



**Carbon Neutral by 2050**

**CITIZENS' GREENER EVANSTON**

**2019 Annual Report**





## **President's Letter**

May 15, 2020

Dear Friends of Citizens' Greener Evanston:

As I write this, discussing what CGE did in 2019 is like speaking of a different universe. Everything mentioned in this report happened prior to the COVID 19 lock-down, and prior to the continuing racial discussion resulting from George Floyd's murder. These events threw into sharp relief the need for long-term planning when it comes to climate disaster and how our U.S. systems and policies, both nationally and locally, have always favored those with money and white skin. CGE's Environmental Justice program has been in place for some time, and as you'll see in this year's report, they worked closely with the City in 2019 to help develop an Environmental Justice ordinance. CGE as a whole is re-focusing its efforts on equity, which is a major part of Evanston's Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP).

In late 2019, CGE played an integral part in the City's first meeting to coordinate a variety of Evanston sustainability groups and implement CARP. We also worked closely with both Evanston school districts on sustainability initiatives that would help them achieve citywide goals. I'm also pleased to say that CGE launched a new Climate Action Committee to help us coordinate all our programs around climate.

In the latter part of 2019 we also launched a search for our first paid position of Program Director. The person in this role will help us transition into our next stage of growth and development, helping us to extend our reach across the community and make us even more effective in 2020 and beyond.

We're proud of CGE's continuing work to help the City reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and become carbon neutral by 2050. At the same time, we need to ensure that our efforts contribute more to building equity in Evanston. Of course, good intentions only matter if we back them up with action. I'm confident that this time next year our achievements will show that we've taken major steps in that direction.

*Hal*

Hal Sprague

President

## Programs and Accomplishments

### A New CGE Program: Climate Action

While the issue of climate change has always driven CGE, in 2019 we created this new program to sharpen our strategic focus on equitable climate action. This new program has been developing and coordinating clear, cohesive climate action strategies and messaging across the many CGE programs. At the same time, members are working closely with the Evanston community and City staff to foster the community action that will help Evanston reach its climate goals.

### Waste Reduction

Beyond Waste continued to focus on making the Evanston Repair Clinic (ERC) a regular event in our city. By learning new skills from expert volunteers, clinic attendees feel empowered to take on repair of their small appliances, textiles, bikes, household items and more. This diverts items from landfill, reduces the need for new items to replace them, and makes Evanston a more resilient city.



Beyond Waste has also given support to the Main Dempster Mile by presenting to their members and supported Evanston's Office of Sustainability by hosting Zero Waste presentations related to the City's Environmental Action Plan. In spring 2019 they coordinated a visit of Evanston residents to Elk Grove's Materials Recovery Facility.

Plans for the upcoming year include continuing and expanding the repair clinics with specialized pop-up events and increasing support for the city's Zero Waste effort.

## **Transportation**

CGE's Transportation program continued to examine and develop ways to help the City reduce vehicle miles traveled and increase walking, biking, and use of public transit. A key effort was a "Walking School Bus," a form of transport for schoolchildren who walk to school along a set route chaperoned typically by two adults. Like a traditional bus route, the walking route is fixed and has designated stops and pickup times. The team also continued advocating for a Metra station warming room and annual snow shoveling to keep sidewalks clear and safe for pedestrians. Go Evanston, which joined CGE in 2018, continued to work on improving and increasing the City's bike paths, particularly across the troublesome McCormick/Green Bay/railroad/canal intersection. As always, group members were key organizers and participants in Evanston's Streets Alive! event that promotes open streets.

## **Water Conservation and Resilience**

CGE's Watershed Collective partners with several local groups including the Evanston Environment Board, the Utilities Commission, Northwestern University, and members of the community. 2019 work focused on researching storm water in Evanston, which included meeting with Public Works Director Dave Stoneback about the City's storm water master plan. As a result, Watershed Collective may assist the City with education and outreach if a rate hike seems possible. The group has made CARP's focus on Green Infrastructure their central organizing structure. They have also begun to focus more on lead in water as it recurs as a public water concern.

