Town of Pleasant Valley Climate Smart Task Force Community Education and Engagement Plan August 2021





INTRODUCTION

Background and Objectives of Climate Smart Communities

Climate Smart Communities (CSC) is a New York State program that supports local governments in leading their communities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and adapt to the effects of climate change. The CSC program began in 2009 as an interagency initiative of New York State; the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) acts as the main administrator of the program.

By taking the Climate Smart Communities Pledge, a community expresses its commitment to taking action on climate change and is designated a Registered Climate Smart Community. Becoming a member of the CSC program is free and voluntary; there are no fees or legal requirements. Registered communities have made a commitment to act by passing the CSC pledge which Pleasant Valley did in 2016.

The Climate Smart Communities Certification Program is a set of actions wherein a community strives to complete, through a Climate Smart Community Task Force, actions that mitigate and adapt to climate change on a local level. Each community defines its own best strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building resiliency to the impacts of climate change, save taxpayer dollars, improve community public health and safety, support a green innovation economy, and demonstrate leadership, cutting energy use, reducing emissions and adapting and mitigating climate change.

Certified Communities are the foremost leaders in the state; they have gone beyond the CSC pledge by completing and documenting these actions. They benefit their communities through the following CSC resources:

* Receive funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation programs via the DEC CSC Grant program.
* Reduce the cost of clean vehicles and associated charging/fueling stations via the DEC Municipal Zero-emissions Vehicle Rebate program.
* Receive free technical assistance for clean energy and climate change initiatives from regional coordinators.
* Discover online guidance and decision-support tools via web pages.
* Learn about best practices through CSC webinars.
* Network with like-minded community leaders at CSC events and workshop.

By implementing certification actions, communities experience the following local benefits:

* Cost savings through greater efficiency
* Greater energy independence and energy security
* Improved air quality from switching to clean energy
* Healthier, more walkable urban centers through smart growth
* Conservation of green spaces for recreation and biodiversity
* Reduction of future flood risk through climate change adaptation strategies
* Investment in an economy that supports sustainability and green businesses
* Greater engagement with residents who care about the future of their hometowns

**PE9 Action: Climate Change Education & Engagement**

**Why is this action important?**

Public education, outreach, and engagement are critical to preparing communities for the effects of climate change and to enlist the public in taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as part of preventing further climate change. Engagement initiatives are often most effective when local governments partner with regional planning organizations and/or outreach specialists who can help them reach a wide range of community stakeholders. Outreach efforts provide opportunities to collaborate with nontraditional stakeholder groups, start conversations about the community’s future, deepen a sense of identity and social cohesion, and identify innovative ways to reduce GHG emissions and build community resilience to climate change.

**Goals**

There are five goals we wish to accomplish through community engagement and education:

* Helping the community to better understand and prepare for the impact of climate change on their natural resources, businesses, schools, and agricultural resources, and how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their households.
* Reducing waste to landfill with a key focus on minimizing food waste through composting. Exploring ways to reduce, reuse and recycle.
* Improving water efficiency. Securing our water resources.
* Generating local renewable energy and improving energy efficiency by enabling renewable energy projects for residents and community assets by improving building efficiency and access to energy efficient products.
* Lowering emissions from transportation through supporting community access to sustainable transportation options including public transport, cycling, walking and energy efficient vehicles.

When planning our actions to educate and engage the community we must consider that climate change communication is shaped by our different experiences, mental and cultural models, and underlying values and worldviews. We must keep in mind that talking about climate change can bring up sensitive topics and be aware of how people react to and are affected by the conversations.

According to census.gov; in 2020, Pleasant Valley, NY had a population of 9,799 people and a median household income in 2019 of $84,645. The race breakdown groups in Pleasant Valley, NY are White (Non-Hispanic) (83.9%), Black or African American alone (3.3%), Hispanic or Latino (7.1%), Asian alone (1.3%), Two or more races (4.1%). The mean travel time to work for works age 16+ was 31.2 minutes.

The Census also states that that in 2019 94% of persons aged 25 years + are high school graduates or higher and that 30.4% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. Another finding from the Census is that 92.7% households have a computer and 86.4% have a broadband Internet subscription.

The demographic data needs to be considered in setting the content, tone, locations, scheduling, and direction of our action plan. For example, knowing that 86% of residents have a computer and internet is good support for online campaigns but we need to consider that there is at least 15% of the community that we will not be reaching. Therefore, we would clearly need to also consider physical methods and possibly collaboration with other groups.

Although not broken down above the community is a mix of ages with about 20% under the age of 18 and 15% over the age of 65. Therefore, when engaging with the community we not only have to offer an adult action, but we need to consider an action that would keep the younger individuals occupied and engaged. Handouts would need to be factual and straightforward for the adults while we also need to have handouts that offer education information in a fun entertaining way in simpler language.

We also must consider the median income and poverty level of the community and be sure that we are offering affordable ideas to help stop climate change or at the least cost saving actions, if not free.

Although when considering so many factors the goals may seem attainable, it is tantamount that these actions are reviewed regularly and adjusted according to current conditions for feasibility and accomplishment.

**Action Plan**

We as a Climate Smart Task Force will be completing actions as a group but we also need to engage and educate residents so we can create a sustainable community. We cannot do or see all the ways our town can prepare for climate change and the reduction of greenhouse emissions therefore we must also let the community educate us. Even the smallest of actions is one step closer to achieving our goals, but a community cannot succeed unless they have the education and resources.

The following is our action plan:

* ***Informational materials*;** gather specific materials that relate to our community and design our own and distribute them at various public events. These will include tips and ideas, games, resources guide etc.
* ***Partnering with community-based organizations;***coordinate, educate and collaborate with various community organizations such as but not limited to: Camp Sunny Days, Arlington Central School District, PV Scouts Troop 55, Pleasant Valley Library, Cary Institute, Land Conservancies, and the like.
* ***Hands on Activities****;* to not only present but to engage such as create a composting jar, repurposing items normally discarded, taking a group walk, creating a Repair Café.
* ***Movie Nights;***show movies that explain climate change and the effects along with what we can do to help.
* ***Events****;* have a presence at large public events with take always and hand on activities such as PV Weekend, Festival of Lights and other community events.
* ***Social Media;***create a Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter account to promote events, give ideas, present facts and interact with the community.
* ***Webpage;***create webpage including total transparency on what the Task Force is doing, promote events, list resources, interact with community.
* ***Surveys;***to understand where education and engagement is needed and to understand the thoughts and concerns of the community create a survey via social media, website, events and/or mail.
* ***Workshops;***to disseminate information, tools and techniques and to build participant networks of support and practice.
* ***Continuing Education;*** Those within the task force will continue to educate themselves through programs such as the Cornell Climate Change Stewards, receiving email alerts from the DEC and other organizations and staying on top of current programs and news.

This engagement strategy will evolve in response to participation and mutual learning.