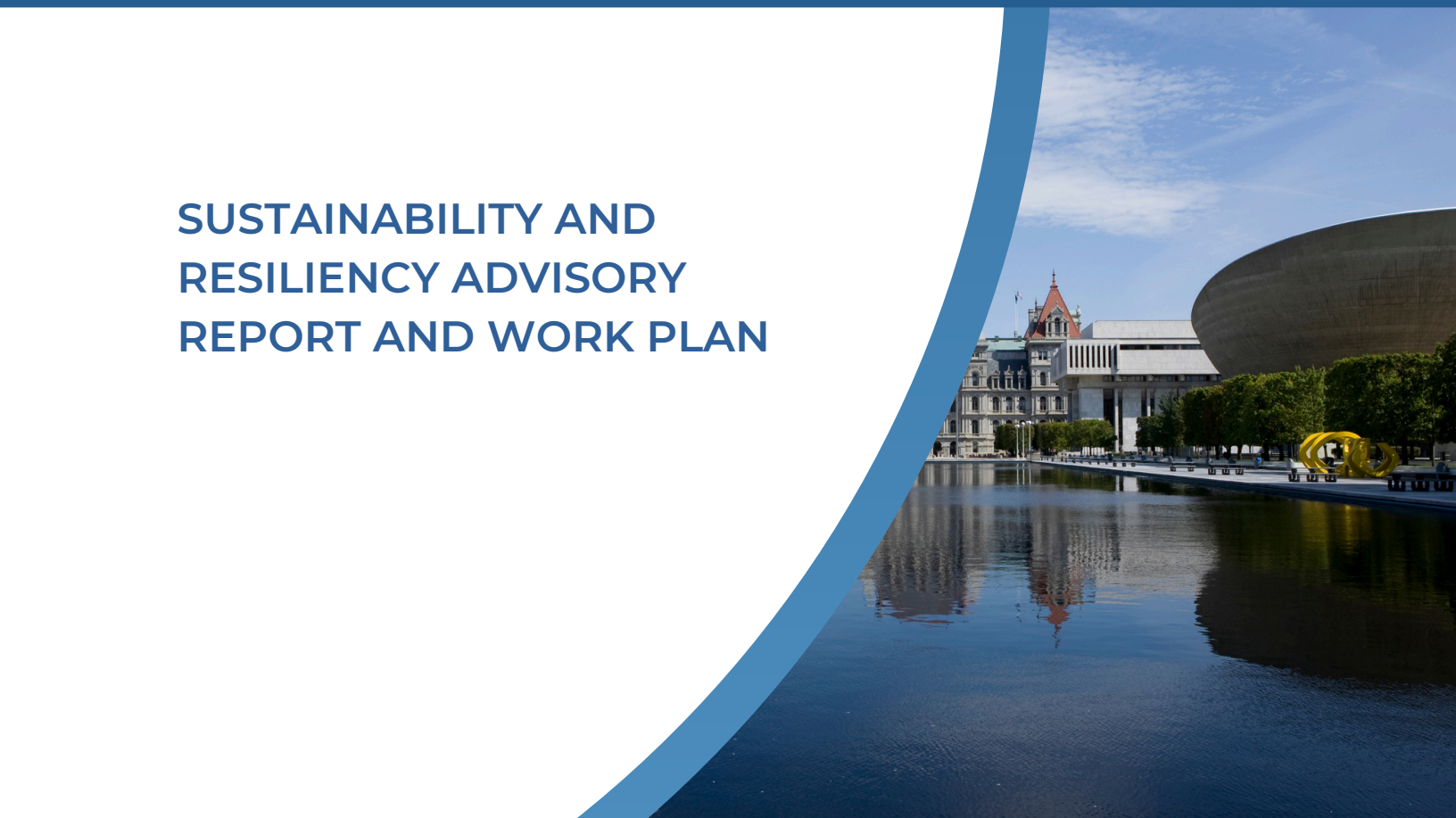
CITY OF ALBANY SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE CITY OF ALBANY'S RESILIENCE AND CLIMATE RESPONSE

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY ADVISORY REPORT AND WORK PLAN



CITY OF ALBANY
SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

MISSION

Established in 2013 by the City Council, the Sustainability Advisory Committee, now known as the City of Albany Sustainability Commission is dedicated to advancing sustainability practices and uniting action on climate change within Albany. Composed of nineteen members, including Albany residents and key city officials, the Sustainability Commission is a dynamic force driving positive change. Together, we are shaping a greener future for Albany by promoting energy efficiency, environmental conservation, and sustainable living.

