

Lehigh and Northampton Counties Set Green Example

Lehigh and Northampton county officials are taking an environment-friendly view of building projects and they're hoping municipal planners and developers follow their lead.

Lehigh County is about to embark on an expansion at the county-run Cedarbrook Senior Care and Rehab that will feature a green roof, rain gardens and native landscaping, while Northampton County forges a "Green Initiatives" plan that includes investing \$1.5 million to build a small, hydroelectric power generator at the Lehigh Canal near Hugh Moore Park in Easton.

"Our goal is to improve the quality of life at Cedarbrook, while preserving the environment," said Lehigh County Director of General Services Rick Molchany. "It's an example of what can be done, and what's we'd like all developers and municipal planners to consider."

Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure's "Green Initiative" plan is focused on preserving farmland and open space, but that concept of saving the environment also extends to all county decisions, said Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure.

"I see Northampton County's future as green—green for the environment and green for the economy," says Lamont McClure. "A healthy environment benefits everyone. We keep both present and future generations in mind when we make decisions."

The Cedarbrook expansion project in South Whitehall calls for a 142,000-square-foot addition to the existing nursing facility at 350 South Cedarbrook Road. The 473-bed facility, with portions dating back to 1844 when the county built it as a place to care for indigent seniors, currently includes as many as four residents sharing one room and wading down a hall to a communal bathroom.

The project will include two rain gardens with natural plantings, and a green roof that will be on the top of a first-floor roof, using rain water diverted from the fourth-floor roof, Molchany said. All of it will help manage the nearby Cedar Creek, Molchany said.

"This will all be expertly engineered to prevent flooding in the Cedar Creek, without starving it," Molchany said.

Approved by County Commissioners, the project is working its way through South Whitehall planning and zoning departments. If all goes as planned, construction would begin this summer and be completed in 2023, Molchany said.

It's not the first building projects designed to make the county just a little greener. Lehigh County's Trexler Environmental Center, built in 2010, has since earned a Leadership in Energy

and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for features that include renewable construction materials, solar panels, bird-friendly glass, green roof and rain gardens.

Northampton County's "Green Initiatives" plan has helped increase the county's preserved farmland to 200 farms totaling nearly 17,000 acres, to go along with 3,451 acres of preserved open space, but it now goes beyond the rolling farm fields the county has become known for, said Northampton County Public Works Director Michael Emili said. The County's Parks and Recreation Division is using recycled crushed concrete to refurbish more than five miles of the Nor-Bath Trail from East Allen Township to Northampton, said Division Superintendent Brian Cope, and the county is installing charging stations for electric cars in some county-owned public lots.

The county's most recent building project, the \$11 million Forensic Center opened in October, includes solar panels on the roof, and later this year a contractor hired by the county is expected to begin construction to use the Lehigh Canal to generate electricity.

Northampton County Council has committed \$1.4 million in matching funds for a project to use water flowing into the Lehigh Canal to generate electricity to power the equivalent of 400 homes. The project, by Massachusetts-based New England Hydropower Company, has a matching state grant of \$1.4 grant from the Pennsylvania Alternative Clean Energy Program, and is scheduled to be completed by mid-2022. It calls for installing what's known as an "Archimedes screw" hydro turbine to pump water from the canal to generate power that can be sold to government or private entities. The project is fish-friendly and would be just the third such turbine in the nation, all of them by New England Hydropower. Similar projects are common in Europe.

"It's all part of an effort to reduce our carbon footprint," Emili said. "As a county, we are striving to be more environmentally friendly."

Officials in both counties say green features will be considered for future building projects.

