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## The Time for Climate Action is Now

The Lehigh Valley has been experiencing more intense storms, higher rainfall amounts, increased flooding, less snow and rising temperatures. Climate change is already impacting the region.

The LVPC has been including climate action policy in all of its recent plans, but there's a lot of work ahead. For that reason, the LVPC and city leaders gathered for a public meeting in June to discuss what's in place, what climate action is being developed and what more must be done to battle this unprecedented threat to our environment and way of life.

The LVPC has been including climate change mitigation policies in its plans since its groundbreaking Climate and Energy Element was released in 2014, and Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton are actively developing plans now.

The Climate and Energy Element goals established seven years ago laid the foundation for all of the LVPC plans to follow. That report was the work of 16 Sustainable Communities Partners from the region, funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"Climate change planning is critical for Lehigh and Northampton counties and each of the 62 local municipalities," Geoff Reese, Director of Environmental Planning at LVPC, said June 10th during a WorkshopLV: Environment virtual meeting that included city planners. "Initial climate action planning efforts are underway for Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, which represent a significant portion of the existing urban environment and "carbon footprint" associated with buildings and public infrastructure. Gaining a complete understanding of each community's impact on climate change is a significant technical and financial undertaking."

Reese discussed efforts the past decade to include climate action policy in LVPC and Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) plans and announced that the LVPC has applied to be part of the Pennsylvania Department of Environment Protection Local Climate Action Program, which starts this summer and runs through the spring of 2022. The program assists in creating a greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory for the region, and subsequent climate action plan. The purpose is to take stock of what's happening and develop a plan to mitigate the impact on the environment.

In its recent Regional Climate Action Assessment draft, presented June 10, the LVPC determined that 100% of the policies in its *Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan*, 86% of the policies in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, 83% of its *Northampton Livable Landscapes Plan* and 74% of the *Lehigh County Livable Landscapes Plan* were policies that would reduce greenhouse gasses in the region, said Julie Benco, Community Fellow, who helped perform the Regional Climate Action Assessment. The assessment can be found at [lvpc.org/climate-action](http://lvpc.org/climate-action)

In all, Benco found that more than 500 goals, policies and actions in those plans are already working to reduce GHG emissions regionwide. For example, *Walk/RollLV* is a bicycle and pedestrian masterplan designed to give people options besides cars, and at the heart of *FutureLV* is the preservation of farmland, open space and natural resources that can help mitigate climate change.

“The LVPC and LVTS plans promote principles of smart growth, economic savings, natural resource protection, green infrastructure and sustainability, among others, that further reinforce climate change mitigation and adaptation,” Reese said.

And there are many partners in that effort. During the workshop meeting, Bethlehem, Easton and Allentown reviewed efforts in those cities.

City plans include:

- Bethlehem – The Christmas City has among the most developed and ambitious plans in the region. Released in April, its plan determined that without action, the 12 days of 90-plus degree temperatures the city experiences now would become 50-83 by 2049. Its 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. Net zero is defined as completely negating the GHG created by humans. Bethlehem is currently developing a framework to measure progress and create institutional accountability.

“The Climate Action Plan Working Group assessed Bethlehem’s vulnerabilities, including impact on vulnerable and general populations and infrastructure [including] buildings, communications, energy, transportation, stormwater management, wastewater management, and water supply and treatment,” said Matt Dorner, Bethlehem Deputy Director of Public Works/Chief of Engineering.

- Easton – With help from the Nurture Nature Center, Easton is developing a climate action plan. It’s 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 target goal is a 30% reduction by 2030 and an 80% reduction by 2050.

“This is not a plan that’s going to sit on a shelf,” said Kate Semmens, Nurture Nature Science Director. “We’re already implementing policies that will make a difference.”

- Allentown – It’s recently adopted Vision 2030 comprehensive plan is full of climate action policies designed to protect the city’s environment. Its Environmental Advisory Council has, with help from state grants and Muhlenberg College, developed a GHG inventory for the city that will be incorporated into a climate action plan being developed, said Irene Woodward, Allentown Director of Planning. But Woodward said the city is anxious to develop a Valleywide partnership to tackle climate change.

“We can’t do it in isolation,” Woodward said. “We look to partner with the LVPC as they move forward on this. Being part of the broader conversation is very important.”

Other efforts are also underway. Lehigh University and Lafayette College are among several education institutions and businesses developing sustainability plans.

Once a GHG inventory is established for the region, further steps are to engage Lehigh Valley businesses, residents, academic institutions, local governments, county government and other interested entities to discuss the GHG inventory results and develop a work program for a regional climate action plan, culminating in the creation of *ClimateLV: The Regional Climate Action Plan* in coordination with our community engagement partners.

“So much to do and all essential to ensure the Lehigh Valley accepts the challenge to get to the forefront of climate action,” Reese said. “It’s going to take a regionwide effort. Who’s In?”

Anyone who would like to get involved can join the WorkshopLV: Environment Working Group by contacting [planning@lvpc.org](mailto:planning@lvpc.org)