

Environment and Energy Commission

Village of Oak Park



Green Awards 2023



Green Awards – 2023 Winners

1. One Earth Collective
2. Oak Park Temple
3. Erica Helms (Oak Park Environmental Services Manager)
4. Christine Poreba (Oak Park Public Library)
5. Derek Eder
6. Laurie Casey
7. Climate Ready Community Outreach to Oak Park (COOP)
8. Dr. Greg Johnson (Oak Park and River Forest High School) and Tom Cofsky (Oak Park and River Forest High School Board of Education)

One Earth Collective

One Earth Collective is dedicated to creating resilient communities and healthier planet through its programs. It reaches thousands of people through its program areas: One Earth Film Festival, One Earth Local, and One Earth Youth Voices.

The film festival will be in its 13th year in 2024, and is the premier environmental film festival in the Midwest. The 2023 festival reached more than 2000 attendees, both in-person and virtual, who came from 48 states and 46 countries. Its unique Young Filmmakers Contest accepts submissions from youth from third grade up through age 25. 2023 marked their first year accepting submissions from youth living outside the U.S.

One Earth Collective stands out for its commitment to social and environmental justice, equity, and inclusion. Its grassroots, community-centered approach to environmental programming draws people in through film and storytelling, nature, and activism.



Oak Park Temple

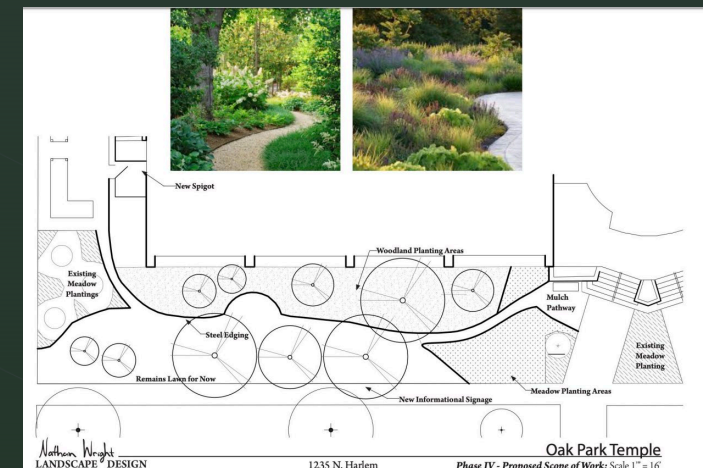
Oak Park Temple was nominated for its dedication to sustainability. Some examples of Oak Park Temple's sustainability initiatives include:

- Participating in a community solar program, which allows it to get all its electricity from solar without having to install rooftop panels
- Creating a pesticide-free native pollinator garden
- Installing energy efficiency upgrades such as installing LED lighting throughout the building and replacing old, drafty windows in the classrooms

Additionally, the Temple pursued a unique grant opportunity through ComEd to have a complete upgrade of their old boiler and inefficient HVAC system. In its place a Very High Efficiency HVAC system was installed – the first major retrofit of its kind in Illinois on a large older building. The environmental benefits of the system include:

- Provides high-efficiency, all-electric heating and cooling
- Uses no fossil fuels
- Increases indoor air quality by using 100% filtered outdoor air

Through these significant sustainability initiatives, Oak Park Temple is truly an environmental leader in the community.



Erica Helms

Erica Helms began her position as the Environmental Services Manager for the Village's Public Works Department in January of 2023. With over a decade of experience in managing recycling and composting programs across the county, she has big ambitions for waste diversion in Oak Park. In the past year she has expanded the Compostable Program by adding additional public compost drop-off sites, implementing a kitchen compost pail program, and engaging with valuable professional networks including the Illinois Food Scrap and Composting Coalition and the Wasted Food Action Alliance. Erica has a passion for keeping hard-to-recycle materials out of the landfill and has provided outlets for residents to divert their non-traditional items such as political signs, holiday lights, foam packaging, and textiles. In 2024, Erica plans to offer more waste diversion opportunities for the Village's multi-family residents, increase participation the Keep Oak Park Beautiful Programs (Neighborhood Clean-Ups, Adopt-a-Block, and Green Block Parties), and focus on community outreach and education.



