

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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NOTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

The following report will serve as a summary of the activities undertaken under Year 2 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 first awarded to the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) on May 22, 2012. To carry out the Pilot for Year 2 (beginning May 23, 2013), CDRPC continued to partner 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 activities for Year 2 included an updated program execution plan, marketing and outreach, region-wide and in-person training, and the development of community profiles, customized service

strategies and related products. The progress in completing these initiatives will be described in more detail below. Copies of the completed deliverables in electronic form are available 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 (May22, 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 – based on the recruitment efforts of the Pilot team. Under Year 2 an additional community – the Village of Green Island – joined the program, again, based on the recruitment efforts of the Pilot team.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS INVENTORY

The Regional Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory was completed at the close of the first year of the program. During Year 2 we developed and made GHG presentations for both the CSC state webinar series and CDRPC's training workshop. We worked with National Grid to understand its local government operations billing practices and found that they now issue bulk utility bills to local government customers in an excel format. We then designed a GHG template tool to help communities transform these utility bulk bills into a GHG inventory, and we used this as the basis for the local GHG operation inventories completed during Year 2. Unlike standard input tools like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Local Government Operations Protocol (LGOP) tool, where the vast majority of effort remains in offline data acquisition and preparation, this approach allows National Grid customers to start with data files in the format they are used to.

During Year 2 we also engaged with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) on ways to incorporate the findings of the Regional GHG Inventory into CDTC's New Visions regional transportation plan, serving on the "Technology and Environment" New Visions plan technical taskforce.

During Year 2, as part of our direct engagement and technical assistance to CSCs (detailed in a separate section below), we assisted five communities in developing local operations greenhouse gas inventories: Cohoes, Clifton Park, East Greenbush, Niskayuna, and Albany County.

PROGRAM EXECUTION PLAN

A Program Execution Plan (Plan) was developed under Year 1 to guide the Pilot. The Plan served as a roadmap for executing the Capital Region Climate Smart Communities Pilot Program. The Plan was updated and approved under Year 2. A copy of the updated Plan is available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#).

CONNECTING WITH CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES

Trainings

There were three climate and energy-related training sessions held during Year 2. The first training session was held on June 20th, 2013 at Hudson Valley Community College as part of CDRPC's biannual day-long Planning and Zoning Workshops. Since the start of the Pilot CDRPC has expanded the content to include a two-hour "Climate and Energy" session. On June 20th, 2013 this session focused on electric vehicles. The session included three speakers: Jen Ceponis, from CDTC, who spoke about electric vehicle guidelines and how communities can become "EV Ready;" Kari Hewitt, from VHB, who spoke about the city of Albany's electric vehicle initiatives; and Adam Ruder, from NYSERDA, who spoke about NYSERDA's Transportation and Climate Initiative. In addition to this session, the plenary session was about green infrastructure techniques to manage stormwater.

A second training session was held on January 24th, 2014 as part of a region-wide conference held at Union College called: "Climate Change: Adaptation & Building Resiliency in our Communities." The conference included a session on the Climate Smart Communities Program. There were three speakers at this session: Angela Vincent from VHB gave an overview of the CSC program; Jeff Edwards from Schenectady County spoke about the county's climate action planning; and Doug Melnick from the city of Albany spoke about the city's various Climate Smart Communities initiatives.

In addition to this session there were other sessions throughout the day on various aspects of climate change and resiliency (see <http://muse.union.edu/climatechange/>).

The final training session for Year 2 was also held at HVCC and occurred on May 21, 2014. The “Climate and Energy” session included presentations from Jim Yienger from CAA on how communities can utilize the regional GHG inventory, and from Angela Vincent from VHB on how communities can engage in Climate Action Planning. There was also a separate session by William Nechamen from DEC on the National Flood Insurance Program, Flood Rate Maps, and how to use floodplain development requirements to reduce risk and property damage.

Copies of the available materials presented at the training sessions are available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#).

Marketing and Recruitment

As noted above, the training sessions held in conjunction with CDRPC’s Planning and Zoning workshop included specific sessions related to climate change, energy efficiency, and the Climate Smart Communities Program, 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 recruit potential new members.

