

OCTOBER 2017 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



JENNIFER GONZALEZ, AICP, CFM, LEED-GA, ENV SP Chief Sustainability Officer, City of Hoboken, Hudson County

Jennifer Gonzalez is the chief sustainability officer and green team coordinator for the City of Hoboken. As a planner with eight years of experience, she manages sustainability efforts as the co-leader of a unique inter-departmental City of Hoboken Resiliency and Sustainability team composed of Chief Resiliency Officer Caleb Stratton, Zoning Officer/Floodplain Manager Ann Holtzman, Acting Director of Transportation Ryan Sharp and Community Development Principal Planner Chris Brown. She is passionate about her work and a recognized sustainability leader in New Jersey. Jennifer's advanced technical and analytic skills set her apart, making her a true asset to any team. Jennifer works on initiatives including rainfall flooding, renewable energy, drinking water infrastructure, natural resources, waste management and others. Her projects include the implementation of the City's Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan, including the Northwest Resiliency Park, green infrastructure training program and capital planning for improvements in the City's drinking water infrastructure system.

Jennifer started working with the City of Hoboken last summer. Part of her job responsibilities included taking over the green team as coordinator. While she had big shoes to fill from former Green Team Coordinator Chris Brown, this was an easy transition because Jennifer had served as a volunteer on the green team for many years. As great of a volunteer as Jennifer was before she was employed with the City of Hoboken, she's been even better as the point of contact between the green team and the Mayor's Office. She's encouraged the volunteers to take on new initiatives, hosted several events and has continued community outreach. Jennifer has kept the green team on the agenda of an Administration that has had many pressing priorities over the past year. Jennifer said, "I love Hoboken, it's my home. I want to be able to live here for a long time, so improving sustainability and resilience in Hoboken is my personal responsibility."



Green Infrastructure Subcommittee: Jennifer serves as the Green Infrastructure Subcommittee Co-Chair for [Jersey Water Works](#), which is a collaborative effort to transform New Jersey's water infrastructure. In addition to other responsibilities, this committee functions as a Sustainable Jersey Task Force to research and develop Sustainable Jersey green infrastructure actions. Jennifer worked with Chris Obropta from Rutgers Cooperative Extension to draft the initial versions of the green infrastructure program actions for the Sustainable Jersey program that will be released in 2018. Jennifer is also a member of the Association of State Floodplain Managers and the American Planning Association.

Sustainable Jersey Certified-Going for Silver: The City of Hoboken has been certified at the Sustainable Jersey bronze-level since 2011. Hoboken is now working toward silver-level certification for Hoboken in 2017. The City of Hoboken Green Team is a group of about eighteen volunteers and city staff who meet monthly to focus on completing program actions like the Solar Challenge (Hoboken is one of the first municipalities to receive points for the new [Community-Led Solar Initiatives](#) Action), the Sustainability Education Series, the Green Team Challenge, the Green Business Recognition Program, the Annual Green Fair and more. Jennifer noted that Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer has served as an active champion for sustainability efforts; her support has made the work more successful. Jennifer said that following



adoption of a Green Building & Environmental Sustainability Element in 2017, anticipated goals for 2018 include doing a greenhouse gas emissions assessment and climate action plan for Hoboken, as well as launching a composting program for commercial properties.

Northwest Resiliency Park: One-Million-Gallon Underground Stormwater Detention System: Jennifer is responsible for advancing Hoboken’s city-wide green infrastructure strategy, including the Northwest pop-up park and the future Northwest Resiliency Park. Hoboken acquired a six-acre property that will be used to create Hoboken’s largest park—a five-acre resiliency park with at least a one-million-gallon underground stormwater detention system. The project is being planned in partnership with North Hudson Sewerage Authority which will direct stormwater to the new detention system. Jennifer said, “The combined sewer system is often overwhelmed during heavy rain which results in backups into streets and private property. By keeping stormwater out of the combined sewer system, the project will further reduce localized flooding.”

Green Team Educational Series: The Hoboken Green Team’s community education and outreach campaign addresses a variety of sustainability topics. The green team developed a series of sustainability/resiliency fact sheets customized for Hoboken residents and business owners; all of the fact sheets are available on the [Green Team website](#) and some are shared on the [Facebook page](#). Fact sheets include: [Energy Conservation](#), [Summer Energy Savings](#), [Winter Energy Savings](#), [Composting](#), [Recycling](#), [Pet Waste](#), [Tree Planting](#), [Water Conservation](#), [Flood Insurance Rate Reduction](#), [Flood Risk Reduction](#), [Stormwater Management](#) and [Indoor Air Quality](#).