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In January 2023, the Albany Sustainability Commission submitted a Climate Action Policy Planning letter to Mayor Sheehan, President Corey Ellis, and members of the Common Council outlining steps to build a more resilient and sustainable community. The Commission has dedicated much of 2024 to developing the following Advisory Report and Work Plan which outlines specific strategies and policies.

Key initiatives include:

- Expanding pre-electrification code compliance programs.
- Adopting stringent energy codes.
- Developing a comprehensive electrification roadmap.
- Accelerating the transition to non-petroleum transportation options.
- Sourcing renewable energy and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- Enhancing climate resilience across all sectors.
- Reducing methane emissions through targeted strategies.
- Encouraging local food production, particularly in low-income communities.

These initiatives are designed to strengthen Albany's leadership in sustainability while prioritizing equity. They aim to ensure that all residents, especially those in historically underserved neighborhoods, benefit from safer, more energy-efficient homes and a cleaner environment.

We invite all stakeholders to continue supporting and collaborating on the implementation of these recommendations, which are essential to achieving our city's long-term sustainability goals. Let this report serve as both a guide and a call to action to realize our shared vision for Albany.
Sincerely,

Sincerely,

CITY OF ALBANY SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION, CHAIR

ELIMINATING FOSSIL FUEL USE IN BUILDINGS

New York State has been a leader in energy efficiency initiatives. As the state capital, the City of Albany should continue to demonstrate its leadership in this critical area. A key challenge the City must address is improving energy efficiency in buildings, particularly in historically redlined neighborhoods, before transitioning to electrification.

Currently, electricity is used for heating in 31% of Albany households, while 63% rely on natural gas, and the remaining households use oil. Fossil fuels power heating and cooking in 69% of Albany households, as well as most commercial and institutional buildings. Emissions from natural gas use in buildings account for approximately 40% of the total emissions generated in the City. To achieve the goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, electrifying heating and cooking citywide is essential.

To this end, we encourage the Albany Common Council and the Office of the Mayor to continue providing resources to administer programs and grants through the Albany Community Development Agency. We support the expansion of comprehensive programs aimed at assisting low-income homeowners by offering resources and incentives to improve energy efficiency. Additionally, we advocate for requiring the highest energy efficiency standards for new construction to pave the way for future electrification upgrades.

Recommendations:

1. **Identifying and overcoming barriers to electrification:**
   - **a.** Including weatherization, air sealing, removing mold and asbestos, roof repair or replacement.
   - **b.** Motivate building owners to invest in building conditions, by informing them of financial incentives from state and federal government, and other outreach as appropriate.
   - **c.** Address labor shortages by encouraging coordination between Albany schools and training programs such as Hudson Valley Community College's HVAC program.
   - **d.** Research and negotiate with companies and organizations that offer block-scale efficiency and electrification services.
2. **Adopt the NY Stretch energy code:** (https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Clean-Resilient-Building-Codes/NYStretch-Energy-Code-2020)
3. **Benchmarking:** Require energy monitoring and reporting of all large buildings to encourage owners to increase energy efficiency. Large buildings are defined in §375 of the City Code as 10,000 square feet and/or greater than four stories.
4. **Rooftop solar:** Require rooftop solar in new construction and substantial renovations.
5. **Adopt LEED Gold (or equivalent) building standards** for all new municipal buildings and major renovations.

High Priorities:

- Addressing barriers to electrification (weatherization, mold, etc.).
- Benchmarking and requiring energy monitoring for large buildings.
- Expanding financial incentives for low-income homeowners.

ACCELERATE DEPLOYMENT OF NON-PETROLEUM TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Moving away from petroleum-based transportation requires a multifaceted approach. Key strategies include expanding electric vehicle (EV) charging and related infrastructure, enhancing mass transit options, promoting car, bike, and scooter-sharing programs, and improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

In 2024 the City of Albany committed $11 million over five years to electrify its municipal vehicle fleet. Currently, the City owns and manages eight charging stations, with 14 more set to be added through the DEC's Zero Emission Vehicles grant program. The Office of Sustainability is actively identifying additional locations to qualify for NYSERDA's ChargeReady 2.0 program, which could provide further funding. In parallel, the County and Parking Authority are also working to expand their charging networks, while private businesses, driven by market demand, are increasing charging amenities for customers.