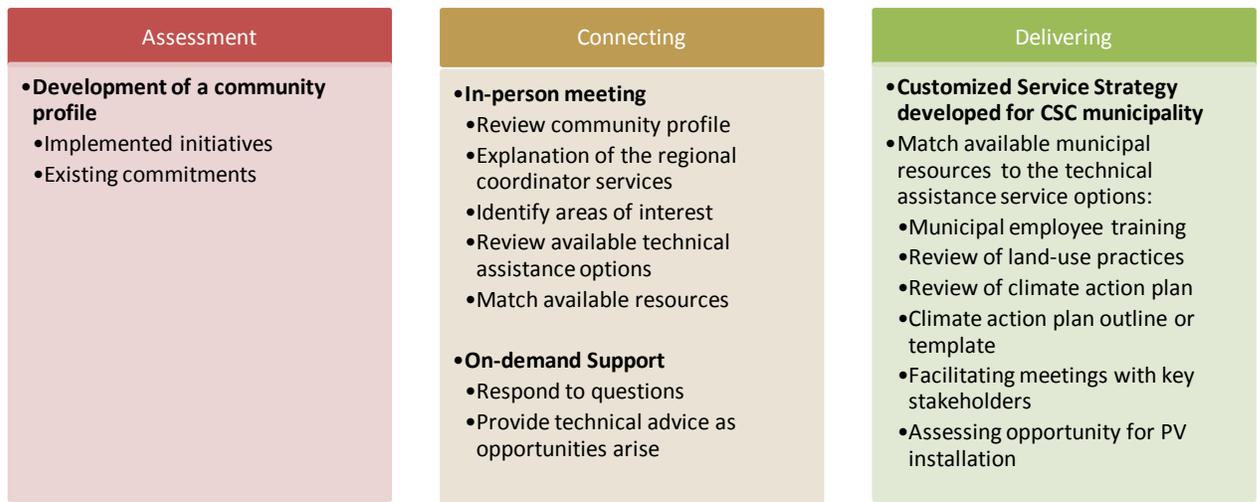
During Year 2 CDRPC also launched its new Climate Smart Communities webpage. The CSC page (www.cdrpc.org/CSC.html) includes a description of the CSC program and Pilot program; copies of all the deliverables from the Pilot, including the Regional GHG Inventory, Community Profiles, and Custom Service Strategies; useful links; and specific strategy deliverables, including local operation GHG inventories and templates.

During Year 2 of the Pilot we reached out directly to a number of non-CSC communities who we thought would be good candidates for joining the CSC program. We had conversations with key municipal staff in five communities to explain the program and gauge the potential level of interest. The Village of Green Island invited us to come to the village and speak with the mayor and staff

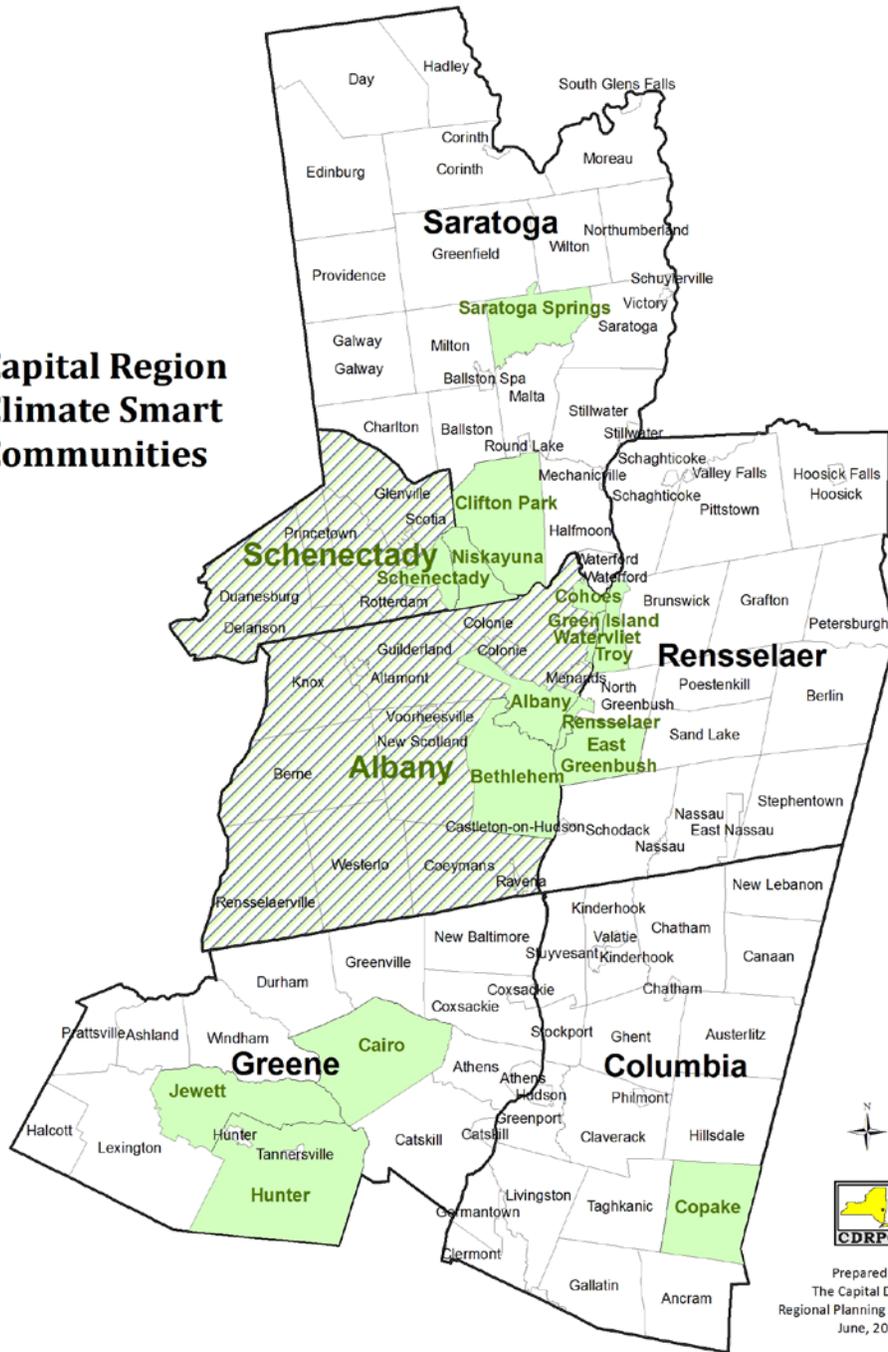
directly. At the meeting they expressed strong interest in the program and have since become the region's most recent Climate Smart Community.