2019 water policy and outreach activities included:

- A proposal for *We are Water*, a series of citywide conversations about our relationship with water, in partnership with Northwestern.
- Main Street improvement meetings.
- Participating in calls with the Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) that focused on water.
- Hosting public lectures at Evanston's Lagoon Building.
- Co-writing and helping distribute materials for the City's *Experience Climate Change* project.

Watershed Collective also supported a number of water education efforts for District 65, including:

- A storm water/ wastewater investigation with Oakton School.
- 6<sup>th</sup>-grade activities related to the City's Climate Action and Resilience Plan.
- School tours of the Water Treatment Plant.
- A Five Senses water activity with Park School students.

- Assisting D65 with choosing a science curriculum.

### **Environmental Justice Evanston (EJE)**

Evanston's Climate Action Plan calls for the City to adopt an Environmental Justice ordinance to ensure that all sustainability-related measures are viewed through an equity lens. Such an ordinance must be preceded by a resolution, and throughout 2019 Environmental Justice Evanston (EJE) worked with key City groups to draft and solicit support for such a resolution. Working with Johanna Leonard, the City's Director of Community Planning, and Kumar Jensen, the city's Chief Sustainability & Resiliency Officer, they created a plan to move an EJ resolution to a City Council vote in the first half of 2020. Once the resolution is adopted, EJE will work with the City to pass the environmental justice ordinance that is called for in the Climate Action Plan.

During 2019, EJE also supported the Air Quality Study commissioned by the City to assess the air, noise, and truck traffic around the Church St. Waste Transfer Station. EJE worked diligently to keep the neighborhood near the transfer station engaged and informed about the progress of the study. Throughout the year, the EJE group continued its community outreach by participating in Evanston's Green Living/Streets Alive! Festival and the Oaktober event at the Ecology Center, soliciting support and informing the community about its work.

### **Edible Evanston**

#### **Growing Gardens, Growing Gardeners**

During 2019, Edible Evanston continued to provide opportunities for individuals to expand their knowledge of nutrition, growing food, composting, and to experience the benefits of locally raised produce. Educational workshops, and "Work and Learn" days at the Food Forest educational "Grove" provided many opportunities to pick up some additional ideas about urban agriculture and gardening. The highly successful annual Seed Swap, held in conjunction with the Evanston Community Gardener lottery in March, handed out nearly 1,000 packets of free seeds to attendees.

Edible Evanston also expanded activities at the Food Forest in 2019, thanks to the previous year's fundraiser, and added more than 100 berry bushes, low-growing food plants, and herbs. Plans for 2020 include construction of a temporary structure to help protect volunteers and workshop attendees from the weather elements so commonly experienced during in the growing season.

## **Produce-Sharing initiatives**

Volunteers help individual local growers get their excess produce to people in need in our community. Since 2012 Edible Evanston has delivered thousands of pounds of fresh local vegetables and herbs to Evanston food pantries each year. Pick-ups were weekly from June through October at five community gardens. Drop-off locations included McCormick, Twiggs, James Park, Elks Park and Ridgeville. Delivery was provided to three local food pantries distributed throughout the community.

## **Eggleston Anniversary Food Forest**

The Eggleston Park Food Forest and Orchard is a diverse planting of perennial edible trees, shrubs, and small plants – including fruits, vegetables, nuts, “mushroom-logs” and herbs – designed to mimic the natural balance of a forest by utilizing permaculture principles. The multi layered Food Forest is a demonstration of how residents can grow their own healthy food, as well as supporting Evanston’s Climate Action Resiliency Plan (CARP) by showing how the community can become more food resilient.

Educational workshops were a part of each monthly volunteer workday in 2019, and covered topics ranging from growing mushrooms, to making herbal teas, to building better soil. The family-oriented Annual Fall Festival in October was a great success, and this year a May Bee Fest was added. Tours and workshops were also given for school groups, ranging from kindergarteners to a Garrett University class.

Edible Evanston welcomes the community to get involved by learning about what is being grown, helping plan next steps, and helping to maintain their portion of the City’s ECO Acre. Volunteers in 2019 included faith organizations, Boy Scouts, school and university groups, as well as interested individuals.



