

Building Community Power and Climate Resilience in Detroit



Mission:

Develop people, places, and plans for sustainable growth on Detroit's east side.

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, Eastside Community Network (ECN) has been working to center health and equity in efforts to progress policy around climate resilience and reverse course on climate change by building a cohesive voice among Eastside Detroit residents to move that agenda forward. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

The CCHE initiative has fundamentally changed ECN's capacity and impact in the climate space. The funding and resources provided have allowed the organization to build up its knowledge, staff, and residents to lead on a number of climate related issues and pursue additional funding to support expansion of those efforts. Through their CCHE-funded activities, ECN pursued community-informed solutions for flooding, resilience hubs, reliable energy, air quality, and transportation, among others. They did so by building community power and collective voice, strengthening the impact of community leaders across generations, and modeling climate solutions that promote resilience and justice. ECN led and contributed to pilot projects focused on flooding, resilience hubs, air monitoring, composting, and mobility to ensure community voices were included in these efforts. Throughout this work, ECN emphasized residents' concerns related to health and climate change.

Central to these efforts was the creation of the Eastside Climate Action Coalition (ECAC), which successfully convened residents, technical experts, and local policymakers throughout the CCHE initiative. The ECAC has supported community power building, enabled residents to advocate for equitable climate and health solutions, and effectively engaged key policymakers, including Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and Detroit City Council. ECN also started the Resilient Eastside Initiative (REI) in partnership with Elevate and the City of Detroit's Office of Sustainability. The REI has grown to include 12 sites serving residents across the eastside with numerous classes, services, and resources. ECN has leveraged resilience hubs to shift the culture of emergency preparedness from individual responsibility to a collective effort. Resilience hub leaders regularly connect to identify priorities, needs, and solutions for the most vulnerable communities in Detroit. The Stoudamire, ECN's own Wellness and Resilience Hub, has over 2,400 members with over 30 classes a week in technology, art, fitness, nutrition, and other topics. Residents have driven the vision for the space, advising on classes, forming clubs, and giving input on future site improvements. See an overview of ECN's key activities and intended impacts in their [CCHE theory of change \(slide 19, 2022\)](#), and described in more detail below.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Launched the Eastside Climate Action Coalition (ECAC) in 2021 and advanced a policy agenda around priority issue areas of flooding and air pollution. ECAC was formed to focus on policy advocacy and use a solutions-oriented approach while engaging residents in power building and policy advocacy for the eastside of Detroit. A Leadership Group of residents advises on agendas, topics, and actions for the larger ECAC group. The ECAC has informed advocacy agendas for topics including flooding, air pollution, resilience to extreme weather, energy, and transportation, including creating a Flooding Task Force, which went further in-depth on advocacy points for flooding-related policies. ECAC agendas have informed conversations with policymakers at the City and State levels and provided a basis for comments and letters around permits and other government actions. The ECAC has also activated resident leaders, including

youth representatives, to speak at City Council meetings, meet with their legislatures at the state level, and write comments of their own. Furthermore, the ECAC's advocacy efforts continue to push the City Council and Mayor's office to improve efforts for climate equity and advance equitable climate action legislation and funding. The ECAC also serves as a space to learn about efforts happening around the city to amplify the concerns of residents beyond the eastside as well and forming greater cohesion in advocacy efforts.

Piloted the Resident Climate Corps. In 2022, ECN received funding from the Institute for Sustainable Communities for an initial phase of the Residential Climate Corps. ECN provided stipends so that residents could lead local climate, health, and equity-related initiatives, including a series of bike tours of green stormwater infrastructure sites (GSI) on the eastside. ECN's Climate Equity staff engaged graduates from ECN's LEAP Sustainability Fellowship program in the Resident Climate Corps. The Resident Climate Corps regularly met with ECN staff to expand their understanding of climate, health, and equity issues and help advocate for policy goals.

Increased incentives for GSI in low density areas of the city. ECN hosted an event at the Hamilton Rainscape Learning Lab in which residents and Detroit City Council candidates learned about the impacts of GSI and discussed flooding issues. ECN received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to lead a Detroit pilot of the Rain Ready program. The Rain Ready program, in partnership with Elevate, provided back flow valves and rain gardens to seven homes to reduce the likelihood of basement flooding. Insights from those assessments informed a policy agenda to address flooding issues in Detroit.

