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# EPA Administrator Regan Visits Valley to Discuss LVPC Climate Pollution Grant

The U.S. Department of Environmental Protection (EPA) is investing \$5 billion to reduce Climate Pollution and EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan visited the Allentown Waterfront last month to discuss how the program's \$1 million grant to the Lehigh valley will help fight the impacts of climate change.

Regan appeared June 27 along the scenic waterfront with government and political leaders that included U.S. Rep. Susan Wild, Allentown Mayor Matt Tuerk, Lehigh County Executive Phillips Armstrong and Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Director Becky Bradley.

His visit came a month after the LVPC was awarded a \$1 million Climate Pollution Reductions Grant, funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

"We know that tackling the climate crisis demands a sense of urgency to protect people and the planet," Administrator Regan said. "Thanks to Congresswoman Wild's leadership and President Biden's Investing in America Agenda, we have an unprecedented opportunity to provide communities like Allentown with resources to develop innovative strategies that address worsening climate change impacts, create good paying jobs, and deliver economic benefits for all."

Bradley explained how the grant helps the Lehigh Valley take a giant step forward on Climate Action.

"With this grant as a base, I look into the not-too-distant future, to see our carbon emissions on the decline and our communities better prepared for the impacts of climate change," Bradley said.

Tuerk said the grant will impact his city's environment and economy.

"The Climate Pollution Reduction Grants program is going to help this city, Allentown, as well as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, start on a path towards a more sustainable future – and will also help to create good-paying jobs in the immediate," Wild said.

Bradley said she considers it just a downpayment for years of Climate Action funding, now that the Lehigh Valley has been received into the \$5 billion Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program. Entry into the program almost didn't happen because the Climate Pollution Reduction grants targeted each state and the top 67 regions. The Lehigh Valley is the 69<sup>th</sup> largest region in the nation, but the LVPC lobbied the EPA to be part of the original pool, and despite initially being outside of the target, filed a letter to participate in the program. So, when Florida, Kentucky, South Dakota and Iowa failed

to file letters to participate by the March 31 deadline, the Lehigh Valley moved into the program. The EPA has structured the program to span federal, state and local partners, so \$3 million went to Pennsylvania, and \$1 million each to the LVPC, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Commission.

Regan, Tuerk and Wild donned hard hats and reflective vests to tour the under-construction Waterfront property along the picturesque Lehigh River. Ultimately, the Waterfront campus is expected to include several office buildings, apartments, businesses, a riverwalk and an amphitheater – all with gorgeous views of the Lehigh River. The environment is expected to be a focal point of the proposed campus through eco-friendly technologies and utilizing existing natural landscapes to create a shared community space for all residents of Allentown.

The site will also include the Riverside Drive commuter road and trail. With help from a \$21.2 million federal grant awarded to the LVPC and a more than \$14 million match from the Waterfront Development Company, Riverside Drive will be a 3.5-mile multimodal trail and road stretching from Allentown, through the Waterfront development, and into Whitehall Township. It will close Pennsylvania highest priority gap in the D&L Trail, and connect disadvantaged communities to employment and shopping centers, providing new transportation and recreation options, while reducing emissions.

It was a project built on the collaboration of more than 20 local, county, regional, state, and federal partners.

Bradley and IBEW 375 Business Manager Paul Anthony joined Regan, Tuerk and Wild inside the Waterfront's first office building for a talk about regional collaboration and the improvements that are now possible thanks to the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant.

The money will fund specific climate pollution reduction plans, and the LVPC has chosen to use its to reduce industrial-based carbon emissions, addressing the impacts of the region's 30 million square feet of warehouse and logistics centers built over the past seven years – and the truck traffic they bring. The plan will take a look at reducing emissions throughout the industrial sector, through things like building design and innovation, and transportation policies. That plan must be done by March of 2024.

From there, the LVPC will embark on a regionwide climate action plan, likely funded by future EPA money not only to craft a plan, but pay to implement climate policies. That plan will likely be due in 2025.

The LVPC has already sent a letter of intent to apply for federal grants to advance:

- A Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) Bus Rapid Transit Equity and Accessibility Project designed to provide fast, frequent, and comfortable transit service along a dedicated transit line or corridor.

- Equitable, Safe and Resilient Highway System Project that reduces the impacts along Interstate 78, Route 22 and Route 33 by re-envisioning the grass embankments, clover leaf interchanges, roadsides and median public rights-of-way green infrastructure corridors that use native grasses, trees and other plantings to reduce run-off and sedimentation, protecting water resources and endangered species. It will ultimately improve air quality, while enhancing pollination and improving the livability in historically disinvested communities.
- Regional Alternative Fuels Corridor and Connectivity Deployment Project designed to create a regional electric vehicle and alternative fueling infrastructure network that connects secondary and local corridors to the national system along Interstate 78.
- Lehigh Valley Watersheds Assessment to create a global (all 16 watersheds) Act 167/Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Watershed Management Plan and best management practices stormwater management ordinance for the region to accomplish public health, safety and welfare goals, improve resiliency, protect water quality and supply and ensure our livability now and into the future.

Bradley said, “I see this grant as a down payment on a cleaner, healthier future for the Lehigh Valley.”