

NEWS

Easton seeks \$15M from program targeting pollution problems in underserved communities

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The Delaware River looking south from the free bridge at Phillipsburg and Easton reaches a forecast crest around minor flood stage the afternoon of Tuesday, December 19, 2023 following heavy rain in recent days. Kathleen Ronan | lehighvalleylive.com contributor



Easton's Director of Public Works Dave Hopkins is hopeful a \$15 million federal grant will be beneficial to both city residents and the environment at large.

Hopkins attended Easton City Council last Wednesday requesting permission to apply for a federal [Environmental and Climate Justice Grant](#). According to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), ECJ Grants "empower community efforts to confront and overcome persistent pollution challenges in underserved communities that have often led to worse health and economic outcomes over decades."

A resolution approved by council secures a memorandum of understanding between the [City of Easton](#) and [Easton Area Joint Sewer Authority](#). Hopkins said the grant requires a nonprofit partner to qualify, and a second resolution solidifies the partnership. The city chose the [Nurture Nature Center](#), which Hopkins believes is the "right organization for that."

"The bulk of the money will be used for the authority to construct a combined heat power system, which is basically a way of generating electricity by burning the methane that we produce from anaerobic digestion at the wastewater plant," he said.

Doing this would generate a renewable source of energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Another chunk of the grant would go toward separating the city's combined sewer systems, according to Hopkins. The known systems in the city are located in North Fourth, Third and Second streets. The main trunk travels down Bushkill Street, through [Larry Holmes Drive](#), and then a combined sewer overflow by Spring Garden Street discharges into the Delaware River during extremely heavy rains.

"If we can separate it, it will help the sewer authority by reducing flow down at the plant, and it's also a boost in the environment," Hopkins said.

The third portion of the grant would fund the distribution of environmental kits to residents. He said this could help promote behaviors, such as using low-flow fixtures and LED bulbs, that reduce environmental impacts. The Nurture Nature Center would also host educational programs to raise awareness of climate and environmental justice issues in the community.

Hopkins said \$7 million would go toward the combined heat power system, the separation of combined sewer systems would use around \$5.5 million, and the remainder would benefit the environmental kits and educational programs.

“This is going to be a long rollout,” Hopkins said. “It’s probably going to take us three or four years, if we’re lucky enough to get it. It’s very competitive.”

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