

# **Capital Region Climate Smart Communities Year-End Summary Report**

Prepared for

**The New York State  
Energy Research and Development Authority**  
Albany, NY

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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The following report will serve as a summary of the activities undertaken as part of the Capital Region Climate Smart Communities Pilot Program (Pilot). The Pilot, which is designed to be a three-year grant program, was awarded to the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). To carry out the Pilot for Year 1, CDRPC partnered with the consultant team of VHB Engineering, Surveying and Landscape Architecture, P.C. (VHB), and Climate Action Associates, LLC (CAA).

The overall purpose of the Pilot is to provide technical support to the communities within the Capital Region that are participating in the New York State Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program. The Pilot included a program execution plan, a greenhouse gas emissions inventory, marketing and outreach, region-wide and in-person training, the development of community profiles and customized service strategies, and summaries of model anchor projects. The progress in completing these initiatives will be described in more detail below. Copies of the completed deliverables in

electronic form are available upon request by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or the [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation](#) (DEC).

## **Climate Smart Communities in the Capital Region**

The Capital Region covers the counties of Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady, and is comprised of 126 local governments. At the start of the program (May 22, 2012) there were 16 local governments that adopted the CSC pledge; they include the cities of Albany, Cohoes, Rensselaer, Saratoga Springs, Schenectady, and Watervliet; the towns of Bethlehem, Cairo, Clifton Park, Copake, East Greenbush, Hunter, Jewett, and Niskayuna; and the counties of Albany and Schenectady (see Climate Smart Communities Map on page 8). During the course of the first year, one additional community joined the program – the city of Troy.

## **GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS INVENTORY**

The Pilot began by undertaking a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory of the region. The inventory was completed at the close of the first year of the program and is available on the [Climate Smart Communities website](#). The inventory computed regional direct and indirect emissions and apportioned them to all 160 cities, towns, villages, and counties in the eight-county economic development region. In order to standardize GHG emissions inventories across Pilot regions in NY State, the Pilot team participated with other Pilot regions in conference calls and exchanged ideas and information to reach consensus on the appropriate GHG protocol to utilize. The GHG inventory also entailed meetings, coordination and the collection of data from key partners, which included the region's utilities, National Grid, Green Island Power Authority, Central Hudson Gas and Electric, and NYS Electric and Gas; the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC, the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization); and other data sources.

We developed the inventory in two phases. In Phase I, CDRPC developed a Regional GHG Inventory for the [Cleaner Greener Communities](#) (CGC) planning team in mid-October 2012 in the format required for the Capital District Regional Sustainability Planning Consortium to meet its deliverables under that program. CDRPC delivered data for all eight counties, rather than just the six covered by the CSC Pilot. At that time all utilities had not yet completed their data requests, so the Phase I report was prepared using alternative GHG Working Group methods to estimate data.

In Phase II, starting in November 2012, CDRPC went back to completing utility data requests and community level GHG inventories. The inventories by themselves, however, are not necessarily a compelling planning tool for communities because tables of GHG numbers do not tie back to relatable community goals and benefits. Therefore, CDRPC decided to expand the GHG inventory scope to include sustainability metrics to support Climate Smart Communities. CDRPC maintains a wealth of community demographic and income data that can be combined with energy and transportation data to create new metrics that communities can relate to. These included overall community energy efficiency, household GHG footprints, and the “Energy Cost of Living” as a measure of household energy bills. Community planners can target these metrics and can compare themselves to others. In addition, given the importance of transportation as both a GHG source and the biggest expense for Capital District consumers, CDRPC analyzed benefits of introducing electric vehicles and bio-fuels.

## **PROGRAM WORK PLAN**

A Capital District CSC Coordinator Work Plan (Plan) was developed as part of the Pilot. The Plan served as a roadmap for executing the Capital Region Climate Smart Communities Pilot Program. A copy of the Plan is available on the [Climate Smart Communities website](#).

