

The Oberlin Project: 2010-2020

The Oberlin Project is a joint effort between the City of Oberlin and Oberlin College to create systemic responses to the combined challenges posed by poverty and climate change. Our eleven person board is a cross-section of the Oberlin Community. Our goal is to generate solutions that are systemic, practical, and affordable and that lead to carbon neutrality, a robust local farm and food system, a resilient and fair economy, affordable high-performance housing, better education, and integrated public policies. We intend, in other words, to grow into a replicable example of resilient “full-spectrum sustainability.” What we are doing is applicable to cities elsewhere, showing that major changes can start at the periphery in out-of-the-way places.

We are a unique kind of organization: temporary, catalytic, and cross-sectoral. We aim to build social and economic capacity by bringing diverse organizations and viewpoints together to develop solutions that advance multiple goals that underpin a resilient, prosperous, and sustainable future. Our staff of 3.5 FTEs works with partners throughout the City and region including Oberlin College, the City, the Municipal Utility, and a dozen other local, regional, and national organizations. We have been named a “Climate Action Champion” by the White House and US Department of Energy, We are a C-40 City and one of only three “Climate Positive” Development Programs and also a semifinalist in the Georgetown University Energy Prize

With an annual budget of \$300,000 we have led efforts to:

- to rebuild the downtown, including a platinum Hotel/Conference center and generate \$100m of new investment;
- deploy an 11 acre solar array and eliminate 87% of utility carbon emissions;
- create a community solar initiative;
- establish an Affordable Green Housing Initiative;
- integrate environment into public school curricula;
- quadruple residential energy audits and home weatherization;
- preserve 12,000 acres of farmland in collaboration with the W. R. Land Conservancy;
- deploy community dash-boards providing instant feedback on resource consumption;
- launch an entrepreneurial business incubator.

Our goals for 2016 include:

- organizing a national conference on “The Next Economy,” on October 6-8th co-sponsored with Wharton Business School, the Democracy Collaborative, the Capital Institute, the Croatan Institute, and the American Renewable Energy Institute;
- launch of a local food hub connecting farmers and the local food market as part of our goal to reach 70% regional food self-reliance and grow economic opportunities;
- creation of a Community Solar cooperative and add another ~2MW of solar energy to the 2.27 MW deployed in 2013;
- fulfill City and College commitments to carbon neutrality;
- an expanded community housing initiative to improve energy efficiency, decent, safe, and affordable homes, and employ local people in locally owned businesses.

Our funders include The Kresge Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The USDA, USDOE, The Rapoport Foundation, The Grantham Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Cleveland Foundation, and several hundred individual supporters.