

Building Resilience: Planning for a Changing Climate

Climate change is intensifying the rate and severity of extreme weather events, from stronger storms and flooding to heatwaves impacting vulnerable populations, vegetation, and wildlife. Since these events affect public health, investments, and the environment, community leaders are asking, how can we prepare for a future where these challenges are more frequent, disruptive, and costly?

Often, effective actions weave sustainability and resilience needs into land use, transportation, housing, and economic development priorities. Implementing green infrastructure or improving energy efficiency and access to public transportation are common actions, depending on a community's size, funding, and location.

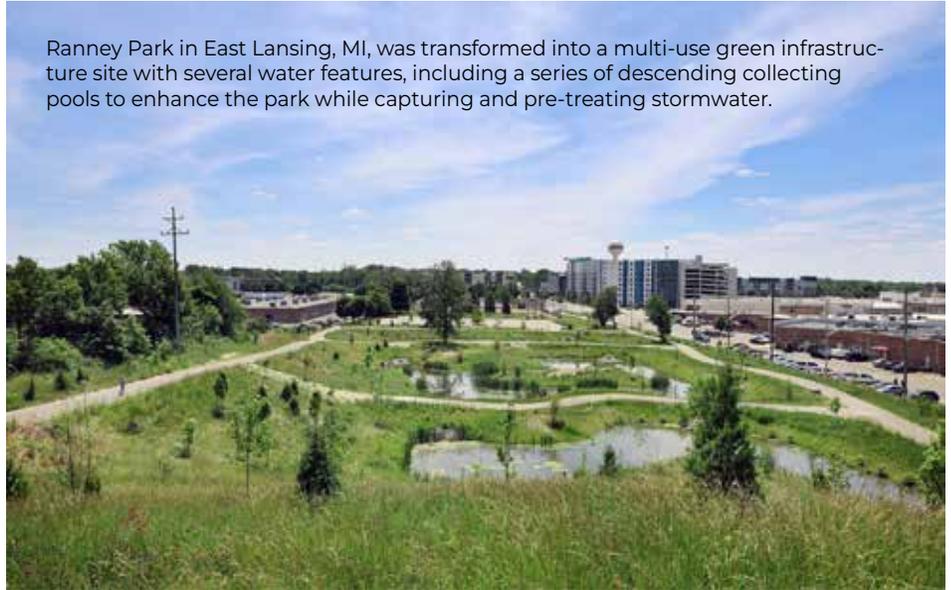
Communities may use several proven strategies to reduce and mitigate emissions, adapt to cope with climate change impacts, and become more resilient. Some choose to develop stand-alone climate resiliency plans. Others integrate climate resiliency goals into broader planning efforts. Lastly, some communities pursue targeted projects that address specific climate impacts with available funding while offering co-benefits such as recreation and public health improvements.

Three recent projects in Michigan—Resilient Washtenaw, Re-Envision Redford, and Ranney Park—illustrate how each approach can help communities safeguard their future.

Climate Resiliency Plan: Resilient Washtenaw

Regional climate resilience requires a coordinated plan. That's the driving force behind Resilient Washtenaw, an ambitious, first-of-its-kind climate action plan to achieve carbon neutrality for county operations by 2030 and county-

Ranney Park in East Lansing, MI, was transformed into a multi-use green infrastructure site with several water features, including a series of descending collecting pools to enhance the park while capturing and pre-treating stormwater.



wide carbon neutrality by 2035.

Adopted in December 2022, the plan identifies 45 actions to reduce and mitigate carbon emissions, build resilience and economic opportunities, and increase community adaptation. All actions are tied to one of eight key strategies, such as infrastructure and energy transition, and the authorities accountable for execution are identified. The vision to create a centralized entity, the Regional Resilience Authority (RRA), is one of the Plan's more innovative ideas. The RRA will bring together local governments, nonprofits, and employers to explore and promote sustainability solutions and allow them to leverage funds and staff across partners. By clearly defining actions, responsibilities, and co-benefits, Resilient Washtenaw offers a roadmap that other counties can follow to tackle climate change at scale.

Integration in Broader Plan: Re-Envision Redford

Embedding climate resilience into a broader vision for the community can lay the groundwork for a more connected, resilient, and sustainable future while

balancing other planning goals. Navigating the challenges of declining population and property tax revenue, Redford Township developed the Re-Envision Redford 2040 Comprehensive Master Plan. Adopted in 2024, the plan's key priorities include diversifying housing options, enhancing transportation choices, expanding recreational opportunities, and revitalizing downtown. Climate resilience was integrated through green infrastructure improvements, park enhancements, and trail connections to reduce car dependency.

A trackable matrix of the plan's goals and action items helped emphasize implementation and position the Township to immediately pursue funding for high-priority projects. One standout initiative—the Redford Township Recreation and Wellness Center—will anchor downtown redevelopment while serving as a resiliency hub during extreme weather events when it opens in 2026. By weaving climate resilience into a broader vision, Redford Township ensures that sustainability goals are part of every decision the community makes moving forward.

Targeted Project: Ranney Park

Meaningful climate resilience can be achieved one project at a time. In East Lansing, the transformation of Ranney Park into a green infrastructure site shows how a single site can address flooding, pollution, and public space needs simultaneously.

As part of a larger stormwater improvement program for the 270-acre Montgomery Drain watershed, the redesigned Ranney Park has a network of detention basins, channels, waterfalls, and wetlands to capture and treat stormwater before it enters the Red Cedar River. The park's centerpiece, a 160-foot-wide water quality wall, circulates stormwater through pools and cascades, creating a striking visual feature while cleaning runoff. Wildlife habitat was

restored via woody debris structures, rock basking and nesting areas, hibernacula (winter shelters for animals), and native plantings.

While visitors enjoy amenities such as trails, boardwalks connecting islands, overlooks, and a sledding hill, initial water quality testing has shown that pollution levels leaving the watershed have decreased 90%. Ranney Park demonstrates how a single infrastructure investment can yield environmental, recreational, and economic benefits.

Different Paths, Shared Goal

Communities have a range of strategies to prepare for and adapt to climate change that come with their own benefits. Each strategy can be tailored to local capabili-

ties, needs, and funding, building communities that protect residents, economies, and ecosystems in the decades to come.

The November *Michigan Planner E-dition* will have links to all of these projects.

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Oxford Trails

City of Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., Progressive Companies

Outstanding Planning Project: Resilience and Sustainability

Sterling Heights Climate Action Plan

Fresh Coast Climate Solutions, City of Sterling Heights

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