## **CONNECTING WITH CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES**

### **The Capital Region CSC Council and Targeted Trainings**

A formal kickoff meeting for the Pilot was held on June 20, 2012. The meeting was convened at Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC). The meeting was scheduled to follow a day-long planning and zoning training conference for local officials sponsored by CDRPC. A climate change session was held as part of the conference and included presentations on the CSC program, the Cleaner, Greener Communities Regional Sustainability Plan initiative, and the Energy Smart Communities Program. The CSC participants in the region were invited to attend this session, which was directly followed by the kickoff meeting. At the meeting, the region's CSC participants were introduced to each other and were asked to describe why their communities were motivated to take the CSC pledge, what initiatives they had taken so far to address the pledge elements, and what they hoped to gain from the CSC Pilot. The concept of establishing a "Capital Region Climate Smart Communities Council" (Council) was discussed and agreed to. The purpose of the council is to periodically bring together the CSCs to share their experiences with addressing climate change and to participate in joint training sessions. The Council met again on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012 for another HVCC conference/training session. The sessions targeting CSCs were on complete streets/creating walkable communities, flood mitigation, and green infrastructure. Near the close of the first year, on April 19, 2013, the CSCs met again for a training session and a roundtable discussion to share year one program experiences. This meeting was held at the offices of CDRPC. The training session was on climate adaptation. In addition to the adaptation training and roundtable discussion, the Council heard a brief presentation about the Capital District Clean Cities Initiative and they were invited to participate in the initiative. Copies of the materials presented at all the training sessions as well as attendee lists are available upon request.

### **Marketing**

As noted above, the training sessions held in conjunction with CDRPC's Planning and Zoning workshop (June 20, 2012 and October 4, 2012) included specific sessions related to climate and energy, however the conferences also included sessions on a variety of planning and zoning topics

and were attended by many communities that are not climate smart communities. Therefore, the conferences were also used to market the Climate Smart Communities program to other potential communities. The climate and energy sessions were open to all conference participants and brochures explaining the CSC program were available at the conference registration desk. CDRPC also used its ongoing interaction with other communities in the Capital District to market the CSC program to potential new members. Although CDRPC hasn't launched our CSC webpage, which will include the copies of the deliverables from this program and other marketing information, CDRPC has created the page structure in a blind link. CDRPC will be launching the page as the first task of our year-two program. Outside of these efforts, CDRPC did not undertake a specific program to market the CSC program to new communities. Rather, our effort during year one was to work with the existing CSCs to try and help them progress their CSC efforts. These technical assistance efforts will be explained below.

## **Coordinating with NY Energy Smart Communities and EDGE Programs**

As part of the Pilot, CDRPC coordinated outreach and technical assistance activities with the NY Energy Smart Communities program to leverage the value of both programs. CDRPC held meetings to discuss mutual program goals with representatives of Courtney Strong, Inc., who was the NYSERDA Energy Smart contractor for the areas that make up the Pilot region. In addition, CSC participants were notified at the Pilot in-person meetings that they may be contacted by the Energy Smart contractor. Midway through our Pilot a different contractor was chosen for the next phase of the Energy Smart program, which is now called the Economic Development Growth Extension [EDGE] program. CDRPC met with the new contractor of the EDGE program (the Center for Economic Growth) on March 25<sup>th</sup> and CDRPC shared information about our programs.

## **Direct Engagement and Technical Assistance to CSCs**

A major part of the Climate Smart Communities Coordinator Pilot Program involved direct engagement with each existing CSC. The direct engagement process involved three elements: 1) creating community profiles; 2) face-to-face meetings with CSCs; and 3) developing and delivering customized service strategies. This framework allowed for the project team to provide quality services that respond to each community's individual needs. The chart below outlines the process that was undertaken.

### Assessment

- **Development of a community profile**
- Implemented initiatives
- Existing commitments

