

2020 COMMUNITY IMPACT SESSIONS



FOCUSED FORWARD

Community Foundation
for Greater Buffalo

Rebuilding Support for Our Environment

Our city is defined by its relationship to water – it is the foundation of our region’s identity and essential to our economic and cultural fabric. Our proximity to the Great Lakes makes us stewards of 20 percent of the world’s freshwater and it is our responsibility to protect and restore the natural assets in Western New York, not just for us, but for millions of people who depend on this resource.

The COVID-19 crisis presented opportunities for residents to experience our parks, trails and waterways in new ways. It also put a spotlight on the difficulties low-income families face in accessing water -- not only for recreational purposes, but for critical needs such as hand washing to prevent the spread of the virus.

Western New York is fortunate to have strong environmental organizations working for solutions to persistent challenges. Their expertise and experience enables them to uncover opportunities among the problems amplified by COVID-19. Their long term efforts have improved parks, trails and bike paths, important assets in the pandemic as people spend more time outdoors. COVID-19 has also surfaced long-standing problems of access to drinking water, where some families have experienced water shut-offs due to their inability to pay. Environmental advocates were able to improve water policies to ensure better access for all.

On Tuesday, October 6, you will hear from key partners about how we continue to support the protection of our water and natural resources, while promoting equitable access to them during these uncertain times.



Photo courtesy GOBike Buffalo

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

Speaker: Jill Jedlicka, Executive Director

Spending time outdoors and exploring nature quickly became an important way for people to get out of the house and still be able to social distance in 2020. While it is wonderful to see so many people enjoying our waterways, it also created more litter. Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper is a community-based nonprofit organization that protects and restores local waters and surrounding ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations. You will hear how Waterkeeper stayed on mission and has found creative ways to protect our region's fresh water, while also recommitting to advocate for and pursue equitable access for all to enjoy our natural resources.



PUSH (People United for Sustainable Housing) Buffalo

Speaker: Rahwa Ghirmatzion, Executive Director

When COVID-19 hit, PUSH was ready. Street teams already in place for educating neighbors about free energy-efficiency upgrades were redeployed to deliver groceries and medical supplies to those in need. Existing grants supporting affordable housing were leveraged for rent relief. The School 77 building, already a center of neighborhood activity, became a mutual aid hub distributing food, cleaning supplies and diapers. PUSH relied on already-established partnerships to respond to the needs of its community immediately, including advocating for low-income families to have access to water for drinking and hand washing. This is all part of PUSH's mission of mobilizing residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality, affordable housing; to expand local hiring opportunities; and to advance economic and environmental justice in Buffalo.



GObike Buffalo

Speaker: Justin Booth, Executive Director

Since early March, a sample study in Western New York shows that biking has increased 3,000 percent and pedestrian activity has increased more than 500 percent. Even as vehicular traffic has begun to return to pre-pandemic levels, pedestrian and bicycle activity remains high. As more bicyclists hit the pavement, concerns for their safety have only amplified. To improve bicycle and pedestrian safety, GObike has advocated for hundreds of miles of bike trails in Western New York. Its initiatives provide education and advocacy for rebuilding streets and infrastructure to support community health; boost the local economy; reduce air pollution and environmental impacts caused by unsustainable transportation; and provide opportunities and access to jobs. The pandemic has catalyzed efforts to rethink the future of area roadways to accommodate walking and biking.

