

Energy Working Group

## Level 2 Report: A Closer Look at Community-Wide Climate Action Plans (CAPs)

May, 2018

Energy Working Group. Northfield, MN 55057

For further information, contact:

Carla Marshall - [marshall569@gmail.com](mailto:marshall569@gmail.com)

Martha Larson - [mlarson@carleton.edu](mailto:mlarson@carleton.edu)

Mary Jo Cristofaro - [mjcristofaro@gmail.com](mailto:mjcristofaro@gmail.com)

\

## Northfield: A City Committed to Addressing Climate Change

Energy Working Group (NEWG) a task force, was assigned by the City of Northfield Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) to advance the recommendations stated in the 2008 Northfield Mayor's Energy Task Force Report. In 2016 the NEWG was tasked by the EQC with a list of four "quick start" actions; these actions include the following:

1. Per Northfield's commitment to the CCPC, do an annual carbon emissions calculation and post publicly. This report should take into consideration carbon emissions for City of Northfield owned properties and emissions for the City of Northfield as a whole.
2. Engage a citizen task force with the charge of utilizing the City's participation in the Minnesota B3 program to advance public awareness and education regarding building energy use in Northfield.
3. Initiate a comparison study of other city-wide Climate Action Plans that target net zero carbon emissions to inform future creation of a Northfield Climate Action Plan
4. Upon completion of the three above items, determine the ongoing role of the NEWG.

In response to item #3 on this task list, the following report draws upon a previous NEWG report that highlights findings from a comparison study of other community-wide Climate Action Plans that target carbon emissions reductions to inform future creation of a Northfield Climate Action Plan. This report delves a bit deeper into the practices of the ten cities outlined in that report with the addition of Carleton College's CAP. The following ten cities + Carleton set clear goals in their CAPs and comprehensively describe and research strategies to reach these goals.

See the Community-wide Climate Action Plans from January, 2016 for links to these CAPs.

Evanston, IL	Bedford, NY	Emeryville, CA	Urbana, IL	Ann Arbor, MI	Creve Coeur, MO
	Oberlin, OH	Dubuque, IA	Burlington, VT	Oak Park & River Forest, IL	

## Overarching Patterns in the 11 Plans:

### What is the scope of the CAP?

- 6 out of the 11 plans focus on two or 2 or more sources (i.e. systems, waste, land use)
- 4 out of the 11 plans focus on energy only
- 1 out of the 11 plans focuses on all encompassing sustainability

### What is the breadth of the CAP?

All 11 plans set goals for both city and community emissions reductions

### Did a consultant help with the creation of the CAP?

5 out of the 11 plans hired a consultant to assist the CAP process either alongside city departments, alongside community members, or alongside both

### What was the scope of the cities' community outreach efforts?

- 6 out of the 11 plans engaged in community outreach before and after creating the CAP
- 3 out of 11 plans engaged in community outreach only after creating the CAP
- 2 out of 11 plans did not explicitly engage in community outreach

### Did the city send out a community survey?

3 out of the 11 plans created a community survey to gather input

### Who is responsibility for tracking?

7 out of the 11 plans assigned a combination of people including city departments, the city's sustainability coordinator, a consultant, and community members to track the plan's progress and results

## Notable CAP Components:

**Bedford, New York** created the Bedford2020 Coalition, a nonprofit composed of Task Forces staffed with over 90 community volunteers. This nonprofit is charged with the implementation of Bedford's CAP. <http://bedford2020.org/climate-action-plan/>

**Dubuque, Iowa** created a business survey to determine what businesses value with regards to sustainability. This survey helped inform the creation of their CAP's content.

**Dubuque, Iowa** engaged in a collective social learning process to answer the question: How will we define and implement the necessary actions to meet Dubuque's greenhouse gas and resiliency goals?

**Carleton College** will uniquely achieve its carbon reduction goals by phasing in major renewable energy resources including geothermal energy.

**Evanston, Illinois** gained support for their CAP from Evanston institutions by kick-starting an energy-saving competition in which Evanston's seven biggest employers competed to see who could reduce the most energy.

**Burlington, Vermont** disseminated thousands of surveys to community members to determine the city's strengths and weaknesses as well as the community's dreams for a more sustainable Burlington.

**Creve Coeur, Missouri** holds regular municipal Green Team meetings, composed of a team of city employees who create, evaluate, coordinate, and implement city-wide sustainability initiatives.

**Ann Arbor, Michigan** initially funded their CAP with a Pollution Prevention grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Environment. This grant allowed the city to gather a task force of local experts to draft the CAP.

**Oberlin, Ohio** set goals for community outreach initiatives including creating a community/ business environmental award, promoting green businesses, and developing support of a buy local campaign.

**Urbana, Illinois** rolled out its CAP in two phases. Phase I included actions that could be implemented quickly. Phase II contained a more thorough set of strategies. This phase was developed after two years of public and stakeholder input.

