

Climate Ready Oak Park: One Year On

2023 Progress Report



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Climate Ready Oak Park: One Year On

On Aug. 1, 2022, the Village Board adopted *Climate Ready Oak Park*, a comprehensive plan developed in response to the global climate crisis. The plan offers an ambitious vision, concrete commitments and actions that can be undertaken by all community members and organizations. There are six key Climate Ready commitments:

1. Decrease community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2030.
2. Achieve community-wide net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
3. Meet the energy needs of Village facilities with 100% renewable electricity by 2030.
4. Establish 30% of Oak Park's land as green infrastructure or enhanced park management.
5. Direct 40% of public climate and sustainability dollars to the most vulnerable.
6. Partner with the most impacted to create climate and sustainability policies and programs.

The decisions we make today will determine how climate change will affect us in the future. Climate change presents many interrelated dangers to human and ecosystem health, food and water supply, and transportation and energy reliability. If the world's communities continue with "business as usual," climate change impacts are predicted to become increasingly destabilizing. Fortunately, these changes also create new opportunities to imagine and create more equitable communities, restore air quality and ecosystems, boost local economies, and foster human connection.

This progress report documents our community's accomplishments, aspirations, and strategies, on the one-year anniversary of adopting *Climate Ready Oak Park*.

[Click here to read the full plan](#)



Community Listening Session

The *Climate Ready Oak Park* community conversation occurred in August. Nearly 100 people joined the conversation to answer three key questions about *Climate Ready Oak Park*: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? And how do we get there in a just manner?

The community discussion was co-hosted by the Village, Oak Park Library, One Earth Local, Arbor West Neighbors, Climate Ready COOP and the Oak Park Climate Action Network. Like the original Climate Ready planning process, the event was designed for procedural equity — processes which ensure the inclusion of two-way communication with underrepresented populations, and considers linguistic, cultural, and other needs for participation.

The in-person conversation featured a series of tables, each with a facilitator and a documenter to capture the conversation. Community members could choose to rotate between tables dedicated to one of the three key questions, or to stay at an affinity-based table which considered all three questions over the course of the evening.

Five affinity tables were hosted. The Black Community Table was facilitated by a member of the Black Residents of Oak Park. The Youth Community Table was facilitated by a member of Oak Park Public Library's Leading Edge Teen Advisory Board, and Oak Park River Forest High School's student Enviro Club. The Disabled Community Table was facilitated by a member of the Village of Oak Park's Disability Access Commission,

and supported by professional sign language interpretation services. The Older Adult Community Table was facilitated by a member of Arbor West Neighbors. The Latine Affinity Table, a bilingual Spanish-English conversation, was facilitated by the Village of Oak Park's Chief DEI Officer and documented by a student leader in Dominican University's climate initiatives. Documenter services were also provided by community leaders, Oak Park Public Library staff, and the Village of Oak Park's Office of DEI, Office of Sustainability & Resilience, and Environmental Services division.



Question One: Where are we today on climate as a community? What climate, sustainability, and equity actions have we — individually and collectively — taken over the past year?

Community members spoke of many achievements over the past year. Some areas were mentioned multiple times as places where the community has advanced in the past year.

- The shift towards **electric vehicles** (EVs) and free access to EV charging was highlighted by tables.
- Growing **native plant gardens**, community education about native plants, and local native plant sales were themes in the open community tables and the Disability, Youth, and Older Adult affinity tables.
- More **composting**, including sharing CompostAble bins between neighbors, better composting signage, and more composting options, were noted as successes by the open community tables, and Disability, Black, Youth, and Older Adults affinity tables.
- Progress was noted on **bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure policy** issues, and more people biking, by the open community tables, Disability, Black, and Older Adult affinity tables.

The open community table brought forward a wide variety of personal and community successes. Community members spoke about improved engagement efforts from local government, the building electrification ordinance, more rooftop solar and energy efficiency projects at homes,

more walking, eating less meat or going vegan, reducing organic waste through food rescue programs, the "No Mow May" pilot program and the pesticide-free pledge, and the adoption of the polystyrene foam ban.

The Disability affinity table spoke of successes in using solar panels, bringing their own carry out containers to restaurants, and buying locally from sustainable restaurants and stores. The Black affinity table also spoke about installing solar panels at home. The Latine affinity table highlighted carbon-free housing upgrades, like repairing insulation and making ducts airtight. The Older Adults affinity table also mentioned many personal sustainability actions, especially to reduce waste, involvement and leadership in local environmental groups and civic committees, shifting away from cars and towards cycling, and making homes more resilient to climate change. One member mentioned planting a garden to sequester carbon with trees!

The Older Adults affinity table also focused on policy and systems change, including a group of members actively working to persuade building owners to electrify their buildings and install solar panels. Apartment tenants do have concerns about increased energy costs.

The Youth affinity table brought forward some recent policy wins, including the ban on gas-powered leaf blowers and the high school switching away from polystyrene foam, and an increase in alternative takeout options. Youth members noted that there is strong public interest in sustainable endeavors, and youth interest in environmental education. One member said, "The climate action plan has been a really good foundation for community organizations big and small to have a good starting point for climate justice."





Question Two: Where do we want to go in the next year?

Conversations converged around a few key issues:

1. Reduce organic waste through more participation in composting.
2. Adapt and become more resilient to climate change impacts through neighborhood flood mitigation infrastructure, including more native plants.
3. Improve community health through safer walking and cycling infrastructure.
4. Reduce carbon emissions from transportation and improve community mobility through more accessible and high-quality public transit and electric vehicle infrastructure.
5. Reduce carbon emissions from buildings and improve community accessibility through building electrification and other retrofits.
6. Improve institutional accountability and collaboration through transparent goals and progress tracking.

Expand composting.

- More community drop-off locations for organic waste, along with a map of the collection bins;
- Pathways to composting for those who don't have bins at their building, including renters and condominium owners;
- Universal or opt-out composting;
- Restaurant composting; and
- Adopting a goal to increase community participation in composting to 40% by next year.



¹The Youth affinity table did not raise flooding as a concern, though one participant offers community education on native plants.

²Bicycling and walking infrastructure was not raised by the Latine affinity table

Action on neighborhood flooding.¹ Many strategies were offered, and community members noted native plants as a way to soak up the rain.

- More permeable pavement, rain gardens, and rain barrels;
- Creating a stormwater runoff tax (i.e., stormwater utility fee), and reducing the tax or providing an incentive for those who plant native plants;
- Dedicating 30% of one's yard for native plants;
- Providing universal sewer maintenance services; and
- Using a greenspace preservation strategy when development is happening.