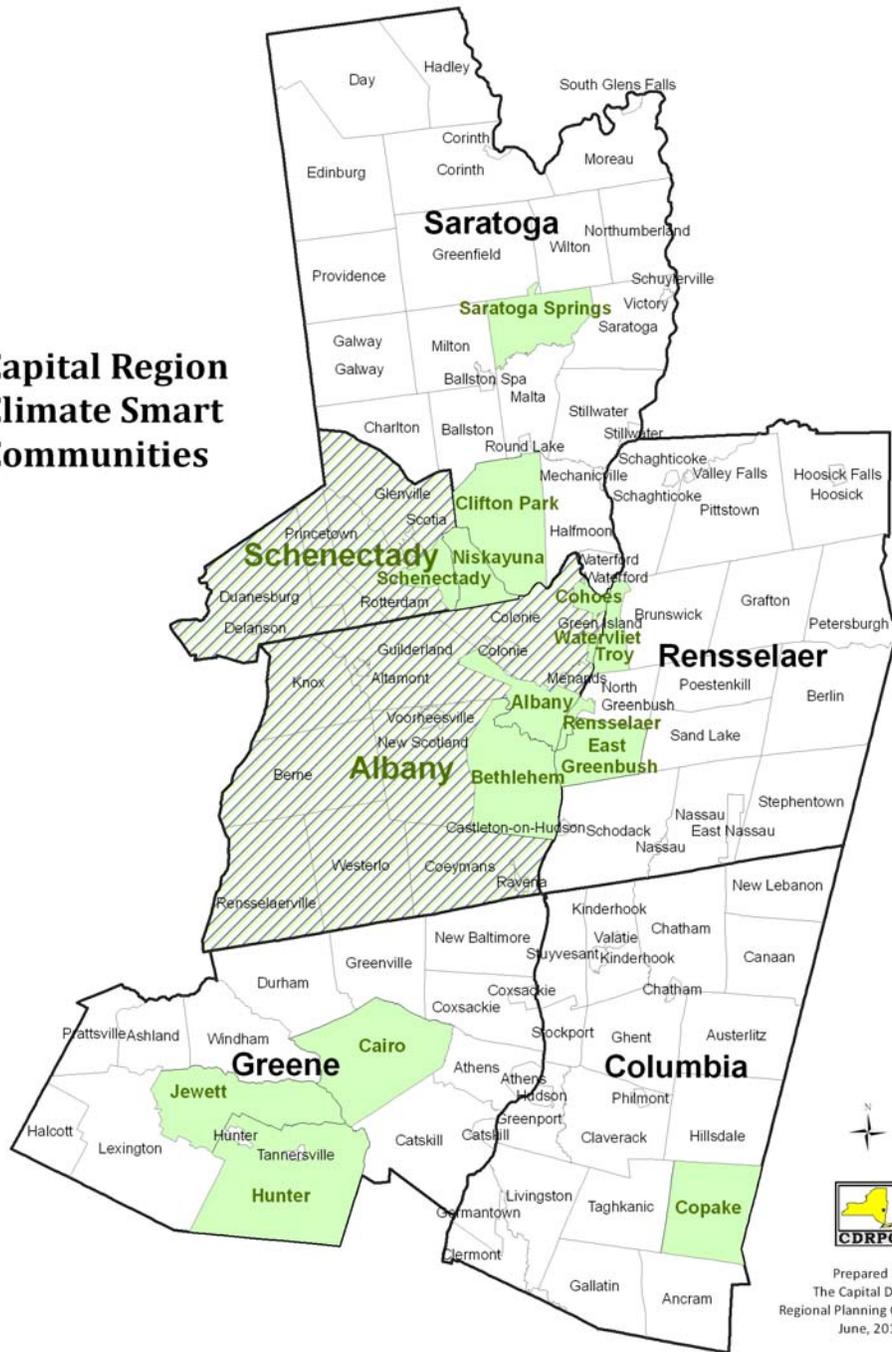
### Connecting

- **In-person meeting**
- Review community profile
- Explanation of the regional coordinator services
- Identify areas of interest
- Review available technical assistance options
- Match available resources
- **On-demand Support**
- Respond to questions
- Provide technical advice as opportunities arise

### Delivering

- **Customized Service Strategy developed for CSC municipality**
- Match available municipal resources to the technical assistance service options:
- Municipal employee training
- Review of land-use practices
- Review of climate action plan
- Climate action plan outline or template
- Facilitating meetings with key stakeholders
- Assessing opportunity for PV installation

# Capital Region Climate Smart Communities



## **Community Profiles**

To begin the community assessment phase, the project team conducted background research on the progress each community has made in achieving the ten CSC pledge elements. In addition to the information provided by NYSERDA and DEC, desktop research was conducted on every current CSC to determine and confirm what had been achieved and to collect supporting information, including greenhouse gas emissions inventories, climate action plans and other documentation. An account was created for each community in Salesforce.com. This database was secured to manage the project team's interaction with existing and potential CSCs. The Salesforce.com account and database is operated by VHB.

Based on the information that was collected, a community profile was developed for each CSC participant. Sixteen community profiles were created. These profiles include all pertinent information on the current climate protection efforts and the details of action taken on pledge elements. These profiles serve as documentation of the status of each CSC participant in addressing the ten elements of the CSC pledge. Copies of the community profiles created for the CSCs are available upon request.