Food Sharing delivery to the Food Pantry



Demonstration booth at Streets Alive!



Annual Seed Swap



Fall Festival at the Food Forest



Foster Street Garden Interns Tour



What's growing in the Food Forest

## **Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy**

The Energy group, in particular Michael Drennan, continued to work tirelessly to help Evanston's houses of worship meet the City's benchmarking requirements with some success. Several members of the team also installed solar panels on their own homes and encouraged others to do so. The team also had conversations about community solar and the possibility of Evanston becoming its own ARES (Advanced Rail Energy System) to avoid the cycle of negotiations with other energy providers. The team also provided content for CGE's EcoHub to educate and help Evanstonians take action on energy in their own lives.

## **Natural Habitat Evanston (NHE)**

Natural Habitat Evanston had numerous accomplishments during 2019 with the City of Evanston, other partners, community groups, and volunteers. A highlight was its work helping Evanston become certified as a National Wildlife Federation Community Wildlife Habitat. After five years of events, local media, seed and plant sharing and about 220 home garden certifications, National Wildlife Federation (NWF) certified all of Evanston as a Community Wildlife Habitat June 14, 2019. NHE had many other accomplishments this year:

- **Oaktober 2019:** While Natural Habitat Evanston organized or participated in about 20 events during 2019, Oaktober stands out. Evanston Mayor Steven Hagerty received Evanston's certificate as a Community Wildlife Habitat from National Wildlife Federation. NHE also distributed 115 free oaks and shrubs to eight elementary and middle schools, Harbert Park, Ladd Arboretum, and Evanston residents.
- **Free Pollinator Garden Starter Kits for School Gardens.** Through a generous grant from Highland Garden Club of Evanston, NHE distributed 253 native plants to nine elementary and middle schools and the JEH Early Learning Center. Wild petunia, spicebush, liatris, aster, coneflower, goldenrod and others.
- **Second Sunday Tree Walks.** Allison Sloan, NHE Co-Lead, initiated Second Sunday Tree Walks to reinforce the importance of trees in our neighborhoods and for our adaptation to climate change. She also led tree walks and tree plantings at Washington Elementary School, and led pollinator garden planting events at Nichols Middle School with Climate Club students, using NHE donated wildflowers and shrubs.
- **Sustainable Grounds Management for Large Institutions.** Natural Habitat Evanston joined with Susan Kaplan, a University of Illinois-Chicago expert on environmental health, to present two sessions on reducing pesticides and lawns to large landowners such as School Districts 65 and 202, Northwestern University, hospitals, assisted living facilities, and others. Next steps for 2020 include a newsletter to this group, as well as personal visits to the properties.
- **Protected two old, oak trees at 2390 Orrington at risk of development.** Through many meetings at the Historic Preservation Commission and at City Council, Natural Habitat Evanston has organized speakers and emails and itself presented to protect these old trees. Most recently, the trees were spared by the City Council, which denied an appeal by the developer.
- **Evanston RoundTable Habitat Articles.** NHE covered topics in Evanston's local newspaper, the Evanston RoundTable, such as the updated parkway planting approval process and suggested plantings, Spring pollinator-friendly garden cleanup, how to certify your yard as a NWF wildlife habitat, why we should reduce lawns and pesticides, and the debate around mosquito spraying.