Christine Poreba

Since beginning her work at Oak Park Public Library in the newly created role of Environmental Programming Specialist in Spring 2023, Christine has organized nearly two dozen events on a wide range of topics at all three branches of the library, from Environmental poetry to an upcycled art workshop to film screenings to an art and science presentation and gallery reception to discussions on consumerism and plastics. She and a colleague started EARTH LOUNGE, an environmental book discussion group that met this fall and will continue to meet in the New Year. She hosted informational sessions on recycling and EVs with the Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability and joined forces with the Village Department of Sustainability to host presentations given by Citizen's Utility Board on home energy savings, decarbonization, and solar power, which close to fifty people attended on a night of a tornado warning. She regularly attends COOP meetings (Climate Outreach Climate Ready Oak Park) and collaborates with numerous community partners. Since her arrival there has also been a Sustainability page added to the OPPL website, the events calendar can now be searched using a sustainability filter and she has set up an Environmental Hub of information on the 3rd floor of the main branch.



Derek Eder

In 2022, inspired by a talk given by a friend on electrification as an important solution to climate change, Derek began undertaking the process of fully electrifying his home in Oak Park. From installing solar panels, to insulating, to installing heat pumps and electric appliances, Derek documented the whole journey on his blog so people can learn how he did it. He also thoroughly documented costs, rebates, and incentives so readers can understand the complexities of financing these upgrades. As of 2023, Derek has fully electrified his family home and shared his knowledge across multiple platforms beyond his blog, including giving a talk to Climate Reality Chicago, sharing his blog posts via One Earth Collective's newsletter, which reaches thousands of people, and doing a video on it for the Village of Oak Park. In addition to his commitment to eliminating his residential carbon emissions, Derek is an active member of the Oak Park Climate Action Network, and works toward a cleaner and more sustainable community.



Laurie Casey

Laurie demonstrates her commitment to making Oak Park more sustainable in many different ways, but particularly in her dedication to communications, outreach and awareness building about the climate crisis and local solutions. Laurie created and leads the initiative Climate Ready Community Outreach to Oak Park (COOP), which engages a broad coalition of community members to share sustainability information across the community. She also channels this commitment to local outreach through her role as the programs manager for One Earth Local, where she helps engage the community at the grassroots-level through partnerships, seminars, workshops and other community-based projects. She also helps organize Green Block Parties over the summer, which helps community members learn about topics like composting, native plants, and electrification. Laurie is a tireless advocate for building a more sustainable community.



Climate Ready Community Outreach to Oak Park (COOP)

Climate Ready Community Outreach to Oak Park (COOP) is a climate action outreach project around the Village of Oak Park's Climate Ready Oak Park sustainability plan (approved in August 2022). COOP brings diverse community groups together to promote the plan to Oak Park's 55,000 residents in a just and equitable way. The organizations meets monthly to plan climate action education projects, including spring and fall tree strolls, a collaboration with D200 on climate change in the curriculum, and outreach at events like the Village's Juneteenth Picnic, Convivencia, and Climate Ready Oak Park: One Year In event.



Dr. Greg Johnson and Tom Cofsky

Superintendent Johnson and Tom Cofsky have demonstrated commitment to environmental sustainability and community engagement by leading efforts to develop OPRF's Sustainability Plan. The plan represents a holistic approach to sustainability, encompassing bold energy efficiency, waste reduction, conservation and education goals. Under their leadership and collaborative efforts, the Sustainability Plan provides an excellent model from which other school districts can draw inspiration and ideas. They not only aligned OPRF's sustainability goals with Climate Ready Oak Park, thus supporting the community's efforts, but they also ensured they were working with diverse stakeholders in the community and collaborating closely with students, making equity and environmental justice a priority.