Infrastructure for safer bicycling and walking.²

Sidewalks and intersections were a focus for the Disability affinity table. Safer cycling was a particular concern for the Youth affinity table, many of whom were personally impacted by crashes or near misses with cars.

- More and better bike lanes;
- Safe bike routes that don't allow car access;
- Covered bike parking;
- Bike safety education;
- Restarting the bike share pilot program (e.g., Divvy);
- Village-provided service to clear sidewalks and areas for people with disabilities, when they are blocked (e.g., after a snow event);



- Community-led walks, along with a map of routes;
- Raised crosswalks at every intersection without a major crosswalk; and
- Removing the "beg buttons" at traffic light intersections.

More access to electric vehicles (EVs), public transportation, and generally improved options for mobility.

Clean and accessible transportation options were especially noted as a priority for the Disability and Older Adult affinity tables, who highlighted connections between gas-powered vehicles, air pollution, and community health outcomes.

- More access to EVs or plug-in hybrid buses;
- No-idling policy, especially near schools;
- A free community shuttle to ease congestion in high-frequency areas;
- Better public transportation, especially bus frequency;
- Requiring large retailers (e.g., Amazon) to use electric delivery vehicles, or placing a moratorium on Sunday deliveries; and
- Improving access to EV charging stations, especially near apartment buildings.

Priorities around renovating buildings to be more sustainable.

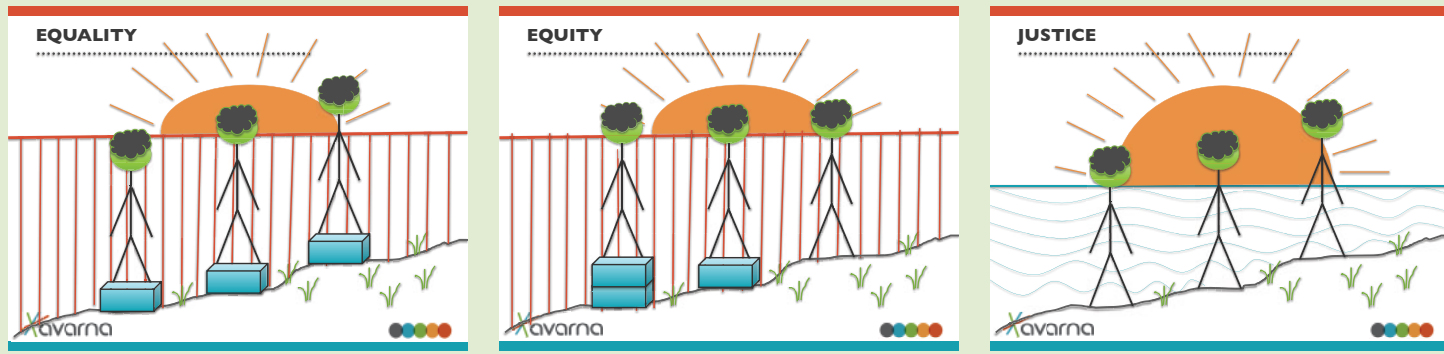
- Convert more homes, apartment buildings, commercial buildings, and public buildings to all-electric appliances and equipment;

- Facilitate faster electrical work, as a vocational or workforce program;
- Develop multi-building geothermal projects for shared heat pump infrastructure;
- Provide additional funding for projects that include new clean energy sources;
- Launch a communications campaign to promote electrification;
- Resolve concerns between historic preservation and climate action infrastructure; and
- Renovate buildings to have clear and inclusive entrances.

Transparent goals, progress tracking, and collaboration at organizations pursuing sustainability goals.

This was particularly noted at the Youth, Latine, and open community tables.

- Create a strong, explicit link between *Climate Ready Oak Park* and other plans such as the zoning map and the Vision Zero transportation plan.
- Organizational statements about measurable milestones, change over time, and progress tracking.
- Organizational collaboration and coordination to advance sustainability efforts.



Source: [Avarna](#)



Question Three: How do we get there in a just way?

Diversity is the differences between us; these differences shape the experiences we have as we encounter systemic benefits or barriers.

Inclusion is creating a sense of belonging by valuing and amplifying the voices and styles of those who experience more barriers based on their identities. A related idea, procedural equity, ensures two-way communication with underrepresented communities, and considers linguistic, cultural, and other needs for participation.

Equity is directing benefits to those that need it the most (distributive equity). It's also the process of power sharing and co-creating policies with underrepresented communities (interactional equity).

Justice is about changing the system by dismantling barriers to resources and opportunities, so that all community members can thrive. In a similar way, structural equity means rectifying inequities for marginalized communities.

It's no surprise that community members had many ideas on how to achieve the climate goals in a justice-minded way.

- Host more community conversations. Use multiple communications strategies, such as the library and a central repository. Ensure we are hearing from all affinity groups through outreach and research. Use clear masks, to provide language access for people who need to see others' lips when they speak. For signs, use pictures instead of words to illustrate information, e.g., how to dispose of waste, compost, and recyclables. Create an inclusive *Climate Ready Oak Park* communication strategy outside of English.

- Provide grants, low-interest loans and other assistance with the explicit goal of benefiting community members with fewer economic resources, rental properties, and legacy residents, and multifamily housing types. Shift towards universal services; e.g., composting is free for all or on an opt-out basis. Obtain State/Federal funding to support income-qualified programs.
- Create programs that make it easier to share resources between community members, e.g., shared geothermal system, bike sharing program, tool library, whole-block building retrofits.
- Make it easier to travel with low-cost options, e.g., walking, cycling, public transit.
- Develop a tree canopy strategy along the Eisenhower, to reduce health impacts from expressway traffic. Focus on creating more tree canopy coverage outside of Northwest Oak Park. Pursue a tree preservation and diversity agenda.
- Coordinate the local environmental groups to more collective impact. Address community priorities that are inhibiting climate action.
- Think beyond our municipal border, and consider where the landfills and factories are located - often in marginalized communities, when choosing a service provider or purchasing something.

