

Climate Change

Creating resilient New Jersey communities

Randall Solomon, Executive Director, Sustainable Jersey



Once a seemingly abstract concept, climate change is now viewed by local officials as a reality they need to understand and address today. Rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, shifts in rainfall and storm patterns, and chronic flooding are changes that New Jersey communities already experience. These impacts amplify other challenges, such as infrastructure conditions, inequality, and public health.

With authority over land use, transportation, housing, energy, stormwater, public health and safety, and major infrastructure decisions, municipalities are on the frontlines of adapting to the impacts of climate change. A new state law requires municipal governments to plan for climate change through their master planning process.

New Jersey's policy environment

In 2020, Governor Phil Murphy signed Executive Order No. 100 asking the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to begin a regulatory reform effort to help reduce greenhouse gas and other climate pollutant emissions while making the natural and built environments more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

In 2021, the New Jersey legislature made changes to the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) to compel municipalities to better plan for the impacts of climate change. On February 4, 2021, Governor Murphy signed into law P.L. 2021, c6, amending the MLUL to require municipalities to incorporate a climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessment into any Master Plan Land Use Element. These assessments will need to analyze current and future threats associated with climate change-related natural hazards including increased temperatures, drought, flooding, hurricanes, and sea-level rise.

Supporting municipal resilience

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) is spearheading and coordinating the work of

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government, non-profit, and academic organizations to support municipalities engaged in resilience work.

Peter Kasabach, executive director of New Jersey Future said, “It is critically important that we support local resiliency planning and implementation with a strategy that is both user-friendly

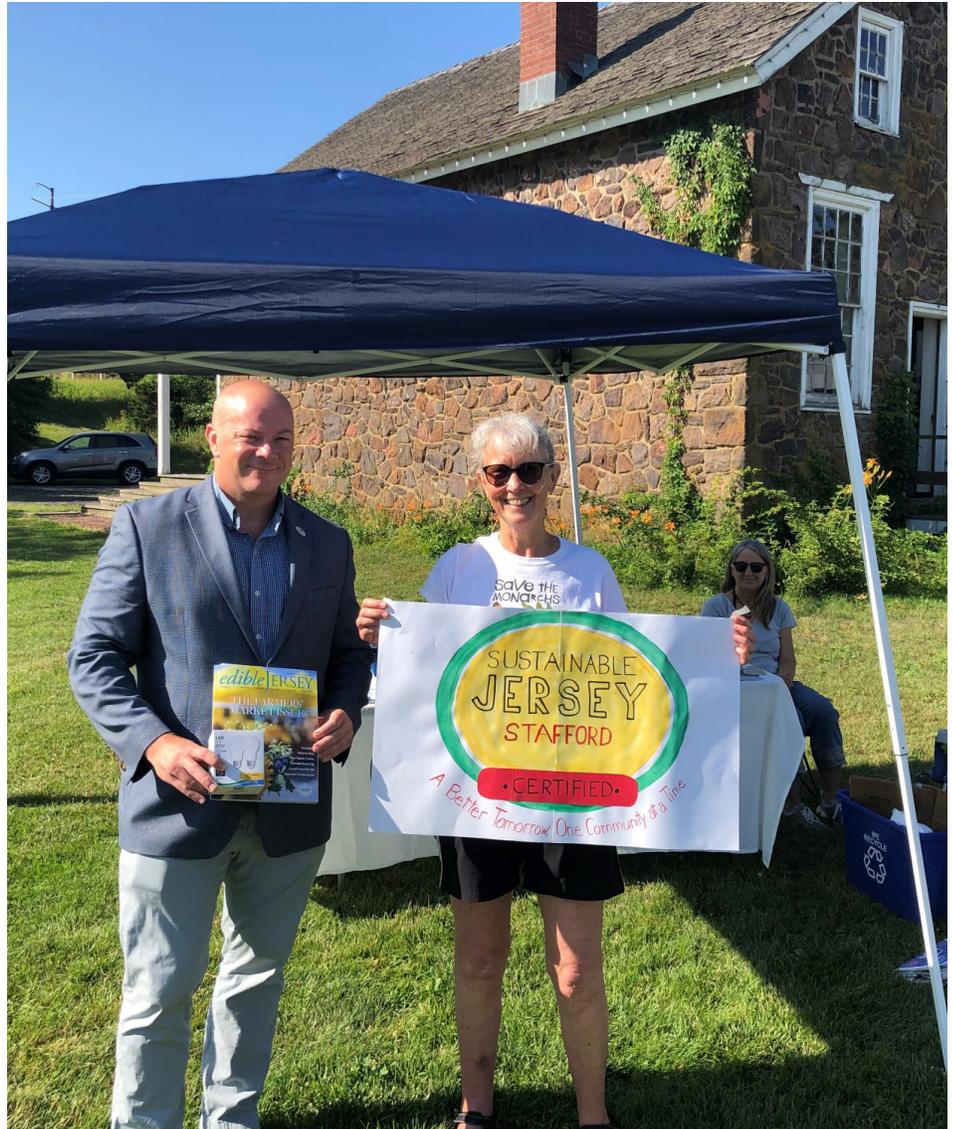
Sustainable Jersey’s resilience work will benefit from review and input from the New Jersey Urban Sustainability Hub.

and that meets measurable, tangible adaptation goals. We need to improve our drinking, storm, and wastewater systems, line up capital spending with resilience plans, elevate racial and economic equity throughout the process, and ensure that decision-making is inclusive and transparent.”

