



# Allentown Environmental Advisory Council

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Allentown City Hall  
435 Hamilton Street  
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RE: Allentown Environmental Advisory Council Recommendations on *Allentown Parks Plan 2025 DRAFT*

To the esteemed members of Allentown City Council and Mayor Tuerk:

The Allentown Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) extends our appreciation to the City and the consulting team for their work in preparing the *Allentown Parks Plan 2025 - Our City in a Park*. The plan's thoughtful attention to ecological systems, sustainability initiatives, and community engagement reflects a clear understanding of the importance of protecting Allentown's natural resources and improving environmental quality, key aspects of the EAC's purpose statement.

We commend the plan's emphasis on **equity, accessibility, green infrastructure, and connectivity**, which are key components of a sustainable and resilient parks system. In particular, we appreciate:

- The plan's alignment with the City's **Climate Action Plan** and the growing role of the **Sustainability Coordinator** and the **Sustainability Bureau**;
- The focus on **trail and greenway connectivity**, supporting non-motorized transportation and reduced carbon emissions;
- The commitment to **riparian corridor restoration and floodplain management**, which are central to protecting water quality and ecological resilience;
- The commitment to increasing tree canopy; and
- The acknowledgment of **naturalization** and **native plantings** as strategies that enhance biodiversity and reduce maintenance costs.

While we celebrate these strong foundations, the EAC offers the following recommendations to strengthen the environmental and sustainability components of the plan:

## 1. Formalize Roles for Sustainability and Environmental Planning

**Plan Section:** *Management – Administration & Governance (Sections 5.2, 5.3, 6.3)*

- **Recommendation 1A:** Require that the **City’s Sustainability Coordinator** review all major park infrastructure projects (e.g., new buildings, lighting systems, large-scale trail construction) for **energy efficiency, renewable energy, low-carbon materials, bird-strike protection and avoidance of light pollution** prior to design finalization.

*Rationale:* This ensures that municipal projects incorporate energy conservation, solar feasibility, and low-carbon construction practices and bird-safe measures consistent with the City’s climate and sustainability goals and consistent with the City’s status as a Bird Town.

- **Recommendation 1B:** Establish a formal process for inclusion of **EAC review and comment** on proposed **land development, land acquisition, or major changes in use** of open space areas identified in the plan.

*Rationale:* This aligns with the EAC’s powers and duties to review land development and recommend plans for the conservation of natural resources and the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.

- **Recommendation 1C:** Require that new park facility construction or major renovations (exceeding \$50,000) **evaluate LEED or equivalent green building standards**, or provide a written justification as to why those standards are not feasible.

*Rationale:* This drives renewable energy adoption, energy savings, and lifecycle cost reductions.

## 2. Increase Naturalized Areas and Biodiversity

**Plan Section:** *Infrastructure – Ecology and Open Space Goals (Sections 3.1, 6.1, Goal 4 & Goal 5)*

- **Recommendation 2A:** Introduce a **measurable objective** to increase the acreage of naturalized, low-maintenance, and biodiverse landscapes consisting of

vegetation native to Pennsylvania—including native meadows, pollinator gardens, and reforested areas—by **at least 10%** over the life of the plan consistent with the City’s status as a Tree City.

*Rationale:* Reducing mowed turf areas conserves fuel and labor (energy savings), improves stormwater absorption, and enhances biodiversity while also being consistent with the shared goals of the EAC and the City to reduce herbicide use in pursuit of sustainable land management practices.

- **Recommendation 2B:** Expand the use of **deep-rooted native riparian buffers** along all first-order streams within City parks, exceeding minimum width standards where possible.

*Rationale:* Native buffers reduce erosion, filter runoff, and improve aquatic habitat health, advancing the plan’s stormwater and water quality goals.

### **3. Promote Renewable Energy Infrastructure and Public Education**

**Plan Section:** *Sustainable Practices and Programming (Sections 4.1, 5.5, 6.3, and 6.4)*

- **Recommendation 3A:** Identify suitable park sites (e.g., parking lots, rooftops, and community centers) for **solar photovoltaic (PV)** installations and establish policies for **electric vehicle (EV) charging stations** in community-scale parks.

*Rationale:* This supports the City’s transition to renewable energy and provides visible demonstrations of sustainability leadership.

- **Recommendation 3B:** Collaborate with the **Sustainability Coordinator, the EAC,** and local organizations to create **environmental education programs** and interpretive signage within parks, focusing on **climate resilience, energy conservation, and native ecosystems.**

*Rationale:* Educational initiatives empower residents to be active stewards of Allentown’s environment and complement the plan’s goal of community engagement.

### **4. Strengthen Interdepartmental Collaboration and Resource Coordination**

**Plan Section:** *Management – Governance & Partnerships (Sections 5.2–5.5, 6.3)*

- **Recommendation 4A:** Establish an **Interdepartmental Green Infrastructure Working Group** comprising representatives from **Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Planning and Zoning, the Sustainability Bureau, and the EAC.**

*Rationale:* A cross-departmental approach ensures coordinated planning for stormwater management, tree canopy expansion, native plantings, avian protection and sustainable maintenance practices.

## 5. Increase cooling services to the community

Plan Section: *Opportunities (Section 6.1)*

- **Recommendation 5A:** Increase spray pads, aquatic amenities, and other infrastructure at parks (such as benches) to provide cooling services to the community as an adaptation measure to climate change
- *Rationale:* As noted in Allentown Vision 2030, extreme temperatures are expected to become more frequent as a result of climate change. The parks can play a key role in providing relief in safe ways that do not involve swimming in dangerous rivers and streams.

In closing, the EAC applauds the City's leadership in developing a comprehensive vision for Allentown's park system. We view the plan as a cornerstone for advancing environmental stewardship, sustainability, and community resilience. Incorporating the above recommendations will strengthen the plan's long-term impact and align it with the City's environmental and energy goals.

We thank the Parks and Recreation Department, Simone Collins Landscape Architecture, and all contributors for their collaboration and commitment to making Allentown a model for urban sustainability. The EAC remains eager to assist in implementing these recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kyle Ropski  
Chair, Allentown Environmental Advisory Council