The community profiles were provided to each CSC two weeks prior to the initial in-person meeting, which allowed the local government staff time to provide any missing information or correct any errors. In addition, these profiles enabled community staff and officials to see what information is readily available about their CSC pledge efforts. The profiles were used as a foundation for the in-person meeting discussions on which types of technical assistance would best meet the needs of each CSC.

## **In-Person Meetings**

In-person consultation meetings were offered to all the existing Climate Smart Communities in the Capital Region during the first year. Thirteen in-person meetings were held. These meetings allowed the project team to introduce the Climate Smart Communities Coordinator Pilot Program and the project team, review the community profile and their progress toward achieving the pledge elements, review current initiatives and projects that they are working on, identify areas where they need assistance with accomplishing their climate protection efforts, identify what resources they have available, and determine a customized approach for meeting their needs.

CDRPC sent an invitation to the highest elected official and, where applicable, the primary liaison for the CSC program to schedule the in-person meeting. Meetings were scheduled with the elected

official, staff, and volunteers working on the local government's climate protection efforts. The meetings lasted approximately one to two hours. Each community was presented with a menu of technical assistance options focused on bringing the community to the next level of activity and closer to achieving the overall CSC goals. All information gathered during the in-person meetings was processed and used as a basis to create a customized service strategy (see below) that met the desires and needs of the CSC. A sample template letter that was sent to each CSC, along with template agenda, sign-in sheet, meeting notes, and pledge elements are available upon request.

### **Customized Service Strategies**

Each community that CDRPC met with received a customized service strategy (Strategy) within two weeks of the in-person consultation. These Strategies summarize the in-person meeting and outline what the action item was, how it would be delivered, who would provide it, and when it would be completed. The Strategy provided to each CSC was based on each community's needs and priorities as expressed in the in-person consultation meeting. Each community's Strategy also included a defined timeline. CDRPC asked that each community have the Strategy signed by their chief elected official and returned to us in order to commence developing and delivering the Strategy.

### **Summary of Service Strategies Developed**

Below is a summary of the Custom Service Strategies developed under year one of the Pilot. Copies of the complete Strategies are available upon request.

- **City of Albany:** Develop a document outlining the next steps for creating a Green Business Certification Program which would build on their existing Green Business Program.  
**Status:** Completed.
- **Albany County:** Identify financing options for Albany County capital projects.  
**Status:** CDRPC anticipates completing this work by the end of June 2013.
- **Town of Bethlehem:** Create a guidance document describing three options for green building code/policies/incentives, including best practices and implementation recommendations.  
**Status:** Completed
- **Clifton Park and Saratoga Springs:** Conduct in-person energy efficiency in O&M training and accompanying resource guide.  
**Status:** The training was completed on April 2, 2013 in Saratoga Springs.
- **City of Cohoes:** Conduct a local government operations inventory.

- Status:** Inventory is 80% complete and awaiting additional data from facilities owned by Cohoes. CDRPC will be following up at the beginning of year two to schedule a meeting with the new mayor and city staff.
- **Town of East Greenbush:** Conduct a local government operations inventory.  
**Status:** The staff person assigned to this project left town employment shortly after our in-person consultation so the project never commenced. The new town planner has been contacted. CDRPC will continue to follow up during year two.
  - **Town of Hunter:** Develop a “how-to” guide on installing a solar photovoltaic system on a landfill.  
**Status:** Completed
  - **Town of Niskayuna:** Assist with redefining the role of the Conservation Advisory Council to serve as the primary vehicle for the Town’s climate protection efforts.  
**Status:** The town is working with their Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) to determine whether there is interest in redefining their role to work on Climate Smart Communities and climate protection in general. We’ve been invited to attend the next CAC meeting in September 2013.
  - **City of Rensselaer:** Investigate green financing programs to encourage more energy efficiency businesses to locate in the city.  
**Status:** Completed.
  - **City of Schenectady:** Develop an educational campaign for water conservation.  
**Status:** Completed.
  - **Schenectady County:** Complete Portfolio Manager Energy Benchmarking Services.  
**Status:** Updated the county’s Portfolio Manager database and provided a memo outlining next steps for maintaining the database.
  - **City of Watervliet:** Research energy efficiency education and outreach strategies for multifamily homes.  
**Status:** Completed energy efficiency campaign recommendations for multifamily housing.