Opened the Stoudamire Wellness Hub to promote community health and wellbeing in 2021 to serve the community in response to the major flooding events experienced in Detroit. Since its opening, the number of services and support it offers to the community has continuously expanded. The catalogue of classes for the Stoudamire includes learning to use technology like smartphones, ballroom dancing, hustle, yoga, sewing, pottery, nutrition, and more. Classes are continuously updated to meet the needs of residents, with new classes around sustainability, leadership development, and organizational capacity beginning in 2025. In 2022, the Stoudamire Wellness Hub expanded its programming and capacity to support childcare and health clinics for residents. ECN hosted various community events at the Stoudamire Wellness Hub to provide residents with access to vaccinations, the City's Homeowner Property Tax Exemption program, home repair resources, and financial assistance services. Additionally, residents were invited to events on topics like public transportation, resilience hubs, affordable healthcare, community power building for policy advocacy, and dimensions of wellness. These events included local policymakers like Antoine Bryan (Director of Planning for City of Detroit) and Councilwoman Latisha Johnson.

ECN continues to pursue partnerships and resources to improve and build out the space to best serve the community. Recently, the Stoudamire became a host site for a pilot electric carshare program that provides more affordable access to transportation through a short-term rental approach. During the 2024 CCHE Convening Site Visit to the Stoudamire, a staff person said, *"We not only offer programming, but are also working to change the systems that create the problems."*

Replicated elements of the resilience hub throughout neighborhoods on the southeast side of Detroit. In partnership with ten other organizations and the City of Detroit's Office of Sustainability, ECN expanded its resilience hub network through the Resilient Eastside Initiative (REI) to several neighborhoods across the eastside. They partnered with other organizations already present and operating community hubs in those areas to combine efforts around preparedness, resource distribution, advocacy, and fundraising.

Built resident power and engagement in issue organizing. Over the course of the CCHE initiative, ECN has hosted a number of events around different climate justice topics to build resident knowledge and support the creation of resident-informed policy agendas. For flooding, as an example, ECN hosted multiple events to understand how residents were impacted by the issue. They held a Resource Fair in 2021 at the Stoudamire Wellness Hub to allow residents to speak with different resource providers to help them recover from home flooding or prepare for future floods. In 2024, they hosted a town hall around "Flooding in Detroit: A Community Conversation." This event included technical experts on water infrastructure and community experts to share experiences with widespread flooding and how communities can be prepared for future climate events. Additionally, ECN's LEAP Sustainability Fellowship, program which began in 2019, has trained residents to become community leaders by building knowledge on climate and sustainability topics and implementing projects in their communities. The fellowship has helped expand the capacity of eastside leaders and supported their growth in developing projects, understanding the issues facing their neighbors, and seeking additional resources.

Engaged with the City of Detroit’s Sustainability and Climate planning efforts, as well as other state and federal government entities to provide community perspective. ECN has consistently brought together residents, technical experts, and other stakeholders to discuss policy issues related to resilience hubs, flooding, solar energy, and air quality through the ECAC and other events. These events have resulted in productive collaboration and ideas that informed ECN’s advocacy efforts. ECN served on the City of Detroit’s Climate Equity Advisory Council and supported development of the Detroit Climate Strategy which was released in 2023. They continue to advocate for the implementation of measures of the plan that align with their resident-informed agendas, like resilience hubs and clean air. ECN has also partnered with Wayne State University, with support from Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, Sierra Club, and other stakeholders, to steer the creation of the Detroit River Watershed Management plan. The plan is taking a community-centered approach that has resident watershed planners researching, writing, and promoting the development of the plan.

Advocated for resources from emergency funds to be allocated to community hubs to provide resilience sites throughout every neighborhood in Detroit. The REI has continued to work with the City of Detroit’s Office of Sustainability and expanded partnership with the City’s Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, as well as the Health Department. The Stoudamire has hosted the City’s Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings and ECN staff taught sessions of CERT focused on climate change and the use of resilience hubs. They continue to work to expand the partnership with the City and look for opportunities to further resource community resilience hubs.

Advocated for community solar and energy grid improvements. The ECAC hosted several sessions focused on energy issues and built an energy agenda that includes advocacy around community solar, reduced energy burdens, and increased grid reliability. They have organized groups of residents to attend City Council meetings and energy company rate hearings to advocate for these points. ECN staff have met with the Michigan Public Service Commission, energy stakeholders, and policymakers to advocate for the concerns raised by residents through the ECAC. Through the REI, ECN has supported installation of solar plus storage systems at two resilience hub sites, completion of solar feasibility studies at several others, and is pursuing funding for solar at all hub sites.