As part of the upcoming Climate Action Plan process, a conceptual plan for on-street electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE) will be developed to guide future deployment.

While the City has made significant progress in advancing EV infrastructure, we recommend the following additional actions to further support the transition to sustainable transportation.

Recommendations:

1. **Establish a network of public EV stations:** Sufficient for densely populated areas with mostly on-street parking (In process).
2. **Electrify the city's vehicle fleet**.(In process)
3. **Collaborate with the Albany Industrial Development Agency (AIDA):** Mandate the inclusion of EV charging in the development of multi-unit dwellings that meet specific criteria. Consider applying this requirement to other commercial developments as well.
4. **Improve pedestrian and cyclist safety:** Va vehicle traffic management, better traffic signals and automatic pedestrian walk signals, protected bicycle lanes and bike boulevards, and adoption of Complete Streets throughout the city.
5. **Collaborate with CDTA:** For better mass transit options, vehicle sharing programs, transit hubs, and equity in access to routes.

High Priorities:

- Expanding EV infrastructure and deploying on-street EV supply equipment.
- Improving pedestrian and cyclist safety through Complete Streets policies.
- Enhancing mass transit and vehicle-sharing options.

INCREASE RENEWABLE ENERGY USE

It is necessary to expand the private use of clean energy. This depends on raising public awareness about options like community solar and incentives for solar panels. The Clean Energy Hubs were designed for this purpose. However, more public outreach is needed. Albany can continue to work with groups like Solarize Albany and Capital District Community Energy to invite residents to sign up for community solar and save on electricity bills.

Recommendation:

1. **Identifying and overcoming barriers to electrification:** Leverage information and volunteers from organizations such as the Capital Region Clean Energy Hub, Solarize Albany, Capital District Community Energy, and governmental agencies like NYSERDA, NYSDEC, and NYPA at city events and programs.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

Addressing climate change adaptation and resilience initiatives, particularly reducing heat stress, is crucial for the City of Albany's well-being. Here are several strategies to consider for Albany's climate change adaptation and resilience initiatives. By implementing these recommendations, Albany can enhance its climate resilience, reduce the impacts of extreme heat, and enhance the health and well-being of its residents:

Recommendations:

1. **Urban Greening and Canopy Expansion:**
   a. **Continue to increase Albany's tree canopy:** Planting more trees in public spaces including parks and along streets, especially in heat-prone neighborhoods.

   b. **Assess the city for green space:** Evaluate the city for areas with limited green space or excessive hardscape using aerial imagery and input from local residents.

   c. **Install pocket parks and other green spaces** in areas not served adequately by trees or parks. Once installed, add signage to identify the reasons for the vegetation in these spaces for both residents and city agencies.

   d. **Promote Green/Cool Roofs and Walls:** Encourage the development of green roofs and living walls on both public and private buildings.
      - Find or create and then share education materials to inform residents, city agencies, and local development groups on the benefits of green roofs and living walls.

   e. **Shade Structures:** Install shade structures in public spaces such as parks, playgrounds, and bus stops to provide immediate relief from heat.

      - Consider co-beneficial approaches such as solar and charge stations in public benches along roads and by bus tops.
      - The Sustainability Commission can conduct an assessment to identify locations lacking or in need of additional shade structures (ex: Morton Avenue playground).

2. **Heat Emergency Action Plan:** The city should develop a Heat Emergency Action Plan (eg. NYS Extreme Heat Action Plan) facilitated by the Albany Sustainability Commission in partnership with community groups and neighborhood associations.

   NYS Extreme Heat Action Plan (EHAP) information: https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/climate-change/effects-impacts/extreme-heat

3. **Continue to address flood prone areas:** Incorporating best water and flood management practices such as bioswales, porous pavement, continued increase of green space and reduced hardscape, and public adoption of rain barrels. Continuing AWD works with DGS and the City Engineer to ensure flood mitigation and green stormwater management practices are incorporated in all street paving and reconstruction projects.

4. **Climate-Responsive Urban Planning:**

   a. Update building codes and zoning regulations to encourage climate-resilient construction, including the use of materials and designs that reduce heat absorption and improve natural cooling, and increase resilience to extreme rain events. For more info about resilient building codes, see this HUD resource: https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-dr/resilient-building-codes/

   b. Encourage mixed-use development that reduces sprawling development and therefore urban heat island effects.

