and household hazardous 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.

Conclusion

- **A native plant policy for County property.** Native plants have many advantages: they often are more resistant to drought and pests, as well as provide habitat for important species within the ecosystem. This policy, once established, could be adopted by municipalities within the County.
- **Advocacy for the expansion efforts of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority of Metro Service,** as well as the incorporation of electric vehicles into their fleet.
- **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 and other alternative commuting options for County employees.** For example, 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.

