



Clifton district signs up for green program

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CLIFTON — Clifton, long lauded as a leading "green" city, is now adding a new initiative to its list.

Clean Communities, composting, recycling, and solid waste reduction are all counted among the city's environmental initiatives. Clifton registered with Sustainable New Jersey in 2009, a state-backed effort to promote sustainability in communities, but the city's roots in environmentally-friendly practices go back much further.

"We've had all these programs from the mid-'70s or early '80s," said Clifton recycling coordinator, Alfred Dubois.

On Jan. 20 the Clifton Board of Education adopted a resolution to register the district for Sustainable New Jersey for Schools, a school-based initiative and sister program of Sustainable N.J. to support "green" practices in schools.

Sustainability is defined as being "able to be maintained at a certain rate" or in the case of environmental practices, "conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources."

In the case of Sustainable N.J., and its new offshoot Sustainable N.J. for Schools, it means creating a plan and practicing environmentally-conscious methods to help make communities self-sustaining and lessen their impact on the environment.

The school program mirrors much of what is offered at the municipal level and requires the district or schools to set up a "Green Team" which will help coordinate actions specific to the program and sustainability. This, along with gaining support from school staff, is the next step for the Clifton district.

"Sustainable practices result in healthier schools. They reduce operating costs and free up money for the classroom. And, in the end, they contribute to student success," said the N.J. School Board Association's executive director, Dr. Lawrence Feinsod, via a press release.

Possible future projects for the district under this program include promoting locally grown foods, school gardens, and an indoor air quality review.

Currently, 25 districts and 33 schools are registered with Sustainable N.J. for Schools since registration opened in October 2014. The program offers bronze and silver certification, determined by points earned for completing actions. No districts are yet certified.

"A lot that can be done, the city is already doing," said School Board commissioner Tafari Anderson. "Some of which we (the schools) are already doing." He said he learned of the program once it became backed by the state and brought it to the attention of the Board.

The Facilities committee, for which Anderson is chair, has conducted an energy audit of the schools and participated in measuring building efficiency. These already completed portions can be applied to the point system offered by the program to help the district progress to certification, he said.

The municipal program boasts 422 registered cities and 177 have become certified since 2009. Clifton is not yet certified, despite having many programs already in place and a nationally-recognized recycling program.

"What makes Clifton unique in the sustainability community is that we keep it all separate," Dubois said of the recycling program. Clifton separates its glass by color, making its recycling "truly" sustainable and able to be reused into other products, rather than just landfill cover.

Dubois said the city was missing an energy policy program component, which was necessary to become certified. It was being examined some years ago, said Dubois, but he did not know what had become of the energy program.

By registering with either of the Sustainable N.J. initiatives, cities are notified of grant opportunities to help fund sustainable projects.

Anderson said he hopes the Municipal Alliance committee will foster a partnership with the recycling and sustainability practices at the municipal level to strengthen the coming sustainability efforts in the schools.

"It's early but it's perfect timing to complete [the first three steps] during the winter to establish the gardening program in the spring," said Anderson.

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