

JULY 2017 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



CHRISTOPHER WALDRON, LEED AP Director of Sustainability, Camden County

For five years, Chris Waldron has served as the Director of Sustainability for Camden County, which covers over 223 square miles and has over 500,000 residents in southern New Jersey. He is a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accredited professional through the U.S. Green Building Council, the former chair of the Winslow Township Environmental Commission, the co-chair of Camden City's Green Team and an Adjunct Professor at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and Burlington County College. An effective and collaborative leader, Chris is known to bring inspiration and energy into meetings and conversations. His flexibility leads to results, since he is able to work with each county agency and department, as well as municipalities, to create a uniform sustainability vision for the county.

Chris is a resource, cheerleader and central contact to the 37 municipalities in Camden County as they work on certification with the Sustainable Jersey program. Chris and his wife Kristin also own an eight-acre farm in Winslow, New Jersey where they grow organic fruits and vegetables, Christmas trees and care for two horses, a miniature donkey and chickens. They have a seven-year-old daughter named Delaney, a two-year-old daughter named Molly and are expecting twin boys in the fall. Chris explained his motivation by saying, "My passion centers on my children and family. At the end of the day, if I have positively contributed in some way, then I am happy." He added, "Today for breakfast, I served fresh raspberries, blueberries, tomatoes and eggs to my girls from our farm. That was an amazing feeling. Living sustainably is a gift and is the reason I care about the work I am doing."

One of a kind--county director of sustainability: Camden County is the first county in New Jersey to create and fund a county sustainability director position. The position was originally championed by Camden County Freeholder Jeffrey Nash. "I understood the fact that our county needed someone to provide the vision, strategy and focus for advancing our operational sustainability efforts by working directly with the community," said Freeholder Nash. He added, "Camden County has large cities and small towns with vast geographical differences and contrasting needs. Chris was able to consolidate and unify the efforts of our municipal green teams, so they take advantage of economies of scale, which result in more impactful strategies that save money and improve our communities."

Sustainable Camden County and the Sustainability Plan: Chris is responsible for developing and implementing the long-range sustainability plan and the sustainability website--[Sustainable Camden County](#). Chris said



that under the direction of Camden County Freeholder Jeffrey Nash and former Freeholder Michelle Gentek, Camden County made a commitment to sustainability. Freeholder Jonathan Young, Sr. is now working with Chris and is the acting liaison for his work. Chris developed a Camden County Sustainability Plan that was first released in 2016; a progress report update for 2018 was recently finished: [Plan 2018 Mid-Term Progress Report – June 2016](#). Chris said, "The initiatives contained in the plan build on decades of work that was accomplished by county staff and community partners. The 11

actions and 63 initiatives were developed to set the stage for what is to come in the next five years. Plan 2018 is a living document, and we anticipate that it will change and grow over time.” The County operates a number of innovative programs including a County Bike Share Program, a Tool Lending Library, a Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom and the county greenhouses on a ten-acre site on the County’s Lakeland Campus in Gloucester Township. With regard to energy, the Camden County Board of Freeholders just signed a [Resolution](#) “supporting the spirit of the Paris Climate Accord and encouraging New Jersey to join the U.S. Climate Alliance.” Although the County doesn’t build many new buildings and tries to refurbish old ones instead, when they do, they make sure to invest in LEED certified projects. The Camden County Environmental Center, a LEED Gold building in Cherry Hill, houses the County’s Division of Environmental Affairs, Open Space and Farmland Preservation as well as the Rutgers Cooperative Extension offices, which include the Camden County 4H and Master Gardeners programs. It has many green features to showcase to the public, including pervious pavement, a solar hot water system, energy efficient lighting, water conservation fixtures and a green roof.



14 Camden County towns are Sustainable Jersey certified: Chris is working with the 37 mayors in Camden County to assist the towns with their Sustainable Jersey certification—all 37 towns have been registered. Seven towns have achieved silver-level of certification and seven towns have achieved bronze-level of certification. He provides the on-the-ground support that towns often need to move forward on sustainability actions. Chris said, “By attending green team meetings in different towns, I am able to share best practices and suggest ways that groups can work together. I have not seen any decrease in interest for Sustainable Jersey which is good.” He also helps outside the county when asked; he is currently working with the Borough of Wenonah in Gloucester County. The [TriCounty Sustainability Alliance](#) (TriCSA) is another resource for collaboration. This alliance brings together sustainability enthusiasts in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties looking to connect regionally. TriCSA helps local green teams with support in getting started with the Sustainable Jersey program. In addition to municipalities, Chris coordinates with sustainability agencies and organizations in the county, including the [Camden Collaborative Initiative](#), which brings together nearly 70 governmental, non-profit, private and community-based organizations to plan and implement innovative strategies to improve the environment and the quality of life of Camden's residents.