The next section details accomplishments made over the past year, for the impact areas and goals in *Climate Ready Oak Park*. Accomplishments represent the community-wide effort across governmental partners, local institutions and community groups, as reported to the Village of Oak Park. ♦

Updates: Climate Ready Oak Park Impact Areas

Energy Use in Buildings & Housing

Advance Equity in Buildings & Housing

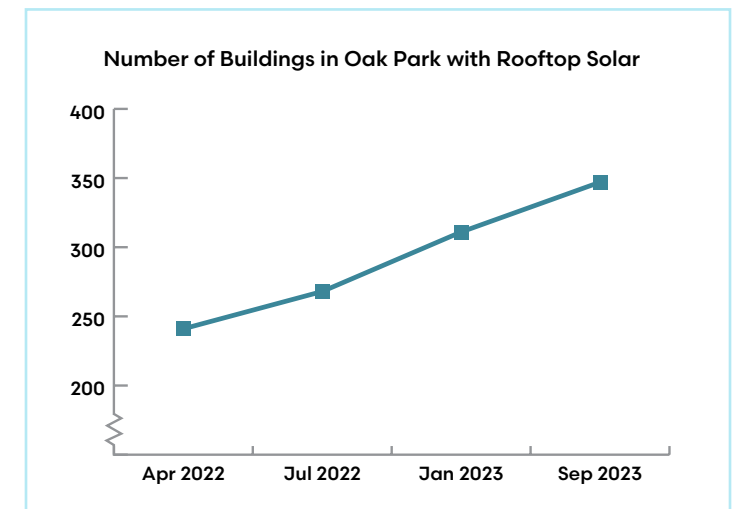
The Village has offered \$10,000 **home energy upgrade grants to income-qualified households** since 2021. An estimated \$90,000 in grants has been disbursed in the first year of *Climate Ready Oak Park*. [Learn more](#)

The **Oak Park River Forest High School** hosted an **Electrification Roundtable** for neighboring jurisdictions to convene industry experts and governmental staff and explore best practices for developing an electrification plan for institutional buildings.

Establish Energy Efficiency Reach Codes for New Buildings and Major Renovations

The Village adopted the **2021 edition of the International Codes** without weakening amendments, and included appendices that **require newly constructed buildings to be all-electric**. [Learn more](#)

The **Park District of Oak Park** completed construction of the Community Recreation Center (CRC). This all-electric building is expected to be three times more efficient than a building which was constructed to the minimum requirements of the building code. The CRC is certified as a Net Zero



Data Source: *Oak Park ComEd Customer Reports*

Energy Facility. The CRC is the Park District's tenth building with solar. Its solar array has 665 panels, for a system size of 317 kWh. Two solar-charging picnic tables are located in the rear of the building. The CRC, which has thousands of visitors a week, incorporates community engagement and educational signage about the environmental benefits of the building.

Establish Energy Goals for Existing Buildings

The Village adopted a mandatory **energy and water benchmarking** and disclosure ordinance (ORD 23-18) for public and private buildings 10,000 square feet and larger. [Learn more](#)

New Moms, a local nonprofit that strengthens families by supporting young mothers, operates a residential building that received National Green Building Standard certification at the Silver Level. [Learn more](#)

The **Oak Park Public Library** completed Phase 3 of a 6 phase LED lighting upgrade at the Main Library. Maze Branch

Library has already been converted to 100% LED. The Library is also conducting energy benchmarking for its buildings. The Library's Facilities team began a long-term project to improve the buildings' climate control, modernize existing equipment and better monitor and control the energy usage involved with building heating and cooling. Upcoming plans include upgrading to a more energy efficient and environmentally friendly chiller, completing a facility energy assessment, and adding Electric Vehicle (EV) charging.

On August 1, 2022, the Village of Oak Park voted to approve a resolution adopting *Climate Ready Oak Park* and **declaring a climate crisis**. Among other commitments, the Village adopted a goal to meet the energy needs of Village facilities with 100% renewable electricity by 2030 without the use of renewable energy credits. [Read the full resolution](#)

Nearly all monitors, servers, computers, printers, and copiers purchased by the Village in 2022 and 2023 are **EPEAT registered**. EPEAT registered products meet standards for environmental and social responsibility. [Learn more](#)

Transportation

Advance Equity in Transportation

Bike Walk Oak Park, a local volunteer advocacy group, released the D97 Safety Report to analyze vehicular violence that occurs around local elementary schools and provide recommendations for a comprehensive plan that addresses these issues. [Read the plan](#)

Establish Emissions Reduction Goals for Transportation Systems

The Village adopted an ordinance that requires at least one Level 2 **electric vehicle charging station** for every five onsite parking spaces at a newly constructed commercial building, and at least one Level 2 electric vehicle charging station at one parking location if a newly constructed residential building contains a parking space/garage. [Learn more](#)

Shift from Personal Vehicles to Active Transportation and Transit

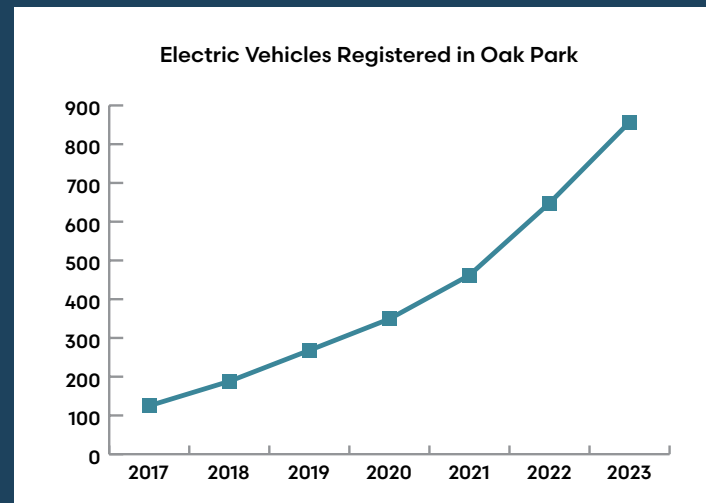
The Village launched the **Vision Zero** initiative in fall 2023 to work toward eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries. The strategies developed in the Vision Zero plan will strive to make mobility in the Village safer, healthier and equitable for all. [Visit the project website](#)

Establish Programs to Support Building Decarbonization

Oak Park Infant Welfare Society, a local nonprofit that operates a children's clinic, participated in the **Oak Park Green Business Program**. The IWS reduces energy use through LED lighting and programming thermostats during unoccupied building hours. While they continue to seek ways to increase their sustainability efforts, they want to provide a healthy, green environment for all who visit their building. [Learn more](#)

Expand Community Purchasing of Renewable Energy

The Village and the community partners of Climate Outreach Community Outreach to Oak Park (COOP) shared information about Illinois Solar for All, Solar Switch Chicagoland, community choice aggregation and community solar programs.



