

Erinda Zenelaj



### The Heat is On: Global Warming at Our Doorstep in Yonkers

Global warming can feel like a phantom from the far future, threatening polar bears on melting ice caps, sinking Pacific islands, and megacities on distant beaches. The greenhouse effect, which traps solar radiation by atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, mostly from the usage of fossil fuels, is studied in sterile scientific terms. Since the Industrial Revolution, these activities have thickened the Earth's atmosphere, resulting in a steady, unsettling rise in global temperatures. The evidence is overwhelming, and nearly all climate scientists agree. However, for many residents of Westchester County, particularly Yonkers, this global catastrophe might remain abstract, disconnected from the daily rhythms of life along the Hudson. However, the repercussions of a warming world are not a future threat, they are a present day state, and they are manifesting in our neighborhoods in a harsh way that shows deep-seated disparities. The difficulty is not simply the changing environment, but also the

societal inertia, denial and indifference, that inhibits real action, leaving our most vulnerable populations bearing the brunt of the load.

The continuous, albeit shrinking, chorus of denial remains a fundamental impediment to solving climate change. Some regard it as a natural cyclical process, a scam devised by scientists for grant money, or a political ruse to expand government control. This doubt is frequently motivated by a mix of misinformation, economic fear about the fossil fuel sector, and a psychological unwillingness to tackle a subject of such colossal magnitude and complexity. Ignoring the problem brings brief consolation, a retreat into the familiar. However, the climate does not negotiate and is unconcerned about our thoughts. According to the old saying, you have the right to your own ideas but not to your own facts. The facts are obvious in the growing number of “unprecedented” weather phenomena. They are reflected in the increasing baseline of our Hudson River tides and felt during longer, more intense heat waves that tax our infrastructure and health. Ignoring these warnings in Yonkers means gambling with the city's future and, more cruelly, abandoning those who lack the resources to make such a play.

The effects of climate change are not evenly distributed. They act as a threat multiplier, aggravating already existing social and economic vulnerabilities. When comparing different neighborhoods in Yonkers, the discrepancy is stark. Affluent neighborhoods with more tree cover, larger lots, and modern infrastructure are intrinsically more resilient. Communities like Getty Square and the adjacent downtown area, which have a higher percentage of minority and low-income residents, face a slew of additional threats. These are neighborhoods with a high percentage of impermeable surfaces, asphalt, concrete, and densely packed buildings, resulting in

an urban heat island effect. On a hot day, temperatures in Getty Square can be much higher than in leafier portions of Yonkers, resulting in increased rates of heat-related diseases, higher energy costs for air conditioning, and poorer air quality.

Furthermore, the threat to water quality is both immediate and tangible. Climate change has a significant impact on the growth in severe, heavy precipitation occurrences. When a heavy storm drops many inches of rain in a short period of time, it overwhelms our combined sewer system. Yonkers, like many older cities, has a system in which rainwater runoff and household sewage share the same pipes. When the system's capacity is surpassed during severe rains, a mixture of untreated sewage and rainfall is discharged directly into the Hudson River to prevent backups into houses and streets. These are referred to as combined sewage overflows (CSOs). This is a clear attack on environmental and public health in a community that lives near and takes its identity from the Hudson. It pollutes the water, closes recreational sites, and endangers aquatic life. The residents most affected by these downstream impacts are frequently those who live in congested, riverbank areas and have the least ability to prevent or ameliorate the effects.

The next step necessitates a combination of awareness and action. The first and most important action is to keep yourself informed. This entails looking for solid sources rather than just headlines. Residents may keep up with local environmental organizations like Riverkeeper, which diligently campaigns for the health of the Hudson River and its tributaries and periodically reports on water quality issues, including CSO events. Attending Yonkers City Council or community board meetings where infrastructure and sustainability initiatives are discussed is another effective strategy to gain an understanding of local policy. Simply watching and

discussing local changes, noting which streets flood first after a storm or which parks lack shade during a heatwave, grounds the global issue in a palpable, localized reality.

Awareness, however, must be accompanied by concrete action. Individually, these seemingly insignificant activities add up to a great force. They include lowering personal carbon footprints by taking public transit, such as the BeeLine buses or the MetroNorth line, conserving electricity at home, and supporting local farmers markets to cut food miles associated with our groceries. Reducing water consumption, particularly following heavy rains, can help to alleviate the burden on the sewer system. Action has a greater impact at the neighborhood level. Volunteering for local park cleanups or treeplanting projects, especially in heatprone areas, immediately boosts neighborhood resilience. Supporting policies and candidates who prioritize green infrastructure, such as permeable pavements, green roofs, and expanded rain gardens that can absorb stormwater, is critical for long-term system change. Advocating for investment in updating Yonkers old water infrastructure is about more than simply the environment, it's about social justice for Getty Square residents and others.

Yonkers cannot afford to believe that global warming is a faraway problem. The evidence is here, in the steam rising from Getty Square's scorching pavement and the overflows that occasionally contaminate our great Hudson. To ignore it is to be complicit in the injustices that it exacerbates. The fight against climate change is more than just lowering carbon emissions on a global scale it is also about creating a more equal and resilient Yonkers. It is a fight for better air in our most densely populated neighborhoods, a safer river for all of our children to enjoy, and a

city in which one's zip code does not dictate one's vulnerability to a changing climate. The heat is on, quite literally, and how we respond will shape our community's future for generations.