



environmental advisory council

10 East Church Street

Bethlehem, Pa. 18018

www.bethlehemeac.org

December 14, 2023

Dear Mayor Reynolds and Honorable Members of City Council,

In accordance with the Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council Bylaws, we submit the following report for the year 2023. In 2023 our meetings have been hybrid; held virtually via zoom and in person at Northampton Community College Fowler Family Center on 3rd Street, in order to be more accessible. In accordance with the Sunshine Laws, our meetings are open to the public and we routinely benefit from outside attendance.

Our most important work is supporting the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP), which aims to reduce our carbon footprint, increase sustainability and utilize alternative energy sources. In order to implement the strategies of the CAP, we worked with the administration and participated on the City's internal CAP Committees. EAC members are represented on the Committees for Public Engagement, Environmental Justice, Transportation and Mobility, Local Food and Waste and Land Use and Greenspace. During the course of the year, a City representatives from each of the nine CAP committees attended one of our meetings, providing an update and opportunity to ask questions.

In January the EAC re-engaged our Green, Transportation, Waste Reduction and Bird Town PA Committees. The committees include volunteers from the community. The Bird Town PA Committee submitted the first annual report required by the state and we are proud to report that Bethlehem City achieved the Silver Level. (There are four levels, with silver the third level and gold the highest.) We also held a Bird Town Event at Camel's Hump in May.

The Green Committee and the Bethlehem Backyards for Wildlife Committee obtained a grant and planted native vegetation along the perimeter of Madison Park, engaging area residents to help. At the State EAC Network Fall Gathering, we gave a presentation detailing the project. We hope to conduct plantings in other areas in 2024.

Our Transportation Committee has been working with the City on ways to make Electric Vehicle chargers available for those that do not have access to a private garage. We are discussing options for a pilot project. Our members also attended Transportation Workshops

hosted by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and have submitted comments on their transportation plan.

Our Waste Reduction Committee did extensive research to answer council members' questions regarding a proposal for a single use plastic bag ban. We plan to address food waste, including composting, in 2024. We coordinated two tours of the Theis/Cornfield Recycling Center and Yard Waste Facility for EAC members, volunteers and members of City Council. Michael Halbfoerster, Director of Recycling, has extensive knowledge and experience with recycling and waste management. Our great appreciation goes to him for his time with us and effort to make Bethlehem's Recycling Center so successful.

Bethlehem Backyards for Wildlife is an active standing committee of the EAC with a dedicated group of volunteers. Please see page 5 of this report for an overview of their mission and activities in 2023.

In August EAC members met with Michael Alkhal, Director of Public Works, Chris Sule, Superintendent of Grounds Maintenance and Jodi Evans, Recreation Director, to discuss water fountains in city parks and the city in general. Thanks to these representatives, the City installed a modern water fountain at the redesigned Fairview Park as a pilot project.

Our EAC worked with other Lehigh Valley EACs to present a forum at PBS39 Media Center in Bethlehem with a panel discussion on "Funding Municipal Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Programs" in June.

Additional Accomplishments for 2023 include:

Letters

The Department of Planning & Zoning gives the EAC the opportunity to comment and make recommendations for proposed developments. Our recommendations are based on furthering the goals of the CAP. All of our correspondence can be found on our website www.bethlehemec.org and includes the following projects:

- 25 West 3rd Street
- 218-226 W. Union Boulevard
- 925 Bethlehem Drive
- 1275 E. 4th Street
- 1323-1339 E. 4th Street
- 1411-1435 Greenview Drive
- 1610 Spillman Drive LVIP VII Lot 9B
- 1746, 1742 & 1800 Elliot Ave
- 2105 Creek Road
- 2300 Hanover Avenue/2235 West Broad
- 2571-2651 Easton Avenue
- 2410 Linden Street

- 3769 Commerce Boulevard Lot 5
- LVIP VII Lot 23B
- Martin Tower Revised Master Plan
- Steam Academy
- Bethlehem Landfill

EAC 2023 Activities

- Spoke at the Climate Action Press Conference at Bethlehem City Hall
- Interview for the “Bethlehem Corner”
- Presented at the Iacocca Global Entrepreneurship Program, a summer program for high school students hosted by Lehigh University
- Attendance at Citizens’ Traffic Advisory Council (CTAC) meetings
- Tabled at Friendship Park Block Party
- Tabled at the Rose Fest at the Rose Garden

Our tabling presence at events is now more professional thanks to the City for providing us with a new table and tablecloth complete with our EAC logo.

