

GREG ZEBROWSKI
Chair

STEVEN GLICKMAN
Vice Chair

PAMELA PEARSON
Treasurer



CHRISTOPHER J. KUFRO, P.E.
Chair, Coordinating Committee

BRENDAN COTTER
Chair, Technical Committee

BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP
Executive Director, LVPC
Secretary, LVTS

LVPC and DEP to Partner on Regional Climate Actions

The LVPC has been accepted into Pennsylvania's Local Climate Action Program, paving the way for the first-ever Lehigh Valleywide effort to mitigate the growing impacts of climate change.

Under the plan run by the state Department of Environmental Protection, the state will provide technical assistance needed to take a regional greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory, and that will ultimately be used to build a defined set of climate actions aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

"The first step is a greenhouse inventory, but the end result is real climate action that municipal leaders can take part in," said Heidi Kunsch, Energy Program Specialist for DEP. "You will be the largest regional entity to participate in this program."

The Local Climate Action Program, now in its third year, provides technical assistance to municipalities and regions to assist in creating a plan to combat the effects of climate change. Like most regions, over the past 10 years, the Lehigh Valley has experienced more intense storms, more rain, more flooding and higher temperature.

So far, 27 municipalities, counties or regions and 13 colleges statewide have gone through the program, and all are in various stages of setting new climate action policy. Among them is Easton and Allentown. The Lehigh Valley will be the first multi-county region in the program, and while the effort will be led by the LVPC and DEP, it will require buy-in from every corner of the region, said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley.

"We all have a bucket of responsibility to carry – as professionals and in our personal lives," Bradley said. "This issue is so important, and so big, we're all going to have to work together to tackle it. We're excited to get started."

The project begins just after a United Nations report released in August signaled a "code red for humanity" in deeming that the planet is on the edge of irretrievable damage if action is not taken immediately to slow climate change that is "unequivocally caused by human activities."

DEP's assistance will include training from Icklei, a global network of more than 2,500 local governments committed to sustainability, and day-to-day assistance from a Moravian University environmental engineering student to perform the GHG inventory.

Training began in August and will be followed by gathering data on all the greenhouse emissions in the Lehigh Valley, covering everything from emissions from municipal vehicle fleets to businesses to privately owned vehicles to residential homes. Easton, for example, has already taken a GHG inventory for the city, determining that 45% of emissions come from homes, 26% come from businesses and 24% come from vehicles. Its currently partnering with

the Nurture Nature Center on policy with a target goal of reducing emissions by 30% by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

Allentown is on a similar path, and while Bethlehem didn't enter the state program, it was the first Lehigh Valley city to adopt a climate action plan. Its ambition plan, adopted in April, predicts that the 12 days of 90-plus degree temperatures the city experiences now would become 50-83 by 2049, without immediate actions. The plan's goal is a 33% reduction in GHG emissions by 2025, 60% by 2030 and net zero by 2040. It has set a goal of net zero for its municipal operations by 2030.

But not all of the region's 62 municipalities have the resources or capacity to do what the three cities have. That's the benefit of the LVPC being accepted into the state program.

"Outside of the three cities, it's hard to imagine that many smaller municipalities would have the capacity to do it," said Geoff Reese, LVPC Director of Environmental Planning. "This will not only cover communities that may not have the resources to do it themselves, but it will avoid the need to have 62 separate plans."

Details of how new policy will be drafted are not yet available, but training is scheduled for August, the LVPC will work with a Moravian student to develop a GHG inventory for the region, and draft policies are due as early as the summer of 2022, Kunsch said.

The project is expected to include a community engagement campaign involving residents, businesses, schools, healthcare organizations and non-profits.

From there, new policy will be worked into all future regional plans, Bradley said. It will be up to community leaders to determine how new policies will be worked into their local plans.

Kunsch recommends that each local government, or in this case region, appoint a climate action committee of stakeholders whose primary job would be to promote the project's recommendations and make sure communities are buying in.

"It's an old and tired excuse that we can't do this on a local level," Bradley said. "Not only can we do it, but we must do it and we must do it now. We've never faced a challenge this big before. It is the responsibility of all of us to be part of the solution."