

Report and Recommendations of Allentown EAC on Allentown’s Bird Town Program
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I. Introduction

“Where birds thrive, people prosper” -- National Audubon Society

[Bird Town](#) is a program through which the [Pennsylvania Audubon Council](#) works with local municipalities and partner organizations to promote community-based conservation actions that create a healthier, more sustainable environment for birds, wildlife and people. In 2014, Allentown was the first City in Pennsylvania to be designated as a Bird Town. The Allentown Environmental Advisory Council subsequently took a leadership role in forming the Lehigh Valley Bird Town Coalition (“LVBTC”) with the goal of bringing together the bird towns of the Lehigh Valley and like-minded organizations to collaborate with each other. The LVBTC established a Meetup group to share event announcements which now has over 1100 members. The LVBTC itself has now been replaced by the Lehigh Valley EAC Network in which the Allentown EAC once again has a leadership role.

The Bird Town program has continued to grow and as of April, 2023, there are 40 Bird Towns in Pennsylvania, including two cities in the Lehigh Valley – the City of Bethlehem and the City of Allentown – along with several other Lehigh Valley municipalities. The program, recently reinvigorated with new leadership, is offering significantly enhanced resources, including technical expertise, workshops, tool kits, etc. for municipalities to use for their community-based conservation programs.

Recently, Bird Town Pennsylvania developed metrics for municipalities to measure their success as Bird Towns. Starting in 2022, Bird Towns now file an annual report (made available to the public) containing data on each of the metrics. The Allentown EAC filed the 2022 Bird Town annual report for the City in 2023 (**see attached**) and was gratified that Allentown achieved “Silver” status as a Bird Town.

As one of its 2023 goals, the Allentown EAC committed to evaluating whether to incorporate Bird Town metrics into future AEAC initiatives related to community-based conservation programs. The next section of this report summarizes the evaluation and the Allentown EAC’s recommendations.

This report has been reviewed and approved by the Allentown EAC.

II. Evaluation Summary and Recommendations

Recommendation No. 1: Leveraging the resources now provided by Bird Town Pennsylvania, the City of Allentown should consolidate its community-based conservation programs under

the “Bird Town” name which would enable more integrated programming and enhance public awareness and engagement.

Although the City of Allentown has been a Bird Town for almost a decade, there was never any official action taken by City Council to recognize this designation. Very few members of the Allentown community or even City staff know what being a Bird Town means. The City is engaged in a variety of community-based conservation actions (such as community gardens, invasive plant removals, children’s education programs, etc.) but they are siloed from each other and community awareness, and engagement in them remains low. With the resources now available through Bird Town Pennsylvania (including technical expertise, workshops, tool kits, etc.), the City has the opportunity to take its community-based conservation actions to the next level, integrating them under the Bird Town name, developing new programs to address gaps, and raising community awareness and engagement in the programs.

Recommendation No. 2: City Council should issue a proclamation recognizing Allentown’s Bird Town designation and appointing the Allentown EAC as the Bird Town lead for the City.

In order to effectively implement Recommendation No. 1, City Council should issue a proclamation recognizing Allentown’s Bird Town designation and appointing the Allentown EAC as the Bird Town lead. The proclamation should follow the form developed by Bird Town Pennsylvania. Every Bird Town municipality is now required to issue a proclamation in substantially this form. The Allentown EAC’s recommended proclamation is attached. This proclamation can be issued at an appropriate event that would celebrate Allentown’s silver status as a Bird Town and would promote community-based environmental stewardship.

Recommendation No. 3: As the City’s Bird Town lead, the Allentown EAC should include in its annual goals support for Bird Town initiatives that best promote community-based conservation actions.

The metrics developed by Bird Town Pennsylvania are comprehensive and helpful in driving community-based conservation programs. By reviewing the metrics annually and determining areas for further action, the City can leverage Bird Town Pennsylvania resources and significantly improve its community-based conservation programs. The Allentown EAC should annually select programs and initiatives that it will include in its goals as the Bird Town lead for the City. Following are examples of programs that the Allentown EAC could lead as Bird Town programs:

1. Establishing an annual or bi-annual native plant and tree giveaway program for City residents, with a focus on tree equity. Many other cities have found that such programs are very popular and provide an excellent means to enhance public awareness and environmental commitment as well as creating positive environmental change.
2. Establishing a speaker’s bureau of experts who can give educational presentations on birds and/or community-based conservation topics

3. Working with community partners such as LV Audubon Society, Lehigh Gap Nature Center, Wildlands Conservancy, Lehigh Valley Watershed Coalition and D&L National Heritage Corridor to offer more environmental programming with an emphasis on environmental stewardship and reaching people living in environmental justice areas within Allentown.
4. Building community awareness of healthy habitats and the adverse effects of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers. Encouraging residents to participate in the Audubon Mid-Atlantic program for bird-friendly habitat at home and to register their bird-friendly spaces.
5. Coordinating with community partners such as Lehigh Gap Nature Center to make environmental education, outdoor recreation, and conservation careers more accessible to Allentown community members.
6. Leveraging Bird Town resources to increase neighborhood involvement in litter cleanups.

Recommendation No. 4: Establish a publicly available dashboard for Allentown residents to track the City's progress on community-based conservation actions included in its 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

The City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan includes the following steps to enhance green infrastructure which is a key component of Bird Town metrics: incentivize partnerships between private property owners and developers to implement stormwater controls on a large-scale basis; engage and educate communities on good stewardship practices; develop inventory of suitable properties for community gardens and partner with community organizations and Penn State Extension to help train residents; enhance the City's network of greenways and trails through collaboration with advocacy groups and aligning with the LV Planning Commission's Walk/Roll LV Plan.

The City has implemented some of these recommendations, but there is no publicly available dashboard to track the City's actions with respect to these recommendations.

Recommendation No. 5: The Allentown EAC should continue to file the annual Bird Town report and make the document easily available to the public.

The annual report is an informative compilation of all the actions the City is taking to promote community-based conservation actions that create a healthier, more sustainable environment. It would be helpful for City residents to be more aware of these efforts and build upon them to continue to improve the City.