NJDEP has also begun working with Sustainable Jersey, New Jersey Future, Rutgers University, the Urban Coast Institute at Monmouth University, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, and others to support the development of guidance and assistance for New Jersey municipalities. Kasabach added, “New Jersey Future looks forward to working with our nonprofit, for-profit, and government partners to make New Jersey a leader in climate change adaptation.”

Climate Adaptation Task Force

Recognizing that municipalities needed direction on responding and adapting to climate change effects, Sustainable Jersey formed a Climate Adaptation Task Force in 2010 made up of New Jersey’s best and brightest from academics, associations, non-profits, state agencies, and local governments. The task force developed Sustainable Jersey certification actions focused on adaptation to climate



Stafford Mayor Gregory E. Myhre and an environmental supporter.

change. With funding from NJDEP, managed by Sustainable Jersey staff, the Climate Adaptation Task Force was reconvened in 2022. The long-standing co-chairs, Liz Semple, director of adaptation at The Nature Conservancy, and Chris Linn, manager of the Office of Climate and Environment at the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, are guiding the action updates to meet the goal of releasing further guidance through a Gold Star in Resilience in 2024.

Sustainable Jersey’s resilience work will benefit from review and input from the New Jersey Urban Sustainability Hub. In 2021, Sustainable Jersey established the New Jersey Urban Sustainability Hub, which has brought together seven of

the largest and most densely populated urban centers across New Jersey for the purposes of peer learning, peer-directed research, and collaboration. Participating cities include Camden, Hoboken, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, Trenton, and Woodbridge.

Resilient New Jersey

NJDEP continues to develop guidance to help advance local action to respond and adapt to climate change. In his role of Chief Climate Resilience Officer for New Jersey out of the NJDEP Office of Climate Resilience, Nick Angarone is coordinating a statewide resilience policy. Angarone said, “At the local level, we are focused on providing technical guidance

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and support to local governments in their efforts to plan for and address the current and anticipated impacts of climate change. We want New Jersey's communities to make informed decisions about climate resilience and plan for the impacts and the associated hazards."

The new efforts by NJDEP, Sustainable Jersey, and others build on an existing base of resources. The Resilient NJ program, managed by NJDEP's Bureau of Climate Resilience Planning, provides funding and technical assistance for local and regional climate resilience planning.

Regional Resilience Action Plans

To date, four regional projects were awarded funding to develop long-term regional resilience action plans. These regional projects include 24 municipalities located in the coastal zone and bring together teams of municipalities, counties, and community-based organizations. The emphasis is for consultant teams to facilitate community-led efforts throughout the process that supports socially vulnerable populations in the project area.

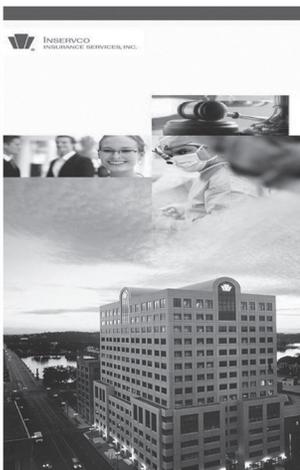
The four regional projects address Northeastern New Jersey; Raritan River and Bay communities; Long Beach



Waretown public meeting, Ocean Township (Ocean County).

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Island; and the Atlantic County Coastal Region. These projects are supported by a grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded through the National Disaster Resilience Competition.

Resilient New Jersey: Municipal Assistance Program

In addition to the Resilient NJ regional action plans, the Resilient NJ Municipal Assistance Program provides direct resilience planning assistance to individual municipalities in the coastal zone.

Five municipalities are currently developing plans, including the Township of Ocean (Ocean County), Salem, Stafford Township, Trenton, and Upper Township. This work is made possible with financial assistance from the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972

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administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration through NJDEP's Coastal Management Program. The five municipalities are facilitating a community-led effort to develop a municipal resilience action plan that includes a climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessment.

TRENTON In July 2022, Trenton held a virtual community meeting to get input and begin the development of a vulnerability assessment and action plan. The Trenton Vulnerability Assessment and Action Plan will build on the City of Trenton Climate Action Plan, Trenton250 (Trenton's long range Comprehensive Master Plan), and the Mercer County Hazard Mitigation Plan. Certified at the bronze-level with Sustainable Jersey, Trenton has completed actions that support this planning, including actions related to hazard mitigation; Lead Education and Outreach; Green Infrastructure Implementation; and Natural Resource Inventory.