High Priorities:

- Expanding Albany's tree canopy and green space in heat-prone neighborhoods.
- Developing a Heat Emergency Action Plan in collaboration with community groups.
- Updating building codes to encourage climate-resilient construction.
- Increasing the use of green infrastructure (e.g., porous pavement, bioswales).

WASTE MANAGEMENT: REDUCING METHANE EMISSIONS BY PROMOTING REDUCTION OF FOOD WASTE AND INCREASED COMPOSTING OF FOOD SCRAPS

In 2020, the City of Albany launched a volunteer composting program to extend landfill life and reduce methane emissions (www.albanynyrecycles.com).

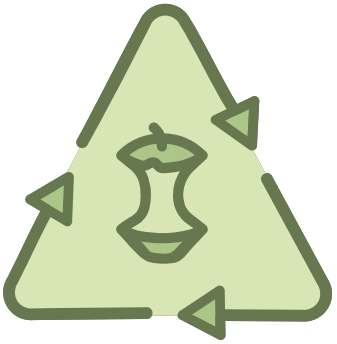
The City should continue to promote home composting partnering with local businesses and organizations to manage food scrap collection and aerobic composting. This would benefit community gardens, and minimize greenhouse gas emissions.
Also the Sustainability Commission should work with city department partners to identify the resources needed to complete a Zero Waste Plan and an Organics Management Plan.

Recommendations:

1. **Adopt composting as citywide practice:** Keeping the product as local as possible.
2. **Provide educational publications and programming** about reducing food waste and composting.
3. **Develop Zero Waste Plan and an Organics Management Plan:** Identify resources needed to complete a Zero Waste Plan and an Organics Management Plan.

High Priorities:

- Expanding composting programs.
- Promote food waste reduction and composting.
- Developing a Zero Waste Plan and Organics Management Plan.



ENCOURAGE LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

Encouraging local food production, particularly in low-income communities is essential for several reasons. Most importantly, it provides affordable access to nutritious foods, helping to combat food insecurity and promote better health among residents who may otherwise have limited access to fresh produce. Initiatives such as community gardens and mobile markets not only deliver fresh fruits and vegetables directly to neighborhoods but also foster community engagement and education about nutrition and gardening. Additionally, local food systems can enhance resilience against climate change by reducing reliance on global supply chains, which are often vulnerable to climate-related disruptions. Supporting local farmers and markets also has economic benefits, creating jobs and keeping money within the community.

Promoting local food production can significantly improve food security, enhance community health, and contribute to economic and environmental resilience in Albany. The City could implement several policies to support local food production and improve food access:

Recommendations:

1. **Support Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture:** Encourage community partnerships between local organizations and city offices such as DGS and Neighborhood and Community Services to increase community gardens, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

2. **Implement Public Awareness Campaigns:** The Albany Sustainability Commission should work with local organizations to promote the benefits of local food and how to access it.

3. **Promote Farm-to-School Initiatives:** The Albany Sustainability Commission should encourage city schools to explore options for purchasing more locally grown foods and building/maintaining school gardens. Also the Commission can provide information regarding grants such as the USDA Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and the USDA Farm to School Grant Program.

4. **Youth Farming:** We also suggest providing opportunities for increasing student awareness and participation in local agriculture including growing food, harvesting and composting. One avenue is through the City's Student Youth Employment Program.

High Priorities:

- Expanding community gardens and urban agriculture.
- Promoting farm-to-school initiatives and integrating local food systems into schools.
- Using the City's Student Youth Employment Program to introduce young people to urban agriculture.

VISION AND CONCLUSION

As the Capital City of New York, Albany has a unique opportunity to address the pressing challenges of climate change, energy efficiency, and community well-being through collaboration and decisive action. The Albany Sustainability Commission envisions a future where the City of Albany can make significant progress in sustainability, resilience and equity.

These recommendations, spanning building electrification, sustainable transportation, renewable energy, waste reduction, climate adaptation, and local food systems, are designed to move Albany toward its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 while ensuring that historically underserved communities benefit equitably from these advancements.

To achieve these goals, it is essential to strengthen collaboration between the Sustainability Commission and City leadership, including the Common Council, the Office of the Mayor, and City department commissioners. Progress to date has demonstrated the importance of aligning efforts, breaking down silos, and fostering open communication. Moving forward, a shared commitment to sustainability must guide decision-making at every level.

Now is the time to act with purpose and unity to realize this shared vision for our city.

PROGRESS. TOGETHER.

GET INVOLVED

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