Data source: Illinois Secretary of State Electric Vehicle Counts

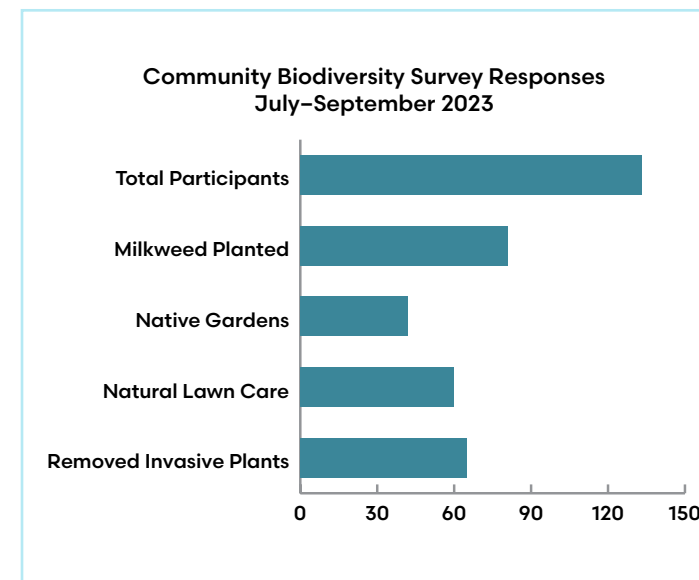
The Village offers a **telecommuting** program for employees. Currently, 38 staff participate in the remote work pilot program, averaging 1.25 days remote per week.

The Village's Transportation Commission evaluated the recommendation to create multiple north-south and east-west protected **bike lanes**, or convert some streets to one-way for vehicular traffic and one lane for bike traffic only. The commission did not recommend moving forward at this time.

Extreme Weather & Resiliency

Establish Climate Resiliency Goals and Data

The Village developed a **biodiversity survey and parkway planting survey** to gather feedback related to rain gardens, permeable pavement, and native and pollinator plants. [Learn more](#)



Data Source: Village of Oak Park Community Biodiversity Survey

Develop Dedicated Revenue Streams for Community Resiliency Projects

The Village received a grant from Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) to include **permeable pavement** as part of the Lot 10 parking lot improvement.

Increase Investment in Green Infrastructure and Other Resiliency Projects

The **Park District of Oak Park** completed construction of the Community Recreation Center (CRC). This highly climate-resilient building uses a battery backup system (no gas-powered generator is included) which allows the building to isolate from the power grid during an extended power outage, and to continue to generate solar and provide lighting, heating, and cooling during a major catastrophe. The site also houses a large bioswale and a permeable paver parking lot, to help manage rain.

The **Oak Park Public Library**, Village and the community partners of **COOP** publicized multiple opportunities to learn about programs such as **Solar Switch Chicagoland**, **Grow Geo Chicagoland** and general building decarbonization. These programs were often held with nonprofit consumer education partner, **Citizens Utility Board**.

Community Health & Environmental Quality



Advance Equity in Community Health

The **Community Mental Health Board** of Oak Park Township (CMHB) achieved sustainability success by moving its offices to the Park District's newly built Community Recreation Center. By moving to this net zero energy building, mental wellbeing and physical health services are brought closer together. The new office space also helps CMHB reduce their carbon footprint from building energy, allows two of the three staff to walk to work (reducing their transportation carbon emissions through a much healthier method of commuting) and creates a model to inspire others. [Learn more](#)

The **Park District of Oak Park** and **Seven Generations Ahead** partnered with the **Cross-Community Climate**



Collaborative (C4) on a townhall about sustainable landscaping techniques. [Learn more](#)

Improve Air Quality

The **Oak Park Fire Department** maintains a policy to reduce the unnecessary idling or movement of its vehicles for non-emergency purposes.

Reduce Noise Impacts

The Village adopted an ordinance establishing a **Lawn Maintenance/Landscaping** business license, a related contractor registration requirement, and equipment restrictions **prohibiting gasoline or propane powered leaf blowers** after June 1, 2025. [Learn more](#)

The **Park District of Oak Park's landscaping team** is using all battery powered blowers, string trimmers, pruning saws and chainsaws, and purchased its first battery powered mower this spring.

Conserve and Protect Clean Drinking Water

The Village initiated a sensor-based **drinking water pipe leak detection** system pilot, as part of an ongoing effort to use best practices to reduce non-revenue drinking water loss to 10% by 2030 and to 5% by 2050.

Sustainable Economic Development

Advance Equity in Sustainable Development

Takeout 25, a local coalition supporting food businesses, launched several key initiatives this year. [Learn more](#)

- **Boxed Water**

Takeout 25 launched 100% recyclable water boxes to replace plastic water bottle consumption in our community. These are now available in 30+ locations including Carnival Grocery and Sugar Beet Coop. In the three months since launch, we have replaced 12,000+ plastic bottles.

- **Green Dining Hub**

Takeout 25 is also partnering with the Illinois Green Business program to launch a green dining hub. As part of their journey, they have: assessed 25 local restaurants to understand the current state and identify strategies for individual and collective action; hired a graduate student pursuing a master's in Sustainability Management at DePaul University; recruited 40+ ambassadors to help engage our community on the green dining hub; identified hundreds of opportunities and strategies for greening our dining ecosystem; Committed to raise and spend \$25,000 in making Illinois' first Green dining hub a reality in a commercially responsible way; and are poised to launch the hub.

- **Art Installation**

Takeout 25 collaborated with Clean Up Give Back to collect 300 pounds of #2 and #5 plastics from our community. Cody Norman, a local artist, creates art work from plastic waste. Cody was commissioned by the Chicago Botanic Garden for art to be placed at the Chicago Botanic Garden as part of their 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2022. The plastic waste collected from our community supported this specific installation.

Expand Universal Access to Green Jobs that Provide a Livable Wage

The Village completed a feasibility study for creating a **Sustainability Business Incubator** in Oak Park and published a briefing book with findings and recommendations.

Promote Sustainable Businesses and Business Practices

The Village partnered with the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center (SEDAC) at the University of Illinois to offer the **Oak Park Green Business Program**. The program was promoted through the Oak Park River Forest Chamber

of Commerce, Downtown Oak Park, Takeout 25, and other business districts and associations. Across over 600,000 square feet of the 22 businesses assessed, SEDAC identified over 223 MTCO₂e and \$29,000 in cost savings from low-to-no-cost sustainability best practices. Businesses were connected to the ComEd Small Business Program to access incentive programs and implementation support for recommendations, and received support in developing grant or incentive application development to access funding for implementing green practices.