Reducing Energy Use with the Church Square Park Lighting Grant: Hoboken applied and received a \$30,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by the Gardinier Environmental Fund. The grant will contribute funds for a project to replace all existing High Intensity Discharge (HID) light fixtures in Church Square Park with high efficiency light-emitting diode (LED) light fixtures. Church Square Park comprises two city blocks, about six percent of the city’s total park acreage and is one of the most heavily used parks in the community. Playgrounds, dog runs, sport courts and other amenities found at this park are not available in most of the smaller pocket parks and waterfront parks in Hoboken. As a result, this park is heavily used and requires lighting to ensure the safety of park goers. As a result of this project, Hoboken will significantly reduce energy consumption and costs while increasing efficiency of the park’s lighting systems. The city and the Hoboken Green Team will collect and monitor data to measure the impact of the project on energy usage in the park from pre-project to post-project levels. The new lights are scheduled for installation by early 2018.

Plastic Bag Reduction Program: The Hoboken Green Team purchased reusable bags with the green team logo and gave them away at two reusable bag giveaway events. The events both encouraged the reduction of single-use bags and educated the public on the negative water quality impacts of plastic in the waterways. In addition to the reusable bag giveaways, the Hoboken Green Team hosted a movie screening of Plastic Paradise, a movie which documents the impacts of plastic.



Green Infrastructure Workforce Program: During storms, Hoboken experiences flooding and sewage backups. The city has a large number of roads, parking lots, housing developments and buildings, all of which have impervious surface areas that do not absorb rain. Hoboken applied and received a \$25,000 grant from [Cities of Service](#). Hoboken is one of seven cities taking part in the [Prepared Together](#) program. The grant will provide green jobs training for low-income residents and high school students, while helping the city to expand and maintain its green infrastructure. Jennifer said, “Through this program, trainees acquire skills that hopefully will lead to future employment opportunities in the fields of green infrastructure, landscape design, landscaping, and grounds maintenance.” Trainees are responsible for

shade tree maintenance, park cleanup and green infrastructure installation and maintenance. The grant also provided for the City with two AmeriCorps VISTAs. These individuals work with Jennifer and city employees to provide the training.

Green Team Business Recognition Program: The free Green Business Recognition Program recognizes green businesses and provides a window sticker that shows the business is a “City of Hoboken Certified Green Business.” To qualify for the Green Business Recognition Program, each business must complete the [Green Business Pledge](#) and report to the green team what the business does to promote environmental sustainability. By pledging their support and partnering with the green team, businesses can tap into positive press and green branding to strengthen relationships with their community and customers. The green team has received 33 Green Business Pledges and after review of the pledges, 23 businesses have met the criteria of a Hoboken Green Business. Mayor Zimmer recognized the 2017 Hoboken Green Businesses at the annual Green Fair in June 2017.



Sustainability & Resiliency Educational Series: The Hoboken Green Team, Hoboken Public Library and Hoboken Public Schools Green Team joined forces to launch a public education series featuring educational events or movie viewings for students, parents, teachers and residents. The events rotate between different venues, and cover various sustainability or resiliency topics. Recent events included the “Hoboken READY” workshop which featured speakers from the CERT Team and FEMA Ready program, “Hoboken RESILIENT Buildings” workshop and the “Hoboken Energy Savings” workshop which had speakers from New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program Direct Install Program and the green team discussing the Solar Challenge. The green team also partners with the public library to present the [“Wellness Wednesdays”](#) series which features a range of practitioners offering educational lectures for free to the public, one Wednesday evening per month.

Lehigh University and Work Experience Before City of Hoboken: After attending West Essex High School in North Caldwell, Jennifer went to Lehigh University where she received a B.A. in International Relations, Spanish and Communications; she graduated Summa cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa. Inspired by an environmental policy class, Jennifer decided to pursue a master’s degree. She graduated with an M.A. in Environmental Policy Design at Lehigh University. Jennifer maintains her ties to Lehigh University; she is the director of the Lehigh University Alumni Association Board of Directors and is a Young Alumni Trustee on the Board of Trustees. After graduating, Jennifer spent almost four years as an Environmental Planner at County of Passaic, Department of Planning and Economic Development. While she was working for the County of Passaic, she integrated sustainability and energy efficiency practices into County operations and managed projects including: Passaic County Sustainability Master Plan Element, Facilities Plan, Local Government Energy Audits Implementation and Morris Canal Greenway Feasibility Study. She then worked a little over three years at Louis Berger in different roles and locations where she contributed to the Hoboken Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan and most recently managed teams of planners, engineers and environmental scientists to prepare NEPA/SEQRA coordinated environmental clearance documents for FEMA and HUD CDBG-DR funded infrastructure resiliency projects.

What You May Not Know About Jennifer: Jennifer grew up in Roseland, New Jersey with her mother, brother and sister. Jennifer said, “My mother is definitely my role model and idol, she supported me and made me who I am today.” In her free time Jennifer likes to read; she is currently reading the [Death and Life of Great American Cities](#) by Jane Jacobs, which she noted that she should have read years ago. Jennifer likes to cook and spend time with friends and family and her rescue dog named Scooter. Jennifer always makes time for cancer-related charity events and fundraising efforts. She is an active volunteer working on the American Cancer Society’s Making Strides Walk, and previously volunteered for the Relay for Life and the Sunday Funday to Beat Cancer football event.