

“A Conversation with Greenable Woodbridge”.....Understanding the climate question and what we can do about it?

Sustainability Pillar: Climate Mitigation & Resiliency

Introduction: Back in 1975 a Columbia University professor is credited with first using the term “Global Warming” in an article ironically entitled “Climatic Change: Are We on the Brink of a Pronounced Global Warming?” Since that time, a national and even international debate has raged over the term global warming. Former Vice President Al Gore’s campaign to raise awareness even resulted in an award winning 2006 documentary film by Davis Guggenheim called “An Inconvenient Truth.” Unfortunately, debate over terminology and data has distracted focus away from the clear need for better preparedness, adaptation and resiliency in the face of more frequent and severe weather events.

Over the past decade, the term “climate change” has grown in popularity to better connect to an indisputable fact – the world, our nation, our state and our region are experiencing more frequent extreme weather events. Greenable Woodbridge has adopted a format for communication with Township residents called “The 12 Pillars of Sustainability.” Our July Pillar is Climate Mitigation & Resiliency. Each week in July we will post topical summaries on the Climate question. These summaries will address:

- What is Climate Change and why do we care about it?
- What is the State of New Jersey doing to address climate change?
- What have we done in Woodbridge Township to combat climate change?
- What can each of us do to help the fight?

The narrative summaries will also be supplemented by companion You-Tube videos and links to additional reference materials for those interested in more detail.

Week 3: What have we done in Woodbridge Township combat climate change?

We only need to look back at October 28, 2013 and Superstorm Sandy to recall the impact of severe weather right here in Woodbridge Township. Over \$3 million was spent by the Township alone in terms of debris removal, materials, supplies and staffing. Fortunately, through detailed recordkeeping, the Township was able to recoup \$2.8 million through FEMA reimbursement

programs. The NJDEP Blue Acres Program purchases improved residential lots in flood prone areas in cooperation with FEMA and once acquired, removes the structures and improvements from the floodplain. Woodbridge had 436 residents that were eligible for Blue Acres buy-outs stemming from Superstorm Sandy. Of the 436 homeowners, 175 (40%) applied for the buy-out. One-hundred of these residents have already closed and sold to Blue Acres and about half of the homes bought have already been demolished and taken out of harms way.

Long before the devastation of Superstorm Sandy, Mayor McCormac understood both the need for Woodbridge to be a “sustainable community” and to plan ahead for the impacts of climate change. In September of 2010 the Township adopted its initial “Sustainable Community Plan (SCP) and Climate Action Plan (CAP)” in the context of our participating in the “Sustainable Jersey Program” <http://www.sustainablejersey.com> . The Plan, which is a living document, has since been revised and updated in October 2010, April 2012 and May 2015. Woodbridge has been the “Sustainable Jersey Champion” for large communities with population over 40,000 residents for five of the last six years (choosing not to participate in 2014 in order to apply for a National Program called Energy Star, which we obtained). (Our SCP and CAP programs represent only one of many initiatives geared toward making Woodbridge the most sustainable community in New Jersey.)

Sustainable Jersey defines a Climate Action Plan or CAP as *“a set of strategies and actions designed to lower the greenhouse gas emissions of a municipality. A CAP establishes a timeline for achieving specific emission reduction goals, identifies key strategies for achieving these goals, and tracks progress through the use of measures or indicators. A CAP can also help prioritize the allocation of funding and resources, and analyzes the costs and benefits that result from implementing new strategies.”* The May 6, 2015 update to the plan can be found at: <http://www.greenablewoodbridgenj.com/images/pdfs/ClimateActionPlan.pdf> . The CAP provides Township residents and businesses with the long-term goals identified for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and detailed descriptions of the actions for achieving these goals. These actions are extremely comprehensive and link to a number of “Sustainability Focus Areas” which include: Transportation; Buildings & Energy; Water, Trees & Open Space; Green Purchasing; Local Economy; and Community. For each specific action, the CAP gives a “priority” (in terms of focus), projected annual economic savings, projected GHG emissions reductions, implementation costs and the year for completion.

In total, some 26 specific actions have been identified and advanced over the past five years (please access the link to the SCP and CAP noted above for more information on each). A short list of some of the major actions include the following:

- Tracking municipal energy expenditure and building maintenance;
- Clustering municipal facilities toward implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy measures;
- Enforcing anti-idling policies for medium, heavy-duty and non-emergency municipal vehicles;
- Continue implementing our Alternative Fuel Vehicle Fleet program;

- Promote car-pooling and the use of Alternative Fuel Vehicles;
- Strategic preservation and enhancement of open space;
- Establish a public/private sector Industrial Advisory Group to promote climate change mitigation;
- Create and implement a “Anything But Cars” (ABC) Program to promote walking and biking;
- Perform small business energy efficiency outreach on financial incentives;
- Support and become a leader in Regional transportation planning and implementation;
- Implement a tree canopy planting program;
- “Green” Downtown Woodbridge and other large multi-use redevelopment projects;
- Adopt and make available a Community Energy Aggregation Program to Township residents and businesses;
- Integrate the arts into redevelopment areas.

Now that we have framed what our State has been doing and our Climate Action Plan, we will link all these actions to what we, as residents of Woodbridge Township, can do to join in the fight.

To Learn More: If interested, please check out the following websites and You-Tube videos:

Websites and Literature:

- “Sustainable Community Plan and Climate Action Plan – Woodbridge Township, New Jersey,” May 6, 2015 Revision
<http://www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=9k99EGuWWb4%3d&tabid=751>
- Website of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Sustainability and Green Energy Program: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/sage/climate-energy.html>
- Website of the New Jersey Climate Adaptation Alliance: <http://njadapt.rutgers.edu>
- NJ Climate Brochure: <http://njadapt.rutgers.edu/nj-climate-brochure/file>
- “Resilience – Preparing New Jersey for Climate Change: Policy Considerations from the New Jersey Climate Adaptation Alliance”: <http://njadapt.rutgers.edu/docman-lister/resource-pdfs/120-resilience-preparing-new-jersey-for-climate-change-policy-considerations/file>
- New Jersey Global Warming Response Act: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/sage/docs/gw-responseact-07.pdf>
- “New Jersey’s Global Warming Response Act Recommendations Report” – December 2009: http://www.nj.gov/dep/sage/docs/njgrwa_final_report_and_appendices_dec2009.pdf

You-Tube Videos:

- Climate Science: What You Need To Know (PBS Digital Studios)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_4055255825&feature=iv&src_vid=y2euBvdP28c&v=ffjlyms1BX4

- Why People Don't Believe In Climate Science (PBS Digital Studios)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2euBvdP28c>

- Climate change just hit home (NBC documentary)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8EXhJmUkNE>

- Climate Change Is Happening Faster Than You Think (DNews)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8-9U-MF1Ko>

- Morgan Freeman's Powerful Climate Change Short Film (The Daily Conversation)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YQIaOldDU8>