- **Happy Apple Pie Shop** has incorporated sustainability throughout their operations. From using biodegradable pie pans, to energy efficient lighting to sharing their vegetable scraps with a local goat farm, they truly think about how their business can impact the environment as little as possible.

- **Thrive Counseling Center** not only centers on individual well-being, but also the well-being of their employees and environment. They have started their sustainability initiatives by addressing water and energy use, working to upgrade their lighting to LEDs and reducing water use throughout the building.





Healthy & Sustainable Food

Support Neighborhood Food Production

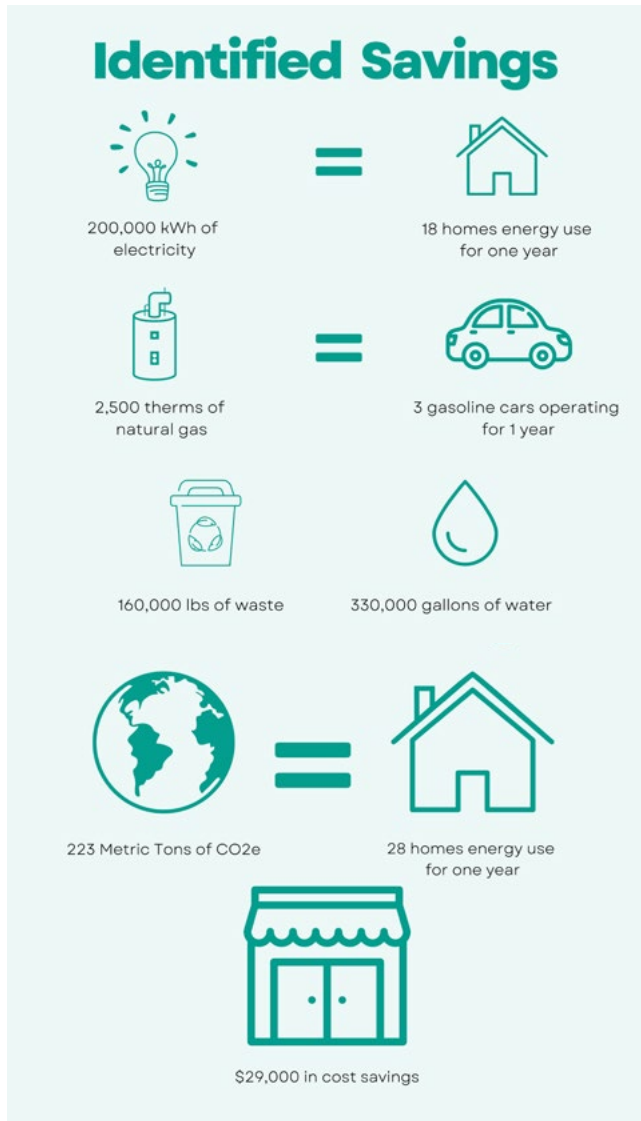
Dominican University's Sustain DU program includes a partnership between a greenhouse and Nutrition faculty to cultivate greens served at the cafeteria.

Deep Roots Project provides resources to grow organic kitchen gardens and milkweed plants, by teaching gardeners to use raised beds without the use of pesticides. DRP's community has been growing - forty percent of people at recent Deep Roots programs were first-time attendees.

[Learn more](#)

- **Sugar Beet Cooperative** has sustainability throughout the core of its operations but is always seeking ways to deepen their commitment. They sort their recyclables and compost as much waste as possible. They have taken steps to increase the efficiency of their refrigeration systems by adding technologies such as electrically commutated motors, anti-sweat heat controls, and more. This will help them reduce their energy use, while increasing the sustainability and efficiency of their store.
- **The Daly Bagel** is committed to sustainability and already uses LED lighting, shuts down all equipment at night, utilizes a programmable thermostat and purchases items with recycled content. They also ensure that all recyclable items are sent to their recycling bin and are interested in adding composting in the future.

[Learn more](#)



Results from Oak Park Green Business Program

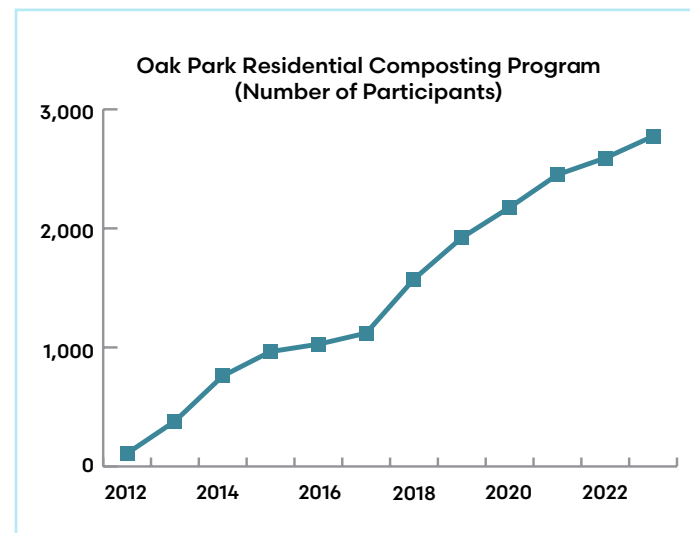


Waste Reduction

Expand Waste Goals & Data

The **Oak Park Public Library** implemented new landfill and recycling can upgrades. After touring a local vendor's factory and being impressed with their product quality, custom options, and customer support, upgrades began in the Main Library vestibule, lobby and community space. The goal is to bring a more modern, consistent and cohesive look in all our facilities to an important and often-overlooked aspect of library spaces, as well as improve patron participation in recycling through clearly distinguished receptacles.

The Village amended an ordinance to initiate a **Participation Rate Study** for commercial waste haulers. The study will be completed in June 2026, and will determine whether the Village can create a commercial waste franchise agreement.



Data Source: LRS reports for the Oak Park residential waste program

Encourage Zero-Waste Practices

The Village and the community partners of **COOP** promoted the curbside composting program and the community food scrap collection sites. A news release and contest were part of outreach efforts around **International Compost Awareness Week** in May.