## General CAP Takeaways and Advice from Cities:<sup>1</sup>

Kumar Jensen, Sustainability Coordinator, Evanston, Illinois:

*"It is important to understand bandwidth. Will you have a paid city staff person dedicated to this project? Will it be a volunteer-driven effort? Will it be lead by a city staff person who does not have 'sustainability' in their job title but is working as a liaison?"*

*"You're going to try to have to point some fingers. Say, 'the hospital is responsible for this portion,' and get other institutions to commit to implement other aspects of the plan. The city can continue to be the leader, but we won't meet our goals if it's just the city pushing the CAP."*

Jennifer Green, Sustainability Coordinator, Burlington, Vermont:

*"There's a lot to be said about including a lot of people in the CAP process. You want to draft a lasting document that people feel attached to."*

*"The first thing you need is a target and a baseline. We use the Clearpath tool to do that. Then go out publicly and say 'let's brainstorm- what are we going to with transportation, buildings, waste? What is community going to do versus the government?' Do a brain dump and then develop criteria to judge those ideas. Then you need financial, technical, and political will [to make it happen.]"*

Gary Cuneen, Executive Director, Seven Generations Ahead, Oak Park, Illinois:

*"Report cards [a frequent concise overview of how CAP goals are proceeding]] are a good broad strategy to hold accountability and engage the public. After every report card comes out, we make presentations to city government officials, park districts, etc, to make sure people are aware of what is going on."*

*"Decide if you want to collect data from the community at large. If you do institution-by-institution data collection, that will require more time/ resources, and having consistent software will be more critical, because individual organizations will be entering their own information."*

Scott Tess, Environmental Sustainability Manager, Urbana, Illinois:

*"In terms of people coming to [engage with the CAP process,] a focus on 'livability' and 'quality of life' are scoffed at my scientists, but that's what gets people interested. Aim to blend a deep dive with numbers and 'livability' / QOL."*

*"Work with local college students. Find a faculty member to take it on and task to a student. Our city created a Clearpath account, shares the username and password with biology faculty, and that faculty recruits student and supervise them in collecting the CAP data."*

---

<sup>1</sup> Information on this page drawn from interviews with City Sustainability Managers. Phone interviews were conducted in March of 2018.

## Examples of community-wide engagement practices:

### Bedford, New York:

- City sponsored Earth Month activities including a summit on residential energy renovation and construction
- Created 11 Task Forces to participate in CAP creation, led by community members. To engage the community directly, several of the Task Forces focus on community users such as residents, businesses, schools, and civic/ religious groups

### Oak Park, Illinois:

- 900 residents, businesses, institutions, government officials, etc. completed surveys, including 47 pages of written comments in a 4 month time span
- They hosted a community-wide forum to educate the public about the CAP and to gather community input about the CAP's goals and targets

### Urbana, Illinois:

- Signed onto the Mayors' Monarch Pledge, which encourages the city and its citizens to restore local habitat

### Ann Arbor Michigan:

- The A2 Climate Partnerships website gives Ann Arbor residents a direct window into the CAP and clearly outlines ways they can get involved in local sustainability efforts: <https://www.a2cp.org/>

### Dubuque, Iowa:

- Established citizen sustainability task force to engage the public
- Created Dubuque 2.0, which encourages public/private partnerships to work together on sustainability goals

## A few challenges and successes of cities with CAPs<sup>2</sup>:

### Evanston, Illinois:

#### Challenges

- No explicit funding for CAP except salary of city Sustainability Coordinator
- Funding implications of each goal are not specifically outlined in the initial CAP
- Too much burden on the city Sustainability Office, not enough on other city institutions
- Don't have a clear way to figure out why some emissions reductions have occurred

#### Successes

- Surpassed overall carbon reduction CAP targets
- Community buy-in through promotion of city sustainability during festivals, markets, and other events such as monthly Green Drinks and the Evanston Green Living Festival

### Urbana, Illinois:

#### Challenges

- Phase I of the CAP led to spending too much money on minute carbon reductions
- Not enough annual funding for CAP

#### Successes

- Successful bulk solar program
- Won awards from the EPA's WasteWiise program, a web-based platform to track and reduce waste a city's stream
- Engaged in a commercial buildings energy challenge to encourage business owners and managers to benchmark, track, and reduce energy. One year, 81 buildings signed up
- Engaged in community meetings with a "low carbon workbook" that helps individuals and institutions benchmark CO2 emissions and set goals to reduce emissions

### Burlington, Vermont:

#### Challenges

- Transportation emissions are continuing to increase despite reduction goals, in part because housing has not kept up with demand, so residents are working out of town
- Community members were very involved with initial CAP creation, but now the city handles it, so there is less direct community engagement

#### Successes

- Runs an effective, well-received CAP webpage that boils their 200 actions down to top 36. The webpage shows whether an action is "complete," in progress," or "nothing happened." Webpage is a visually appealing way for residents to see the city's progress.
- After success of CAP, Burlington is now transitioning the city to net zero energy-- they are the first city in the country to source from renewables

---

<sup>2</sup> Information on this page drawn from interviews with City Sustainability Managers. Phone interviews were conducted in March of 2018.