

# The CAP: environmental justice, outreach, green space

The Bethlehem Gadfly Climate Action Plan December 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series on Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan* 

## Climate Action Plan

Here are a few more of the interesting elements of the CAP.

### Create and Environmental Justice Council

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To inform the development of a Bethlehem Climate and Environmental Justice Plan, the implementation of strategies in this CAP, and future updates to the Bethlehem CAP, the City should create an Environmental Justice Council. The council could consist of representatives from frontline communities who could gather those communities' concerns and relay them to the city. The council would create an information pathway between city government and community-level concerns about the environment. The council could also develop a framework of principles for advancing equity and justice in Bethlehem.

#### Implementation considerations:

The Bethlehem CAP's Environmental Justice and Equity Steering Committee and the connections it made in local communities can serve as a starting point until representatives from frontline communities can be selected in a formal process. The Bethlehem Mayor's Office has convened other committees, referred to as the Mayor's Ad Hoc Committees, including the Financial Advisory Committee and the Latino Advisory Committee.

### Initiate a "Bethlehem Climate Challenge" public outreach/educational program

Develop and run a campaign to generate community-wide understanding of the CAP and support for implementation. This will complement more targeted education programs addressing specific sources of emissions and strategies in the CAP, such as recycling, inequities, and food, as well as engagement programs for K-12 educators. This will provide a more general education campaign related to mitigation and adaptation that reaches the business community, the administration of the higher education institutions, and other key stakeholders.

#### Environmental justice considerations:

Consider how to leverage the local expertise in the Lehigh Valley to help with this program.

#### Implementation considerations:

Leverage the Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) educational expertise to lead and/or inform this program. Also leverage the public library to feature relevant climate-related reading, such as create a "Bethlehem Reads" initiative focused on climate education. The program should aim to instill a sense of urgency on the issue of climate change. People have many misconceptions about climate change. Families are focused on the economy, the pandemic, and other perceived short-term issues without a realization that the impacts of climate change, including increasing temperatures and extreme weather events, will exacerbate those underlying conditions and existing stressors.

### Evaluate existing green space sales with goals of the CAP

Review sale of any City-owned property, particularly green and open space, for alignment with CAP goals. Maintaining City control of green spaces, including public parks, woodlands, and meadows, will allow the City to ensure forest management best practices are followed and to continue to expand the urban tree canopy. Reducing sales of City open space property that could cost-effectively be converted to green space also helps to maintain the City's urban tree canopy potential.

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**Environmental justice considerations:**

Open spaces in socially vulnerable areas on the south side should be evaluated for conversion to green space prior to sale. The City could go further by seeking to buy back privately-owned land to build more green spaces, particularly where this can provide new green space to low-income communities.

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**Implementation considerations:**

This action requires a rethinking of development strategy, from the post-Bethlehem Steel 'all development is good' strategy to a focus on sustainable and equitable development and retaining or creating green space instead.

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