Downtown Oak Park, a local business district, hosts **Thursday Night Out**. Thursday Night Out is a 15-week event with participating restaurants offering special menu items to-go for al fresco dining. Restaurants were asked to use sustainable packaging and limit packaging to a minimum. To mitigate the refuse and support the efforts of the restaurants, Downtown Oak Park hired a green team to work at three waste stations offering recycling, compost, and landfill bins. The green team was trained on recycling, composting and educating consumers on proper waste practices. Thursday Night Out diverted over 50% of landfill into compost and recycling this year. [Learn more](#)

Twice a year, Oak Park parents rummage through closets and donate outgrown clothes, shoes, books, games and toys for **Hephzibah Children Association's** Kids Resale Events. The Resale Squad—an impressively organized group of volunteers—moves in to sort the donated items. The first day of the sale dawned and hundreds of local area parents begin sorting through the piles to find gently used, affordable treasures such as dresses and dance leotards for their preschoolers, onesies for their newborns and even maternity clothes for their own changing bodies. By the time each sale is over, volunteers will have donated approximately 750 hours of time and effort. Items are being sustainably repurposed, which benefits moms with limited budgets while conserving the earth's limited resources. [Learn more](#)

The **Park District of Oak Park** completed construction of the Community Recreation Center (CRC), which incorporated benches from Park District trees which needed to be removed.

Starting in January 2023, the **School District 97** building and grounds department began to fully implement sorting and composting during lunchtime at all 10 schools. The district has been working with [Seven Generations Ahead](#) to shift operations and minds towards generating zero waste through source reduction, recycling, composting and food recovery. As part of these efforts, Beye Elementary School student leaders continued their work with the schools Green Team to reduce food waste and divert it from the landfill during lunchtime, while serving as a model for school districts in the region. Beye hosted the Cross Community Climate Collaborative (C4) last spring, a partnership between 14 communities and several local nonprofits that have committed to work together to address the climate crisis and achieve



equity and sustainability outcomes. C4 members came to tour the Beye lunchroom during the student-led sorting and compost process with the goal of bringing practices and learning back to their community school districts. By sorting and composting food scraps, recovering surplus food, and reusing lunch containers and utensils, the district is working towards zero waste being the new normal for our schools and our next generation of environmental leaders.

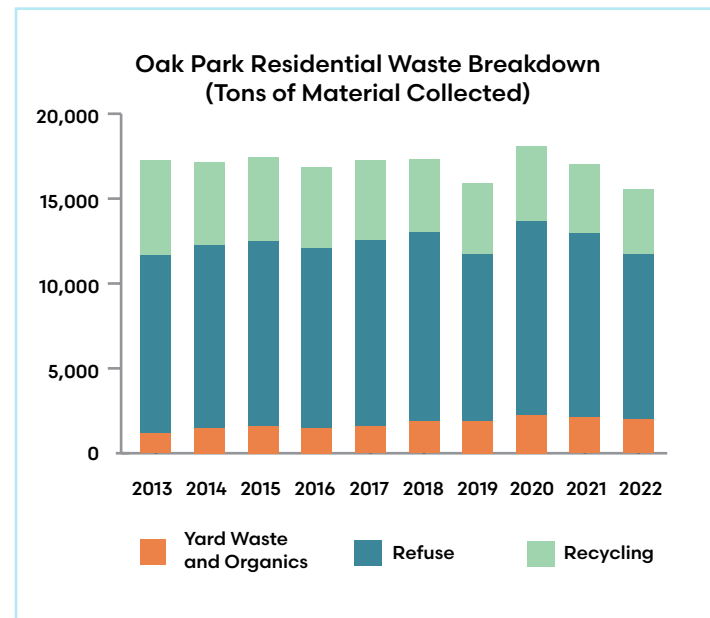
Reduce Plastics and Packaging Waste

The Village adopted an ordinance to require that restaurants **offer single-use plastic foodware upon request only** (with the exception of straws, an accessibility tool), and to **prohibit the use of polystyrene** foam food packaging beginning in 2024. [Learn more](#)

