

CROTON 100

Neighbors Helping Neighbors Help the Planet

How to Make an Entire Zip Code Carbon Neutral in 20 Years

By Caedra Scott-Flaherty

"How many cars do you drive?" our neighbors asked. And later, "How much red meat do you eat?" My children slurped their lentil soup and stared at our lunch guests. I thought, "Don't mention the hot dogs." "Really only hot dogs," my husband said. I cringed. "Only occasionally. We really don't—" "I want a hot dog!" my son shouted.

This wasn't an awkward neighborhood potluck. Not exactly. Dr. Chandu Visweswariah and Patty Buchanan, two volunteers with Croton100, offered to help us calculate our household carbon footprint. Before they arrived, I hid our single-use plastic bags, but as we talked I noticed a stray water bottle on our counter. I slid over and asked how the organization got started, nudging the non-biodegradable material behind our toaster. Chandu smiled kindly. "That's a great question."

IN THE BEGINNING... The organization grew out of Croton Climate Initiative (CCI), a grassroots group, founded by Lisa Moir, dedicated to reversing climate change. While CCI tackled a wide range of environmental advocacy issues, Croton100 is focused on one actionable initiative: reduce 10520's net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2040.

CALCULATE YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT Trying to make an entire zip code carbon neutral in 20 years is a big goal, but Croton100 urges us to think of it this way: If every household reduced its emis-

sions by just 5% a year, the goal would be met. Amazing! So how do we do that? That's when their volunteers step up to the biodegradable plate.

Croton100, an all-volunteer, community-based organization that seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Croton-on-Hudson, for a "100% emissions-free future," started organizing in October 2019 and had its official launch celebration on Feb. 29 at Croton-Harmon High School.

Attendees watched presentations, visited an electric vehicle car show, and checked out a tabletop expo, where Sustainable Westchester and Bedford 2020 distributed information and eco bags were available.

STEP 1 The first step is to calculate your carbon footprint. The average annual household



Croton 100 board member Dr. Chandu Visweswariah explains the organization's mission and climate action plan at the Feb. 29 launch celebration at Croton-Harmon High. Photo: Sonia Ferrante



Croton100's mascot, the Decarbonizer Bunny, reminds us, "Our progress will keep on going, and going and going and going." Photo: Andrew Courtney

emissions in zip code 10520 are 52.6 metric tons (1 metric ton of CO₂e = 2,200 pounds).

The emissions are divided into six themes—transportation, heating, electricity, food and waste, goods and services, and zip code overhead.

Croton100's local experts created a playbook (currently a spreadsheet and a mobile app, still in beta) with formulas and data pulled from studies that allow you to do your own carbon tracking. While the tools are relatively user-friendly, some of the calculations can be confusing, so volunteers offer to help administer the playbook.

CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH

For us, the ability to immediately compare our household with the zip code's averages added an element of fun peer pressure and gamification. When we learned that our electricity was 100% clean, my husband and I cheered and did a high-five. While our electricity score was boastworthy, our household's estimated emissions are 58.8 metric tons per year, a bit above average, mostly due to my husband's business travel.

Airplane travel is particularly harmful (especially "super long haul" flights to Asia and Africa),

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because CO₂e from burning jet fuel is released high into the atmosphere. "But what can we do about that?" I asked. "Business travel is unavoidable."

STEP 2 This is where the second step, figuring out how to improve your carbon footprint, comes in. The playbook provides you with tips and resources on ways to make realistic changes, and volunteers offer to connect you with neighbors who have done the same. We learned about carbon offsetting our flights through organizations like Carbonfund.org. We found out we can get a free energy audit through NY-SERDA. We discovered that our forced air heating system can easily be converted from oil to a heat pump. We now know that if we cut out red meat, we would save 1.4 tons of CO₂e annually per person.

STEP 3 The third and most important step is to make a 10-year

plan for how you will cut your carbon footprint in half by 2030.

COUNT US IN Despite my self-consciousness, Chandu and Patty were incredibly kind and non-judgmental. My children waved them goodbye from our porch, begging them to come back soon. We have a long way to go as a household, but both the little and big steps feel more doable now. Croton100's mascot, the Decarbonizer Bunny, reminds us, "Our progress will keep on going, and going and going and going."

HOW TO STAY IN TOUCH

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