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Easton

Easton has made strides in climate change fight. New plan outlines more to do.

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The Delaware River between Phillipsburg and Easton nears a crest Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2021, of 21.49 feet, just shy of the 22-foot flood stage, but preliminarily good for 18th-highest on record, according to National Weather Service data. Dave Dabour | lehighvalleylive.com contributor



By [Kurt Bresswein | For lehighvalleylive.com](https://lehighvalleylive.com)

The Delaware River at Easton was retreating, from a crest 6 inches below flood stage, as city council was voting three blocks away on a new climate action plan.

It was the night of Wednesday, Oct. 27, less than two months after Hurricane Ida's remnants Sept. 2 pushed the river at Easton to 25.73 feet, its 10th-highest crest on record.

Inside city council chambers, the climate action plan passed unanimously with little discussion, aside from thanks to the Easton-based Nurture Nature Center for its help in crafting the plan at no charge to city taxpayers. The center worked with Pennsylvania's Local Climate Action Program in coming up with the plan's goals for 2030 like using 100% renewable energy for municipal uses and electric vehicle charging, and cutting low-income residents' energy costs by 20%.

“We feel very strongly about climate change,” said Kate Semmens, the center’s science director, after the vote. “We’re very much about trying to improve the environmental legacy of our community so we can be more resilient, and climate change affects everything so we really wanted to see a plan in place.”

Increased flood risk in Easton is just one concern of climate change, as a warming atmosphere holds more moisture and leads to heavier precipitation, Semmens said. The city’s new plan addresses local concerns but also global responsibilities as part of the fight against a warming planet.

The city is far from alone in the fight.

A week after council adopted the climate action plan, President Joe Biden’s administration on Nov. 2 launched a [plan to reduce methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas](#) that contributes significantly to global warming. The announcement was part of a broader effort with the European Union and other nations to reduce overall methane emissions worldwide by 30% by 2030. At the [United Nations climate conference that opened Oct. 31 and runs through Nov. 12 in Glasgow](#), Scotland, Britain hailed the commitment by more than 100 countries to end deforestation in the coming decade as the first big achievement of the gathering, even as experts noted such promises have been made and broken before.

In the Lehigh Valley, [Bethlehem’s climate action plan presented in April](#) received an [award from the American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter](#) during its annual conference Oct. 17-19 in Pittsburgh.

Taking steps locally to stem climate change isn’t new to Easton. The city as of 2018 was purchasing 100% wind-generated electricity for municipal services from Constellation Energy Group, under a bulk-purchase program through the Pennsylvania Municipal League. That year, [city council pledged unanimously to cut greenhouse emissions citywide](#) by 30% by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

Easton’s new plan outlines ways to reach those goals, and it’s not just municipal government practices that will need to change.

The biggest source of greenhouse-gas emissions in Easton is residential heating and cooling, said Semmens.

“That’s going to require a lot of education, some incentives and just collaboration across all of the community entities,” she said.

To reach the public, the Easton plan calls for students to help lead the way through public education outreach in schools.

Along with renewable energy for municipal uses, Easton’s other steps already taken in the climate change fight include a [composting program run by the Easton Farmers’ Market](#) and urban farming initiatives, Semmens noted.

“This isn’t just something like an ambitious pie-in-the-sky thing that we have to change completely what we’re doing,” she said. “There’s a lot we need to change, but there’s a lot we’re already doing that is putting us on that path.”

You can read the plan in its entirety on the city website, easton-pa.com, or that of the [Nurture Nature Center](#), which operates out of 518 Northampton St.

Here are the climate change targets established by Easton “and safe community for future generations, while improving the quality of life for those who live here today,” according to the plan:

By 2030:

- Easton will reduce energy use in its buildings by 20%.
- 100% of Easton’s electricity will come from renewable energy.
- Electric Vehicles will be powered by 100% renewable energy.
- Easton will incentivize Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certification or equivalent, and/or enforce net-zero building codes for new buildings.
- At least 30% of new housing units (constructed after adoption of the plan) are within a quarter-mile of high-frequency transit are designated affordable. High-frequency transit would be bus stops that are regularly serviced as well as the Easton Intermodal Transportation Center. Affordable refers to the HUD standard of 30% of income for housing costs.
- A food outlet selling fresh produce is located within a 15 minute walk of every resident.
- An emergency cooling center is located within a 10 minute walk for the most vulnerable resident (based on age, income and other factors).
- Increase annual number of households reached by low-income weatherization or energy efficiency programs by 30%.
- Decrease the energy costs of low-income residents by 20%.
- Install roof-top solar on homes of 20% of low and moderate income residents.

By 2050:

- 70% of Easton’s households and businesses will participate in smart grid meter programs.
- 90% of Easton’s existing buildings will complete energy-efficiency improvements.
- 50% of heating fuel derived from fossil-fuels (oil, natural gas and propane) will be switched to a low-carbon fuel source and/or electric heat.
- 100% of public transportation will be carbon-free.
- 80% of light-duty vehicles will be electric.
- 100% of Easton’s light- and heavy- duty vehicles will be electric or fueled by carbon-free fuel.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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