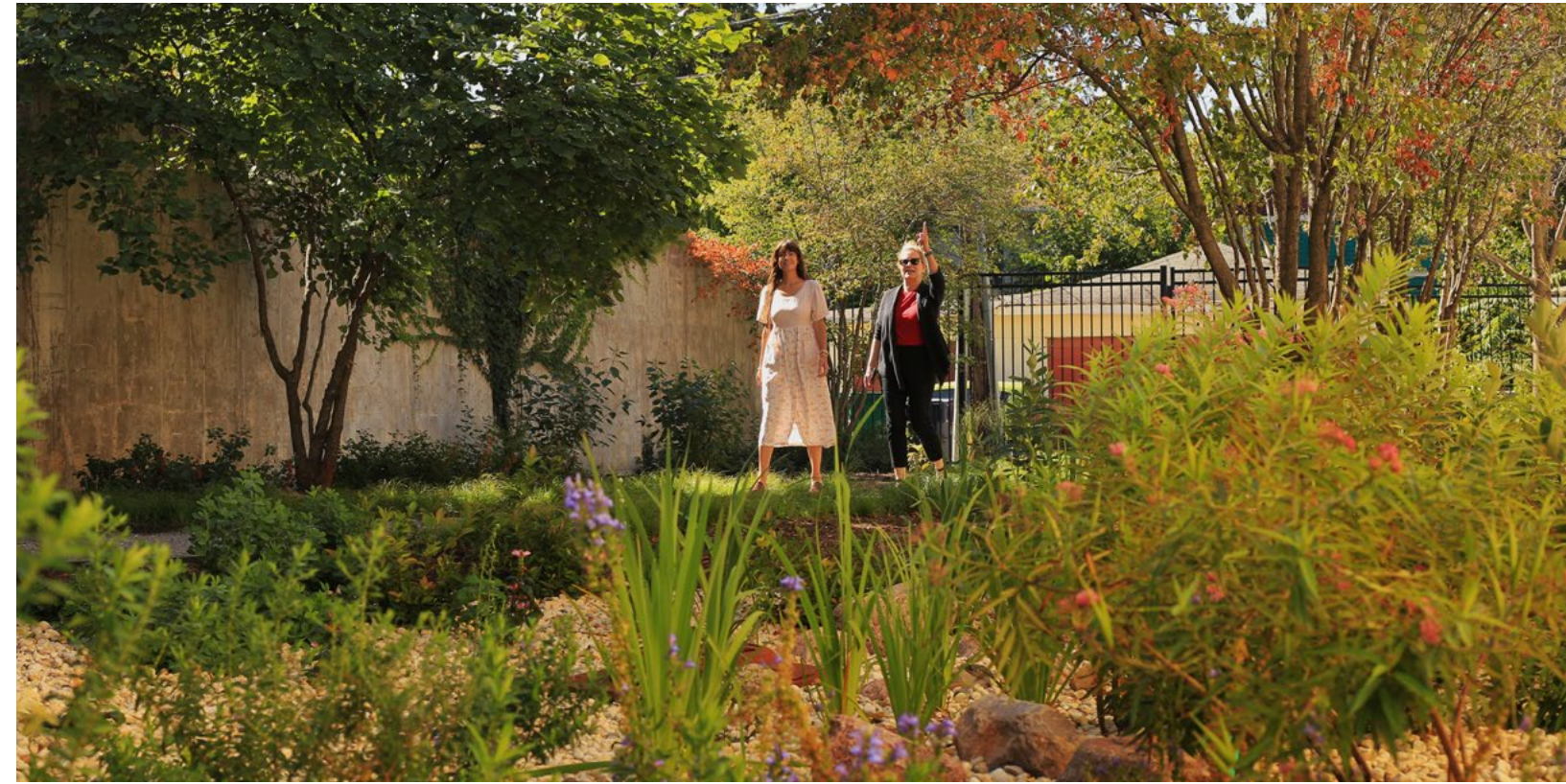
Reduce Organic Waste

The Village evaluated the **leaf litter pickup program** during vendor negotiations and determined that it should not be reduced at this time.

The Village opened five **community food scrap collection sites** in 2023, and countertop food scrap pails were made available at-cost to all community members. [Learn more](#)



Data Source: LRS reports for the Oak Park residential waste program



Parks, Plants & Biodiversity

Advance Equity in Parks & Plants

The Village participated in the Chicago Regional Team of the [Urban Nature-Based Climate Solutions Accelerator](#), a national cohort program designed to rapidly grow community capacity to implement equity-centered solutions to urban heat, using urban forestry practices.

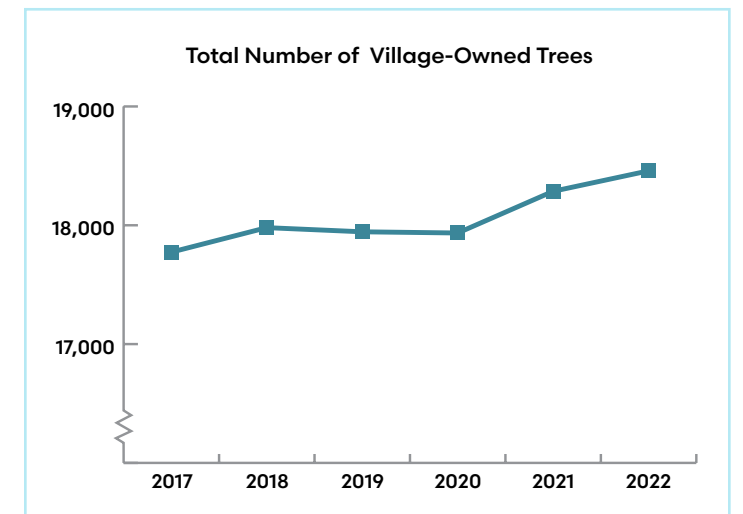
Increase Plant & Tree Cover

The Village and community partners such as **West Cook Wild Ones** shared information about proper mulching, tree pruning and the invasive spongy moth. A flyer with information about spongy moths was also created for distribution via **green block party** packets.

Prioritize Native Species Over Non-Native Species

West Cook Wild Ones, a local nonprofit with a mission to get more native plants into the ground, expanded its grants and plant sales programs. Community groups, schools, and churches around the region have been funded to create native gardens. [Learn more](#)

The **Park District of Oak Park** completed construction of the Community Recreation Center (CRC). A large bioswale, housing native plants and pollinators such as milkweed, has been planted in the parkway next to the CRC. To compensate for the loss of trees on the CRC construction site, the Park District planted 87 trees throughout its parks. The Park



Data Source: Village of Oak Park tree inventory

District's Conservatory grows thousands of native plants every year for our parks and for the community plant sale.

Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

The Village participated in the 2023 Mayors' Monarch Pledge, a program where local governments act to help save the monarch butterfly. The Village shared communications and events related to protecting monarchs, revived the Oak Park Pesticide-free Pledge for residents, and created two demonstration sites on Village property for "No Mow May."



Waste sorting stations are available for all of the Park District's special events.

Climate Plan Implementation

Share Implementation Responsibilities & Benefits

The **Oak Park River Forest High School's Sustainability Committee**, composed of Enviro Club students, faculty, administrators and Board members, and supported by Seven Generations Ahead, are working to implement the school's Sustainability Plan, which was approved in July 2022 by the school's Board. The sustainability policy influences everything from everyday procurement to construction. The high school has set targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make the building more energy efficient. The student members of the Enviro Club are taking the lead on compiling sustainability metrics and tracking progress. Read the high school's sustainability plan [here](#).

District 200 also co-hosted an **Electrification Summit**, bringing together industry experts to advise on how to pursue the sustainability goals planned for the school's Project 2 capital improvement project. The high school's future plans include engaging a sustainability consultant, with a goal of installing a geothermal system. The high school is also engaging in the global climate and sustainability conversation through students who attend the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP).

The **Park District of Oak Park** has completed a greenhouse gas inventory

for all of its sites and fleet. This information is being used to create a Climate Action Plan that aligns with *Climate Ready Oak Park* to ensure the Park District will meet the community's goals.

Dominican University's Sustain DU program engages students, faculty, and staff in reducing the school's contributions to climate change.

Arbor West Neighbors is a local nonprofit that helps seniors age in community, enjoy innovative programming, make new friends and contribute to welcoming neighborhoods. Over the last year, AWN members have taken many individual actions to reduce energy use and switch to renewable energy. As an organization, AWN held a public sustainability workshop that led to the creation of its own AWN Green Team. This team meets monthly to share ideas, encourage actions, and make a difference through advocating for creative housing solutions like Affordable or Accessible Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Illinois' first Intergenerational Cohousing condo building in Oak Park. [Learn more](#)

The **Downtown Oak Park (DTOP)** Board of Directors developed a Sustainability Committee to work on a climate plan for the organization's activities. In the last year, the DTOP office became certified across six areas of sustainability through the Illinois Green Business Program. DTOP continues to increase sustainability activities in the downtown business district, and within the business community. [Learn more](#)

The Village of Oak Park's **Disability Access Commission** integrated the implementation of *Climate Ready Oak Park* into the commission's work plan, collaborated with other organizations through the community-based umbrella group, **COOP**, helped plan and participate a community-led tree walk and distributed a survey that asked for feedback on the Tree Walk in the context of disability, and staffed an affinity table for the Climate Ready: One Year On listening session.