Speakers at EAC Monthly Meetings

- Victoria Bastides, Friends of Johnston Inc.: Stormwater management/beautification project along Route 191
- Lehigh University students Esther Cisneros-Ramos, Isabella Jacavone, Tessa Dougan, and Laruen Hagerty: Miyawaki Garden project
- Lehigh University students Christian Martinez-Abraham, Violette Bonvallet, and Chanakya Nukala: Air Quality project
- Lehigh University student Lauren Dougherty: “Environmental Injustice on the South Side: How Planting More Trees Can Promote Equality”
- Lehigh University student Giavanna Gast: Greenery in Bethlehem: Nature Accessibility Challenges in a Post-Industrial City
- City Forester, Olivia Teel
- Celina Daddario, Northside Alive Coordinator: Friendship Park Improvements

One of our EAC members served as the mentor to the students for two of these projects.

In 2024 we look forward to working with the Nurture Nature Center’s (NCC) ““CREATE Connections: Linking a Vision of Resilience to Action” project. NCC will work with Easton and Bethlehem to increase environmental literacy around climate action and resiliency, engaging municipal leaders, universities and community organizations that work with the underserved.

Our great appreciation goes to Tad Miller, City Clerk, and Bettina Bubba, Assistant City Clerk, for their assistance. They respond immediately to all of our requests and questions, and facilitate communication between the EAC and City Council. Additional appreciation to Stephanie Aguello, Chief of Staff, for facilitating communication with the Mayor’s office.

We are grateful to Darlene Heller, Director of Planning & Zoning, and Craig Peiffer, Assistant Director of Planning & Zoning for the generous amount of time they give working with the EAC. We also acknowledge and thank Michael Alkhal, Director of Public Works, for his department's ongoing contributions to Bethlehem City.

We also recognize and appreciate our City Council liaison, Kiera Wilhelm, for her input, research, support, attendance at our meetings and continued efforts on behalf of climate action.

Finally, we commend City Council and the Administration for their support of the CAP and initiatives to make Bethlehem a greener, more pedestrian and bike friendly city. In 2024 we will continue to assist in implementing the goals and strategies of the CAP.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Rothman

Lynn Rothman, Chair
Bethlehem, EAC

On behalf of the Bethlehem EAC:

Ben Felzer, Vice Chair

Ben Guthrie, Secretary

Vibhor Kumar

Mandy Tolino

Mike Topping

Katie Trembler

cc: Department of Public Works
Department of Planning & Zoning
Department of Recycling

Bethlehem Backyards for Wildlife (BBFW) – Overview of 2023

Our mission: To work with the City of Bethlehem to support biodiversity and minimize negative environmental impacts by encouraging city residents, schools, businesses, and other organizations to implement wildlife-friendly and sustainable garden practices.

Native Plant Demonstration Gardens maintained by the BBFW committee and community volunteers:

Meadow on the Southside Greenway

Hoover-Mason Trestle at the Steel Stacks

Rose Garden Pollinator Garden on the West Side

Native Perennial Plantings at Madison Park on the Southside

On-going projects:

Rose Garden Pollinator Garden – continued maintenance of the two native perennial gardens on 8th Ave that BBFW designed and planted in 2019

Rose Garden – continued maintenance of the refurbished pollinator garden beds

New volunteers joined us to help maintain the ten garden beds up on the **Hoover Mason Trestle** and at the **Meadow on the Southside Greenway**, which are valuable assets to the City of Bethlehem. At the Meadow, we refurbished the boundary walkway that surrounds the two planted areas by removing weeds that had taken over the walkway and resetting each of the large stones that define the two spaces' borders. A native Redbud tree was planted in the Meadow in memory of Ilse Stoll to recognize her positive impact of teaching gardeners throughout the Lehigh Valley the importance of planting native perennials to help pollinators and provide native habitat.

New for 2023:

Together with members of the Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council, BBFW organized a park renovation project at **Madison Park on the Southside**. This neighborhood park had been recently refurbished with new playground equipment and a pavilion. BBFW applied for and received a grant from the Pennsylvania Native Plant Society to purchase 250 native perennials. Along with neighbors who live near the park, a cardboard/compost mulching project at the end of April prepared three beds along the chain-link fence for planting in the summer. City Crews supplied a water cube so that the plants could be adequately watered through the fall. The City Forester also arranged for four native trees to be planted in the park. This park gets a lot of use from the neighborhood residents and now serves as a model for how to use native trees and perennial flowers to create a beautiful, welcoming, and sustainable environment.

Special thanks to Chris Sule in the Public Works department for his assistance with all of the above projects.