

# JUNE 2016 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



## TERI JOVER PP AICP Deputy Executive Director, New Jersey Future Chair, Sustainable Highland Park

For more than 15 years, Teri Jover has worked in the nonprofit sector to champion the advancement of sustainable and healthy communities in New Jersey. Teri is the energetic chair of [Sustainable Highland Park](#), an exemplary volunteer-driven organization that achieved silver-level Sustainable Jersey certification for Highland Park Borough in 2013.

One of Teri's biggest undertakings with Sustainable Highland Park was Highland Park's US EPA Climate Showcase Communities Grant, which resulted in the creation of the borough's "In Our Power Campaign," Climate Action Plan and Home Energy Assessment Program. Under Teri's leadership, Sustainable Highland Park has hosted three annual Earth Day celebrations, which have attracted hundreds of residents and engaged them in sustainability issues and practices as well as local music and food. Teri is the chair of Sustainable Jersey's Land Use and Transportation Task Force and has been an invaluable supporting partner contributing to the development of the Sustainable Jersey program.

**Community-level smart growth initiatives at New Jersey Future:** Teri is the deputy executive director of [New Jersey Future](#) where, in addition to her day-to-day managerial responsibilities, she focuses on implementing smart growth at the local level, with a special emphasis on downtown redevelopment issues. She is responsible for the organization's work with municipalities recovering from Hurricane Sandy. She helps towns understand the extent of their vulnerability to future sea-level rise and offers strategies to address those risks. New Jersey Future is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that brings together concerned citizens and leaders to promote responsible land use policies.

**Highland Park Borough silver-level certified:** Sustainable Highland Park is the green team for the Borough of Highland Park. The group of volunteers meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month at the Environmental Education Center. Highland Park Borough was Sustainable Jersey certified in 2013 with 355 points. Review all of the actions that Highland Park has accomplished; read the 2013 certification report: [Highland Park Borough \(Middlesex County\) Certification Report](#).



Teri is working with the group to be recertified this year. She kicked off the effort by convening all of the borough's volunteer boards to share their current projects and brainstorm what actions are achievable for certification. Teri explained, "Sustainable Jersey allows a good cross-section of groups to work together and think more strategically about sustainability initiatives." Teri said Sustainable Highland Park is working with the public works department to launch a recycling re-education effort. She is hoping to persuade the Borough of Highland Park to use an app called [My-Waste](#) that personalizes local waste and recycling program information and makes it instantly available for residents on demand.

**Advice for green team leaders:** Teri said, “At Sustainable Highland Park, our strength is the passion of our volunteers. So we encourage people to bring their ideas. If your thing is gardening, then you can champion the community garden. As long as your passion touches an area of sustainability, we are open to what you want to do.” Teri added, “Our other strength is the commitment and engagement of our local elected officials. We have been fortunate to have leadership that supports this work and respects the perspective we bring. We have a liaison from council that attends our meetings and makes our projects a priority.”

**Sustainable Jersey Small Grants:** In 2014, Highland Park Borough was awarded a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant to implement a solar islanding microgrid and education project to explore options for making renewable energy back-up power an option in the case of a community-wide power outage, like what happened during Hurricane Sandy.

In 2015, Highland Park's High School and Middle School green teams received a \$4,000 [Sustainable Jersey for Schools](#) grant to install drinking water bottle refill stations. Sustainable Highland Park members Sarah Leibau and Hailey Conrad worked on the school grant. The Highland Park School District is registered with Sustainable Jersey for Schools and the schools are currently working on achieving certification.



**Sustainable Jersey’s Land Use and Transportation Task Force:** Teri has served as the chair of the Sustainable Jersey Land Use and Transportation Task Force since the beginning of the program in 2009. She has had great success in building consensus on best practices for municipalities for the coordination of land use and transportation planning and development.

There are currently eleven Sustainable Jersey actions under the Land Use and Transportation certification section including: [Adopt a Complete Streets Policy](#), [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) and [Smart Workplaces Program](#). Teri reflected, “I enjoy creating new actions and my work with Sustainable Highland Park has made me aware of the need to balance the perfect with what is realistic and doable at the local level.” The Land Use and Transportation Task Force is now considering how to contribute to a new gold star level of Sustainable Jersey certification. Teri also serves on the Sustainable Jersey Certification Standards Committee.

**New Jersey Future Annual Smart Growth Awards on June 9:** Teri has expertly coordinated New Jersey Future’s [annual Smart Growth Awards program](#) for the past 15 years. The winners will be celebrated at a reception on Thursday, June 9. Teri said, “This year we look back at the more than 100 different projects and plans that have been honored over the years and the list is impressive. I’m definitely proud of this event and program.”

**It’s In Our Power Highland Park:** Teri and Sustainable Highland Park have led a successful project for the borough called “It’s in Our Power Highland Park,” which was a two-year EPA Climate Showcase Community Grant with partners Montclair and Cherry Hill.

Among the accomplishments was the creation of a Home Energy Assessment Program designed to encourage residents to get a home energy audit and take advantage of the incentives provided by the Home Performance with Energy Star (HPwES) program. As part of this effort, the borough issued an RFP to select a certified contractor to perform high-quality audits at a fixed price for Highland Park residents. A letter was then sent to more than 2,500 households announcing the home energy assessment program. By the end of the campaign, 244 home audits were performed and 35 NJ Home Performance with Energy Star Projects were completed. The Highland Park program is the model for the Sustainable Jersey HPwES [Municipal Program](#) action. Sustainable Highland Park continues to promote the program. The program has been renamed Smart Homes (name borrowed from Sustainable Princeton) and the group hopes to report additional local home energy audits and installations in the future.



**New Jersey Future's "Creating Places to Age" Project:** Teri leads the New Jersey Future project, "Creating Places to Age," that identifies best practices and policies that municipalities can deploy to prepare for the needs and preferences of the forthcoming "boom" in older adults. She is currently working with two communities to assess their age friendliness in terms of land use. Teri said, "What's good for the aging population is good for everybody. Smart growth land use goals have a synergy with this work. Walkable, compact communities with access to transportation and health care providers will better serve older adults in addition to the whole community."

**Downtown New Jersey Board Member:** As a champion of New Jersey's small towns, Teri has been a [Downtown New Jersey](#) Board member since 2010 and now, through a brand new affiliation with New Jersey Future is serving the role of executive director. Downtown New Jersey is an organization of individuals, businesses, government agencies, and local and regional organizations that are passionate about downtowns.

**Why is sustainability important?** "My outlook on sustainability has changed since I became a mother. Now sustainability issues are more personal. I see my son's future and understand that addressing these issues head-on isn't optional; it's an imperative that we must all take action on now because future generations – within my son's lifetime – are in peril."

**Education that led to her current position:** Teri holds a master's degree in City and Regional Planning from the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University and a BA in Sociology and Religion from Rutgers College. She grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland and attended Montgomery Blair High School.

**What you may not know about Teri:** Teri enjoys spending time with husband, Gary Kaplan, a local musician in the indie-rock band [The Fletchers](#), and her 4 ½ year old son Gregory. When she is not volunteering, she likes to work in her yard. However, it is best to avoid talking to Teri about groundhogs and invasive Honeysuckle vines that continue to test her patience. In the summer Teri and her family like to go to Asbury Park, New Jersey. She is a big booster of the redevelopment and enhancement of this creative place. She and her husband do home brewing and have a special rye IPA planned for their next outdoor party.