Direct Engagement and Technical Assistance to CSCs

Similar to Year 1, during Year 2 a major part of the Climate Smart Communities Pilot 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.



Capital Region Climate Smart Communities



Prepared by:
The Capital District
Regional Planning Commission
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Community Profiles

To begin the community assessment phase for Year 2, 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 collected during Year 1, desktop research was conducted on every current CSC to determine and confirm what had been achieved and to gather any additional supporting information that was not previously documented. For new communities, an account was created in a database that we use to manage the project team's interaction with existing and potential CSCs.

Based on the information that was collected, the community profiles were updated for each CSC participant and new profiles were created for new CSC communities. These profiles include all pertinent information on the current climate protection efforts and the details of any action 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 are available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#).

The community profiles were provided to each CSC prior to our scheduled in-person meeting, which gave them the opportunity to add any missing information or correct any errors. In addition, these profiles enabled the community 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 their needs. Based on the discussion during the in-person meetings, we updated the community profiles following the meetings, and sent each community the updated versions.

In-Person Meetings

Following the outreach process established in Year 1, in-person consultation meetings were offered to all the existing Climate Smart Communities in the Capital Region during Year 2. 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 (if we had not met with them during Year 1), 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 on accomplishing their climate protection efforts, identify what resources they have available, and determine a customized approach for meeting their needs.

CDRPC contacted the primary CSC contact for each community to schedule the in-person meeting. An updated spreadsheet with the CSC contact information is available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#). Meetings were scheduled with community-identified individuals 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 them 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 needs of the community and the CSC Program.

Customized Service Strategies

Each community that we 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 is, how it will be delivered, who will provide it, and when it will 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. We 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.

During Year 2, twelve new Custom Service Strategies were developed for the following communities:

- Town of Cairo
- City of Albany
- Schenectady County
- City of Schenectady
- Town of Clifton Park
- City of Troy
- City of Watervliet
- Town of Bethlehem
- Town of Niskayuna
- Village of Green Island
- Albany County
- City of Rensselaer

Summary of Service Strategies and Products Developed

Below is a summary of the Custom Service Strategies proposed and the products developed under Year 2 of the Pilot program. Copies of the complete Strategies and the products developed through the Strategies are available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#). Communities that were unable to dedicate enough resources at the time to complete a Strategy are listed as 'deferred.'

- Town of Cairo: Summary of financing options to fund the installation of a solar farm on Town-owned land, including a description of each option, basic process for securing the financing, and the pros and cons of each financing possibility. *(Completed)*
- City of Rensselaer: Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. *(Deferred)*
- City of Saratoga Springs *(Deferred)*
- Town of Bethlehem: revised to conduct a vulnerability assessment associated with risks from flooding in the Local Waterfront Revitalization Area and two pump stations outside the area. *(Completed)*