Activate Community

The **One Earth Film Festival and Young Filmmakers Contest** continue to connect people to climate science and inspire climate action. The Young Filmmakers Contest expanded and went global this year, communicating with young people all over the world. [Learn more](#)

The **Youth Empowerment Festival**, hosted by Your Passion 1st and partners, brought together 500 people with music, food, wellness, and entrepreneurship. [Learn more](#)

Connect Resources

The **Oak Park Public Library** has an ongoing commitment to and proactive



visibility around Sustainability. The Library created and hired for a new position, **Environmental Program Specialist**, to enable community members to connect with environmental resources and communicate about these issues. Information and discussion-based programs are offered at all three library locations. The Environmental Information Hub lives on the Main Library's third floor.

The Library led many programs and collaborated with others, including the Village of Oak Park, Citizens Utility Board, and Cook County, to support many programs, such as:

- Your Energy-Smart Home: A Money & Energy Savings Workshop
- Solar Power Hour
- Home Decarbonization 101
- ONE YEAR IN: Community Conversations on *Climate Ready Oak Park*
- Official Signing of the Monarch Butterfly Pledge at Village Hall
- Waste Reduction and Recycling Right
- Basics and Benefits of Electric Vehicles

- Speaking for Earth: Poetry Reading and Discussion on Climate Crisis
- Climate Science 101 with Climate Up Close
- Plastics Discussion, in honor of the global movement Plastic Free July
- Film Screening: Nuclear Now
- Unwind as You Upcycle: an Arts Workshop for Adults

[Learn more](#)

Change Systems

Go Plastic Free, a local waste reduction community group, focused on advocacy this past year. GPF says, "We increased our letters to the editor about plastic use, we signed petitions and met with Senator Harmon about banning styrofoam containers in restaurants and contributed to the discussion around Single Use Plastics on Request. Phyllis Rubin and Wendy Greenhouse spoke to the village board about this issue and many of us wrote letters to the board. We were thrilled when this ordinance passed this spring. We hope this is a first step for Oak Park to address the plastic crisis." In the past year, Oak Park became the first Illinois municipality to ban polystyrene

foam packaging, and Illinois passed a bill to reduce single-use plastic in state facilities.

Oak Park Climate Action Network (OPCAN) collected signatures in support of a building electrification ordinance. In the past year, Oak Park became the first municipality in the Midwest to require new buildings to be powered by electricity only.

School District 97 student-leaders advocated for climate action policy. On Nov. 3, Illinois Senate President Don Harmon paid a visit to Brooks Middle School to meet with science teacher Laura Stamp and student activists on the **Brooks Earth Action Team (BEAT)** about the fight to save one of the state's last remaining prairies. During their presentation, BEAT students provided Sen. Harmon with a brief history of Bell Bowl, its ecological significance and the potential consequences of future destruction. They also engaged in a brief Q&A where they shared more about what they have learned and the steps they have taken to get the attention of state lawmakers.

Monitor & Update

The Oak Park Public Library, One Earth Collective, Village of Oak Park, and Dominican University students, and community partners, collaborated on the community listening session, "**Climate Ready: One Year On**," summarized at the beginning of this report.

The Village reported on climate resilience, mitigation, and sustainability progress through the annual Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) reporting. The Village participated in the initiatives Race to Resilience and One Planet City Challenge to help improve climate planning and reporting. Sustainability metrics can be found online at sustainoakpark.com. ♦

Top 5 Actions to Take

For House Owners

- 1. Weatherize and electrify your home.**
Reduce your energy load and [save money](#). When appliances break, replace them with electric ones. [Learn about mini-splits and other heat pump technology](#).
- 2. Switch to solar.**
[Invest in clean energy](#) without the panels. Or, [find out here](#) if your home is a good candidate for rooftop solar.
- 3. Convert your lawn to native plants and veggies.**
[Support biodiversity](#). Consider a rain garden. Grow your own food.
- 4. Travel clean.**
Use public transit, walk or ride your bike as much as you can. Or use an e-bike or electric vehicle. [Learn more](#)
- 5. Compost.**
Join the [Village's curbside compost program](#). Share with a neighbor to reduce trash pick up cost.

For Condo Owners

- 1. Weatherize and electrify your home.**
Reduce your energy load and [save money](#). When appliances break, replace them with electric ones. [Learn about mini-splits and other heat pump technology](#).
- 2. Switch to solar.**
[Invest in clean energy](#) without the panels. Or, [find out here](#) to see if rooftop solar could work.
- 3. Convert your lawn to native plants and veggies.**
Work with your board to [support biodiversity](#). Consider a rain garden. Grow your own food in containers, your yard or a community garden.
- 4. Travel clean.**
Use public transit, walk or ride your bike as much as you can. Or use an e-bike or electric vehicle. Ask your board to add charging outlets in your garage. [Learn more](#)
- 5. Compost.**
Buildings with less than five units can join the [Village's curbside compost program](#). Or purchase a kitchen compost pail for \$10 at Village Hall and drop off your food scraps at one of four [composting locations](#).

For Renters

- 1. Grow your own herbs and vegetables on a windowsill.**
Eat more plants and less meat. Purchase a \$10 kitchen food scrap pail at Village Hall and drop off scraps at one of the [free community collection sites](#).
- 2. Weatherize your apartment and stop "vampire energy" losses.**
Seal drafts, close blinds, unplug appliances, switch to LEDs, program your thermostat, and wash clothes in cold water and air dry.
- 3. Save money on car insurance, parking and gas** by using public transit, walking or riding your bike as much as you can. Or use an e-bike or electric vehicle. [Learn more](#)
- 4. Look for an apartment that's built to save energy.**
Good insulation, low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators, and ENERGY STAR®-certified appliances all save on energy bills.
- 5. Switch to solar.**
[Invest in clean energy](#) and save money without rooftop solar panels.

Read more about
Oak Park's climate
commitments:
**Climate Ready
Oak Park**