"The Resilient NJ planning looks at resilience a little different than our previous work," said Michael Kolber, senior planner for City of Trenton. "It considers our flood walls and infrastructure, and all the foundation elements. But, in addition, it will take into account a broader view of the social fabric of our city. It considers how we take care of our neighbors and the systems that we have for everyday living. Our goal is to develop a plan that will prepare us collectively and individually to be resilient." The July community meeting is the first step in the planning process. The second public meeting took place on November 3, 2022, and the resilience action plan is targeted for completion by summer 2023.

TOWNSHIP OF OCEAN (OCEAN)

The Township of Ocean (Waretown), located along the New Jersey coastline in Ocean County, is developing a vulnerability assessment as part of the Resilient NJ Municipal Assistance Program. The vulnerability assessment will identify how the impacts of climate change are projected to affect the community and

RESOURCES

Sustainable Jersey

- Sustainable Jersey Grants and Technical Assistance Program: www.sustainablejersey.com/grants/
- Sustainable Jersey Actions: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions/

NJ Department of Environmental Protection

- State of New Jersey Climate Change Resilience Strategy: www.nj.gov/dep/climatechange/docs/nj-climate-resilience-strategy-2021.pdf
- New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change – 2020: www.nj.gov/dep/climatechange/data.html
- Resilient New Jersey: www.nj.gov/dep/bcrp/resilientnj/index.html
- Local Planning for Climate Change Toolkit: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9daab51c2f5542969d50437522e012c4>
- NJ PACT: Protecting Against Climate Threats: <https://dep.nj.gov/njpact/>

Office of Planning Advocacy (NJ Department of State, Business Action Center)

- Municipal Climate Resilience Planning Guide: <https://nj.gov/state/planning/assets/pdf/resilience-plan-guide.pdf>

New Jersey Future

- Sustainable and Resilient Coastal Communities: A Comprehensive Coastal Hazard Mitigation Strategy: www.njfuture.org/research-reports/srcc-hazard-mitigation-strategy/
- Local Options/Local Actions: Resilience Strategies Case Studies: www.njfuture.org/research-reports/local-options-local-actions-resilience-strategies-case-studies/

an action-item portfolio will identify projects that will improve the township's resilience to climate change.

In July 2022, the Township of Ocean held its first public workshop to get input on community resources, problem areas, and a common vision for the future. After a presentation, the community gathered around maps to discuss issues and place sticky notes identifying

important resources and issues. Diane Ambrosio, business administrator for the Township of Ocean, said, "The Resilient NJ Municipal Assistance Program aims to strengthen the Township's resilience to the effects of extreme heat, sea level rise, coastal storms, extreme precipitation, and other impacts of climate change. Our first public workshop started the conversation on what is

important to our community and allows us to share our progress on the vulnerability assessment.” The community has continued to provide input after the workshop through an online survey. The targeted schedule for completion of the action item memo is fall 2023.

STAFFORD TOWNSHIP In July 2022, Stafford Township held its first community meeting as part of the Resilient NJ Municipal Assistance Program. Matthew von der Hayden, the Stafford Township Administrator said, “We have done a lot of planning for resilience to date, and we have additional projects we are currently working on. The public input for the Resilient Stafford effort is helping us create a climate adaptation plan. The goal is to create a better Stafford for future generations.”

Mayor Gregory E. Myhre said, “Geospatial data will be analyzed to determine potential scenarios as coastal areas change in the future and actions will be created to address future

scenarios.” Mayor Myhre added, “The public’s input will be important in this process, especially residents living in coastal areas.”

Stafford Township will enhance this work with a Sustainable Jersey grant. The Township received a \$20,000 Sustainable Jersey grant, funded by the PSEG Foundation, to help develop a climate adaptation plan. Sustainable Jersey offers multiple competitive grant and technical assistance opportunities

each year. Since 2009, Sustainable Jersey has awarded over \$7.2 million in grants to participating municipalities and school districts.

Municipalities interested in learning more from communities that are doing resilience planning work and about the resources available to help are encouraged to attend the Sustainable Jersey workshop session, “Climate Ready Communities” at the 2022 New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference. 

Sustainable Jersey will hold the session:
Climate Ready Communities, Thursday, November 17, 2:00 p.m., room 420.

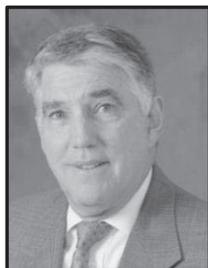
This session will provide insight on what municipalities need to consider as they prepare for climate change. Learn what you can do now, where to find local champions and relevant planning information to assist your municipality in understanding the potential impacts of climate change. Hear from communities that have begun this work and learn how to be climate ready and prepare for conducting a climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessment.



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