Need a belt sander? Ride your Bike Share bike to the Camden County Tool Library: Sustainable Camden County partnered with the Rutgers Master Gardeners and green teams and environmental commissions throughout the county to develop a ten-acre site called the Lakeland Complex to serve as a hub for community gardening and environmental education. Chris said, “Our goal is to make this a demonstration site for sustainability best practices.” Members rent a tool for a period of time rather than purchasing one from the store. For inventory availability, check the [Camden County Tool Library website](#). Another innovative county program is the [Camden County Bike Share](#) which is a volunteer-based program run in partnership with the Camden County Board of Freeholders that serves to give new life to unwanted bicycles for the benefit of Camden County residents.

Hydroponics Greenhouse: Through support from the Board of Freeholders, Chris is working with the Rutgers Master Gardeners on a hydroponics system to provide produce to local partners, including Camden County College and the Cooper House Restaurant. Hydroponics is a soil-less approach to gardening. The project’s mission is to produce locally-grown fruits and vegetables in an environment where food safety, nutrition and water conservation are the key principles. The

greenhouse will provide food to low-income urban areas and to people of all walks of life and all levels of ability. They are growing microgreens and lettuces using a form of hydroponics system referred to as “ebb and flow” and are in the process of adding a different type of system (Dutch-bucket) to grow select tomatoes and cucumbers. The greenhouse also grows rain garden plants that are provided to Cooper’s Ferry Partnership and the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority.

Camden County Animal Shelter: Wearing his shared services hat, Chris serves as the liaison to the [Camden County Animal Shelter](#) (CCAS). CCAS works to reduce the overwhelming stray/unwanted animal population in Camden County. It is an open admission shelter that takes in over 6,000 companion animals from 17 municipalities in Camden County every year. CCAS finds animals homes and provides low-cost spay/neuter services. Chris said, “The facility is working toward being a no-kill designated facility which means that 90 percent of the animal lives are saved, right now the CCAS facility is at about 86 percent.” He is proud of the work being done at the shelter and looks forward to overseeing a substantial renovation for the clinic and site in the coming months.



Penn State University and 19 years at the Philadelphia Zoo: Chris was the first member of his family to graduate from college. He has a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Pennsylvania State University. After college, Chris worked at the Philadelphia Zoo for 19 years, as a zookeeper, primate and carnivore curator, and as their Director of Sustainability. He received the Employee of the Year Award and the Manager of the Year Award. Chris spent five of his 18 years at the Philadelphia Zoo as its sustainability manager and he managed the first sustainability audit. He also was able to spend time in Kenya and Botswana working with African lion and wild dog researchers. Chris has been married for 11 years to his wife, Kristen, who is the Director of Conservation Education Integration at the Philadelphia Zoo. They both worked with Polar Bears International on a polar bear research project in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, which is on the front line of the increasing threats from climate change.



Sharing his knowledge through teaching: Chris continues to teach several online courses in Conservation Education and Exotic Animal Management at the Animal Behavior Institute. He is also an adjunct professor at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey where he teaches a master’s level course on Sustainable Communities. As coursework for the class, he leads his students through the Sustainable Jersey certification process, creating a mock town profile to complete sustainability actions.



What you may not know about Chris: Chris grew up in Kensington, North Philadelphia and is the oldest of three children. Chris is definitely cut from the same cloth as his parents; he describes his mother and father as “hard working and kind-hearted people.” At 70 years old, his father still works as a quality assurance inspector and his mother is retired from Temple University Hospital-Episcopal Campus; she is able to care for her grandchildren. The family lives close together with his sister, brother and parents all nearby. Chris and his father have a shared interest in Elvis Presley. Before his daughters were born, he and his father, brother and sister all travelled to Graceland together. This summer, he is taking his dad to an Elvis Presley event at the Mann Music Center in honor of the 40th anniversary of Elvis’ passing; his daughter Delaney will also be attending and already knows the words to many of Elvis’ big hits.