- City of Albany: Develop a roadmap for prioritizing and implementing the City's climate protection efforts, specifically those that are in progress but need further support and those identified but not yet started. This roadmap will also serve as a tool for educating the City's incoming administration. *(Completed)*
- City of Schenectady: Based on existing needs and development priorities, deliver an outline of the process for developing a tailored Complete Streets Policy for the City using models from other communities and related resources. *(Deferred)*
- City of Troy: Facilitate a discussion between Troy and neighboring communities about the feasibility of and potential implementation of an organics recycling program. A follow up report identifying next steps was developed. *(Completed)*
- City of Watervliet: Develop a Climate Action Plan that builds off of the results for Watervliet from the Capital District Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and other relevant local, regional and state plans and programs. The final deliverable was an outline of what the plan would look like and sample strategies. *(Completed)*
- Schenectady County: Based on existing needs and development priorities, deliver an outline of the process for developing a tailored Complete Streets Policy for the county using models from other communities and related resources. *(Deferred)*
- Town of Niskayuna: Completed the Roadmap for Climate Protection Guide for the town's Conservation Advisory Council began under Year 1. Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. The training is complete and we are providing on-going support as they continue to collect data. *(On-going)*
- Village of Green Island: Create an Energy Audit guide for residents and businesses. *(Deferred)*
- Town of Clifton Park: Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. *(Complete)*
- Albany County: Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. *(On Going)*
- City of Cohoes: Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. *(Complete. This strategy was started during Year 1)*
- Town of East Greenbush: Provide training and support for completing a Local Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. *(Deferred. This strategy was started during Year 1)*

Guidance Documents

In addition to community-specific products, we also created the following guidance documents during Year 2:

- A municipal organics recycling guide entitled: "Food Waste Recycling in the Capital District, Practices and Opportunities for Municipalities.
- A draft Climate Action Planning Template (to be finalized under Year 3).

These two reports are available by contacting [NYSERDA](#) or [DEC](#).

ANCHOR PROJECTS

The Pilot project team queried CSC participants to identify potential anchor projects. Under Year 1 we had identified several projects that could warrant wider replication in other communities:

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 1 we completed write-ups of the first two projects. Under Year 2 we reviewed the other potential projects identified under Year 1 and decided to focus on Bethlehem's vulnerability assessment, which was expanded to include the risks associated with flooding in the Local Waterfront Revitalization Area and two pump stations outside the area. However, while we completed the Custom Service Strategy assessment product for the town, because of the extensive nature of the strategy, it wasn't completed until near the close of Year 2, so we were unable to expand this project to complete a separate Anchor Project write-up. We will undertake this task during Year 3.

We also tried to expand Watervliet's experience with curbside organic waste recycling to other communities by helping facilitate a collaboration between CSC members currently active in food waste composting. As a result, Watervliet, Schenectady County, and the city of Troy agreed to apply for Cleaner, Greener Communities grant funding to develop a regional collaborative to promote food composting in the Capital District. However, they weren't awarded the grant. We subsequently developed the report "Food Waste Recycling in the Capital District: Practices and Opportunities for Municipalities," which is a report on the present state of organics recycling in the region that includes information on composting and digestion, potential barriers and opportunities, and recent changes in laws regarding organics recycling in several Northeast states. The report was distributed at a meeting between Troy, Green Island, Watervliet and Cohoes, who we brought together to discuss Watervliet's experience with organic composting and to explore the potential for a wider collaboration between these communities. As a result of the meeting, Troy agreed to consider implementing a residential curbside pilot program, using a collection vendor and operating in select neighborhoods, such as Miami Beach Estates and Emerald Greens. Part of the goal will be to determine if savings from tipping fees will cover the cost of collections. In addition, Watervliet and Green Island agreed to work together to implement a municipally run pilot collection program in Green Island, and to have the organics collected processed in Watervliet's digester. We have also had

conversations with Albany County about a potential county-wide organic recycling program. We will continue to facilitate this collaboration during Year 3.

YEAR 2 OBSERVATIONS

With the second year of the CSC Pilot complete, we are able to make general observations about the program at this stage, its successes and challenges, and some recommendations for the future.

As a core part of our Pilot, we attempted to meet with each of the eighteen CSCs in the region. As noted above, we were able to meet with fourteen of these communities and develop strategies for twelve of the fourteen. We did not meet with four of the communities during Year 2 due to municipal staffing issues.

As a general observation about technical support outreach, 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 aside from 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. Correspondence is usually with part-time elected officials who don't always have the time, will, or resources to carry out CSC initiatives.

However, on balance, the majority of the CSCs strategies were successfully executed and positively received. Therefore we anticipate continuing to provide customized services to interested CSCs in year three, either as assistance to carry Year 2 strategies forward or to create a third round of strategies if the second-year strategies have been completed. In order to create value for communities that don't have the staff resources or support to be more engaged, we will also focus on creating and/or promulgating more generic templates and technical guidance documents from which any community can benefit, and that can be accessed from our website when it fits their schedules and priorities. During Year 3 we will continue to market the program and seek out new recruits. And finally, during Year 3 we anticipate adding a fourth in-person training session specifically for CSCs in which the individual CSCs make presentations to the other CSCs highlighting the lessons learned from a project they have completed under the Pilot program.