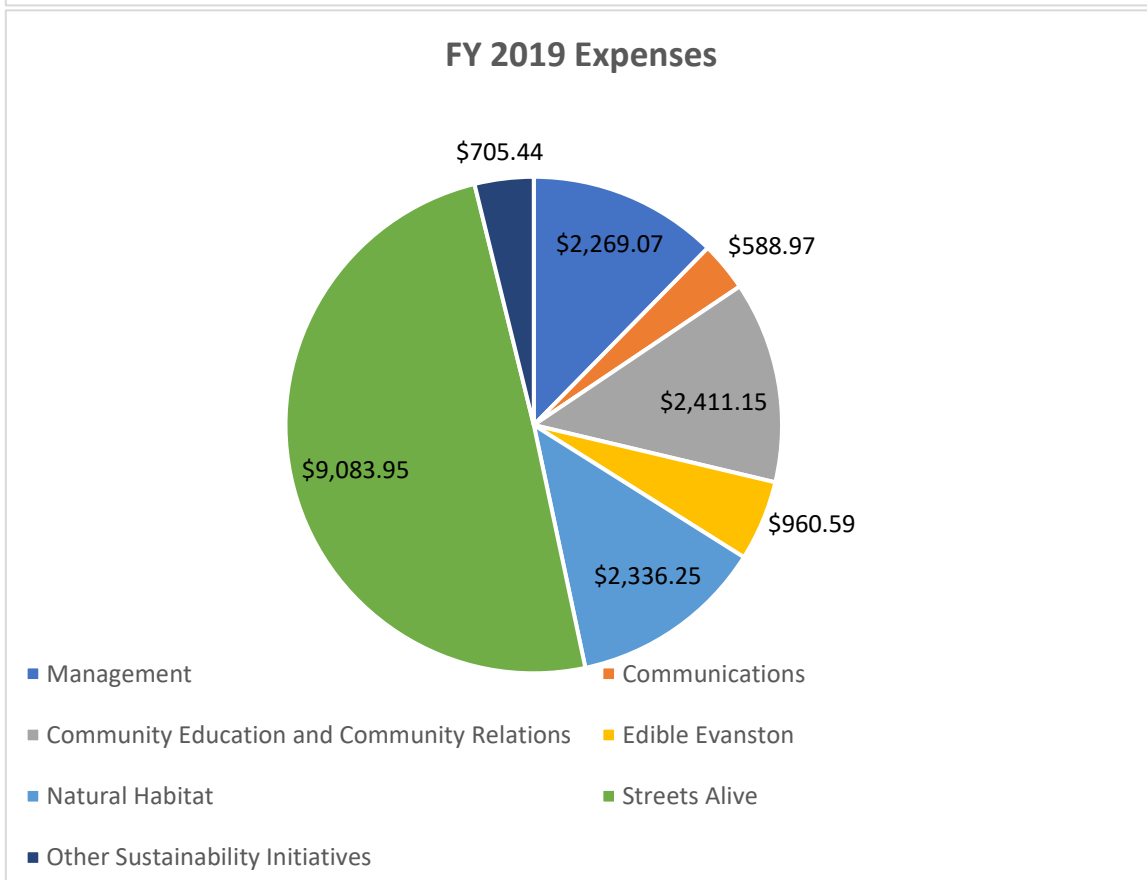
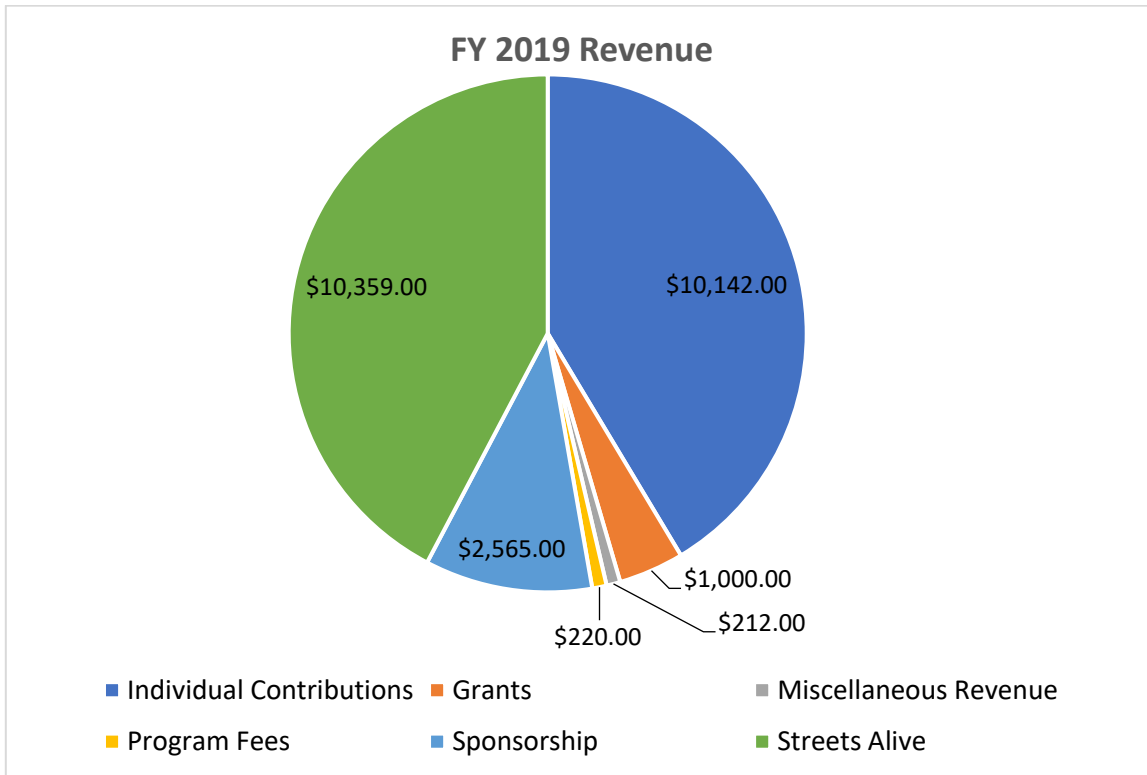
- **NHE Newsletter.** NHE's online newsletter provides a wealth of information to 450 people monthly about habitat topics in Evanston, from action alerts and gardening tips to calendars of workdays, tree walks, and other goings-on around town.
- **Speaker Series at Quarterly meetings.** NHE's speaker series provides an expert focus on local habitat issues, eco-knowledge, and natural gardening ideas. NHE welcomed Evanston City forester and arborist Michael Callahan, who shared his vision of a greener Evanston to about 30 people. Other talks were by Alan Molumby, University of Illinois-Chicago Clinical Associate Professor and Director of Prairie Biological Sciences, who brought great enthusiasm to fly pollination; Libby Hill, Perkins Woods steward and author of *The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History*, who spoke about an Evanston tree survey from the 1800s; and Spirited Gardener Julia Bunn who spoke about gardening in a small space. In addition, our members with considerable expertise as stewards, TreeKeepers, and expert gardeners regularly attend and share.
- **Promoted Evanston Pearl Crescent Butterfly Project.** Thanks to NHE member Ryan Chew, NHE shared and encouraged plantings of asters to support the Pearl Crescent butterfly, a native in our area that is purportedly common yet distressingly hard to find. Ryan shared out asters, a host plant of the Pearl Crescent caterpillar, and NHE leads and members propagated asters from seed to share out.