Pushed industrial facilities and regulatory agencies to address community health impacts of polluting facilities. Air pollution from industrial facilities and truck traffic continues to impact the health of residents on the eastside. ECN is a part of the Clear the Air Coalition and Trucks Off our Streets effort which are bringing together groups across the city impacted by air pollution to unite their voices for policy change to protect the health of residents. These groups are pushing to pass city ordinances to control truck traffic to reduce impact on residential areas and to improve buffering between industrial facilities, truck routes, and residential neighborhoods.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Brilliant Detroit	Community Partner
City of Detroit Emergency Management and Homeland Security	Government Partner
City of Detroit Office of Sustainability	Government Partner
Detroit Collaborative Design Center	Other/Public Sector Organization
National Weather Service	Government Partner
Detroit Water and Sewage Dept.	Government Partner
Elevate	Environmental Partner
Great Lakes Environmental Law Center	Environmental Partner
Lower Eastside Action Plan Coalition	Community Partner
Residents of Detroit’s Eastside	Community Partner
Wayne Mobile Health Unit	Health Partner
University of Michigan’s Detroit Urban Research Center	Institutional Partner

Organization	Type
Wayne State University	Institutional Partner
Just Air	Environmental Partner
Ecology Center	Environmental Partner
University of Michigan School of Public Health (CAPHE)	Institutional Partner

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- Government agencies are getting better at including community-based organizations and residents in disaster planning, but more progress is needed.** Through the REI, ECN has grown its relationship with the City of Detroit’s Department of Sustainability and improved connections to other City departments. The Stoudamire has hosted the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management’s CERT the last two years, and in 2024 began leading a session of the training around climate change and resilience hubs. They have had productive conversations with the City’s Health Department and see opportunities ahead to grow these partnerships. Wayne County has also started its own resilience hub funding initiative, in which ECN is involved. Overall, government partnerships have grown, though ECN stresses there is still a lot of work to be done to better integrate the work of ECN, the REI, and the City and County to ensure that Detroit’s communities are prepared for climate emergencies.
- Issues related to climate change, health, and equity are expansive, technical, and complex.** These issues can often be overwhelming to understand for residents and even ECN staff. ECN is focused on developing the ability of residents to approach these topics and connect independently with technical experts. Throughout the CCHE initiative, residents have learned from ECN and gained the skills to advocate for issues that directly impact their lives. They have gained a working knowledge of complex climate issues, such as sewershed management, urban flooding, heat risks, air pollution, transportation systems, and environmental health. Expanded community science efforts through distribution of wearable air monitors and rain gauges has helped improve engagement with scientific data and understanding of the environment.
- Extreme rain and flooding brought water infrastructure issues to the forefront for ECN and many residents.** Detroit was not prepared for the impacts of severe flooding and rain, though communities had known for years that climate change would cause higher intensity storms in their communities. More support is needed to foster collaboration between local leadership and residents to prepare for future flooding and other extreme weather events. ECN convened a Flooding Task Force with academic and resident partners to develop recommendations for addressing flooding issues. This led to the Detroit River Watershed Management Plan that centers community voice in the process of creating a plan and continues working to increase transparency around water infrastructure improvements. The Plan itself will open the door to additional funding opportunities.

Looking Ahead

The CCHE initiative propelled ECN forward along a path to increase their impact in addressing decades of environmental injustices and emerging climate justice issues facing eastside Detroit residents. Building off the ECAC and other ECN efforts, ECN will continue its policy advocacy to exert greater influence in the policy process, involve residents in legislative advocacy, and advance initiatives at both the city and state level that improve health outcomes for Eastside Detroiters and beyond. With City and State elections in the next two years, ECN will partner with residents to ensure candidates for elected positions are taking stances on the issues the community needs addressed. ECN will continue power building efforts to expand the number of voices speaking up and being heard so that residents can steward policy changes that make their neighborhoods safer, healthier, and more just and resilient.

ECN also looks to take the REI to a new level by stewarding robust investment into the network’s community hubs. By improving the site facilities for the community groups involved, the REI can increase its ability to serve residents and keep them safe. ECN will also continue to invest in the community of care, mobility solutions, communications planning, and emergency preparedness training with REI hub leaders.