## **Guidance Documents**

In some instances the Service developed resulted in the creation of a guidance document. Under our year one program these included:

- A facilities operations and management guidebook
- A guide for installing a solar PV system on a landfill
- A guide to green financing programs
- An education campaign for water conservation
- An energy efficiency outreach strategy for multi-family housing.
- A green business certification program.

- Water conservation education campaign.
- A guide to municipal financing options (pending)

Although these documents have been developed for individual communities, they will benefit all of the local governments in the region. All of the resources that have been completed to-date are either posted on the [Climate Smart Communities website](#) or available upon request.

## **ANCHOR PROJECTS**

The Pilot project team queried CSC participants to identify appropriate anchor projects. CDRPC identified several potential projects that could warrant wider replication in other communities.

These candidate projects include:

1. Quail Street Complete Streets Project -- Albany
2. Curbside Organic Waste Recycling -- Watervliet
3. Bethlehem's Waste Water Treatment vulnerability assessment and associated upgrades
4. Albany's Green Business Certification Program
5. Town of Hunter Bio-Grass Energy Project

Under year-one CDRPC completed write-ups of the first two projects. CDRPC also began research on the other three projects, which will be developed into case studies for Year 2. In addition, CDRPC completed a spreadsheet that summarizes the synergies between the recommendations in the Capital District Regional Sustainability Plan (Cleaner, Greener Communities) and the 10 Climate Smart Communities Pledge Elements. This spreadsheet, and the Curbside Organic Waste Recycling and Complete Streets anchor project write-ups are available upon request.

## **YEAR ONE OBSERVATIONS**

With the first year of the CSC Pilot complete, CDRPC is able to make general observations about the program, its successes and challenges, and some recommendations for the future.

### **GHG gas inventory**

The GHG inventory took longer than our original timeline to complete due to an expanded scope to assist the Cleaner Greener Communities program and to address additional sustainability metrics. However, CDRPC believe the metrics, which include overall community energy efficiency, household GHG footprints, and the “Energy Cost of Living” as a measure of household energy bills, will be useful to local community planners, who will be able to target these metrics and compare themselves to others. In addition, given the importance of transportation as both a GHG source and the biggest expense for Capital District residents, CDRPC analyzed commuting patterns and the benefits of introducing electric vehicles and bio-fuels. As a result of these additions, the Capital District 2010 Regional GHG Inventory report is applicable, accessible and readable, and so far has received positive feedback.

Going forward CDRPC sees regional planning agencies as ideal “homes” for GHG inventories and sustainability plans because they already track demographic and economic data. CDRPC suggests that we continue to maintain relationships with utilities and CDTC to secure ongoing community-scale energy and transportation data for Capital District communities. In the first round of consultations all communities expressed an interested in receiving this information as a product from the CSC program. CDRPC will work with each CSC during year two to help them understand and utilize the GHG inventory. CDRPC will also work with CDTC to identify sustainability metrics to support the New Visions Transportation Plan, the Capital District Regional Economic Development Council, the CGC Sustainability Plan, and the CSC program. One of the needs cited out of the statewide GHG working group was to identify metrics to estimate community-generated transportation demand, community transportation efficiency, and related GHG emissions intensity. CDRPC will provide CDTC with the GHG Inventory report and will work with them in the coming year to potentially reconfigure their traffic flow model to create these metrics.

### **CSC Technical Assistance**

As a core part of our Pilot, CDRPC attempted to meet with each of the seventeen CSCs in the region. As noted above, CDRPC was able to meet with and develop strategies for all thirteen of these communities. CDRPC was unable to meet with four of the communities. CDRPC will be following up with those four communities during year two.

As a general observation of how the strategies proceeded, there were often delays in receiving feedback and responses to either jumpstart a project with a community or to continue our work. Municipal staff, if they exist, often has other demands on their time and other priorities besides the CSC program. Communities without municipal staff are even more challenged because there is often no one to undertake the labor necessary to complete and implement the service strategies.

The majority of the CSCs strategies were successfully executed and positively received. Therefore CDRPC recommends continuing to provide customized services to the CSCs in year two, either as assistance to carry year-one strategies forward or to create a second round of strategies if the first-year strategies have been completed.