- **Making native plants more available.** NHE propagated native plants to share out free to residents, schools and parks at events and meetings. Most successful germination in 2019: butterfly weed and smooth blue aster. NHE also gave away native wildflower seeds from members' gardens: white turtlehead, great blue lobelia, anise hyssop, celandine poppy, cardinal flower, New England aster and more.

NHE continues advocating on behalf of trees and natural habitat, spreading the word and joining in to remove invasive species and add wildflowers at schools and parks, and keeping an eye on protecting Isabella Woods from development.

### **Advocacy**

Combating climate change and forging a sustainable future requires informed and engaged citizens, a robust democracy, and responsive government. CGE's Advocacy program continued to connect CGE with the larger Illinois environmental community by keeping the board abreast of select policy debates and developments at the federal, state, and local levels. Periodically, opportunities arise for direct contact with elected or appointed officials. Because being a 501(c)(3) organization limits expenditures and public lobbying, the greatest effectiveness of CGE is being able to alert members when a debate is at a point where many voices matter. Going forward, the Advocacy program may become a significant focal point and resource for information on sustainability issues. This group continues to seek members with experience or interest in research, policy analysis, bill tracking, writing, organizing, or citizen (nonprofit) lobbying.

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And thanks to the Evanston Garden Club for helping to coordinate contributions.