

# City of Benton Harbor Justice40 Plan

2025



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative .....6

Community Background and Context .....9

Community Engagement and Participation ..... 10

Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan, Key Projects and Initiatives..... 14

Funding and Resources ..... 19

Glossary of Terms..... 21

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## Introduction

The Biden-Harris Administration established the Justice40 Initiative through Executive Order 14008, which focuses on tackling the climate crisis both domestically and globally. The Justice40 Initiative was designed to address the longstanding environmental injustices faced by disadvantaged communities, which are often disproportionately affected by pollution, climate change impacts, and limited access to resources. Under this initiative, the federal government committed to directing at least 40% of the benefits from specific climate and clean energy investments to these communities, aiming to rectify the cumulative environmental and economic burdens they have endured.

Justice40 prioritized federal funding across several critical areas, including clean energy projects, climate mitigation strategies, affordable and sustainable housing, and clean and accessible transportation. By designating these communities as top priorities for federal and state resources, the initiative seeks to improve overall quality of life, increase economic opportunities, and build climate resilience. Although Justice40 did not come with a dedicated budget, it leveraged existing federal funding streams and emphasized an equitable allocation of resources to ensure that vulnerable communities benefited directly from the transition to a more sustainable and just economy.

The commitment was subsequently adopted in the Whitmer Administration's MI Healthy Climate Plan. (Although the Trump administration has largely abandoned the Justice40 initiative, it remains a State of Michigan priority.)

The Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative was a program of Michigan Sustainable Business Forum that supported a sustainability project manager for a two-year period. During this time, the initiative worked with collaboration partners to develop the Justice 40 Plan, a climate action plan that would guide efforts to attract Justice40 funding to the community.

To execute this plan, the initiative supported the development of grant applications for energy efficiency, renewable energy programs, environmental justice, coastal resilience, and other opportunities that will be available for funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act and MI Healthy Climate Plan.

These collaborative efforts have resulted in grant awards to the municipality and community and business partners in excess of \$25 million.

## Summary of Action Items and Objectives

The Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan, grounded in the Justice40 Initiative's priorities, draws from the 2023 Best Benton Harbor Community Plan, the Ox Creek Revitalization Strategic Plan, and the Benton Harbor Master Plan. It aims to address critical areas such as climate change, clean energy, pollution remediation, sustainable housing, workforce development, water infrastructure, and food systems. Each category includes targeted action items and objectives tailored to the Benton Harbor community to improve residents' quality of life and promote long-term environmental and economic resilience.

### Climate Change Mitigation

- Action Items: Improve environmental health and wellness by protecting sensitive areas such as wetlands and wooded zones.
- Objectives: Strengthen the community's resilience by preserving natural spaces and reducing the effects of climate change on residents

### Clean Energy & Energy Efficiency

- Action Items: Enhance energy efficiency in city facilities, residences, and businesses, while exploring renewable energy options.
- Objectives: Implement a microgrid at the Bobo Brazil Community Resilience Center to ensure a sustainable and resilient power supply for critical infrastructure.

### Legacy Pollution Remediation & Reduction

- Action Items: Restore Ox Creek as a recreational area, clean up illegal dump sites, and prevent future contamination.
- Objectives: Work with various agencies to clean up contaminated areas, remove waste, and create community spaces that encourage neighborhood pride and passive recreation.

### Clean Transit

- Action Items: Develop infrastructure for multiple modes of transportation, such as bike paths and electric vehicle charging stations.
- Objectives: Promote safe, eco-friendly transport options and connect Benton Harbor with surrounding communities to create a seamless transportation network.

### Affordable & Sustainable Housing

- Action Items: Increase housing availability, improve existing housing conditions, and address gentrification.
- Objectives: Implement a program to develop 1,000 new housing units within five years, especially focusing on attainable housing and protecting historic structures.

### Training & Workforce Development

- Action Items: Establish training programs, support small business development, and build pathways for minority contractors.
- Objectives: Launch a small business incubator, create co-op programs with local schools, and provide resources for workforce development in green industries.

### Critical Clean Water & Wastewater Infrastructure

- Action Items: Integrate green infrastructure for stormwater management and protect water and sewer facilities.
- Objectives: Use asset management to safeguard infrastructure, incorporate sustainable designs, and control invasive species like Japanese Knotweed.

### Revitalization of Food Systems:

- Action Items: Assess food access and create community gardens and year-round farmers markets.
- Objectives: Support local food businesses, expand farmers markets, and provide fresh, affordable food options to strengthen Benton Harbor's food resilience.

## Summary of Key Projects & Initiative

### Ox Creek Corridor Revitalization

- Description: Restores Ox Creek and Hall Park, adding recreational spaces and housing developments to enhance the local environment.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, Benton Charter Township, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, EGLE, NOAA, EPA.

### Bobo Brazil Armory Revitalization

- Description: Converts a vacant community center into a Community Resilience Center, focusing on clean energy and community safety.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

### Riverview Drive Redevelopment

- Description: Addresses high water issues using green stormwater solutions, increases public river access, and introduces placemaking elements.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, SWMPC, Cornerstone Alliance, EGLE.

### Empire Corridor Redevelopment

- Description: Part of the “Sustainable Square Mile” concept, it focuses on sustainable and affordable housing.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, Benton Harbor Brownfield Authority, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation.

### Sustainable Materials Management

- Description: Develops a multi-county recycling and composting plan to divert waste from landfills.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, Berrien County, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, EGLE, Let Us Rest.

### The Corner at Wall Street

- Description: Creates 55 affordable housing units to improve housing availability for residents.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor, MHT Housing.

### Flourish Community Garden

- Description: Provides free community garden space to support local food pantries and school-based food programs.
- Sponsors: Total Wellness by Choice, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation.

### Homegrown Program

- Description: Assists residents in starting backyard gardens to promote self-sustenance and local food production.
- Sponsors: Total Wellness by Choice, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation.

### Benton Harbor Black Wall Street Incubator Initiative

- Description: An incubator dedicated to empowering minority entrepreneurs in Benton Harbor through mentorship, funding, and resources to build sustainable businesses, creating a modern Black Wall Street and driving community prosperity.
- Sponsors: Emerge Innovation Hub, City of Benton Harbor.

### Benton Harbor “Green Cities” and Mi Healthy Climate Challenge

- Description: Implement energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings, equipment upgrades, creation, and implementation of a sustainability plan.
- Sponsors: City of Benton Harbor.

*Select projects can be found in the Benton Harbor Justice40 dealbook at [misbf.org/benton-harbor](https://misbf.org/benton-harbor).*

Through these detailed action items, objectives, and key projects, the Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan seeks to create a robust, sustainable foundation for the community, addressing environmental, social, and economic needs while fostering long-term resilience and equity.

## **Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative**

In 2011, the Benton Harbor Master Plan identified three pillars to be considered as a part of city policy and decision making to promote sustainability that encompassed short and long-term goals. At the time, the city desired to focus on the environment, economy, and society and worked toward identifying and protecting environmentally and ecologically sensitive areas which included: wooded areas, ravines, waterways and other areas from the impacts of development, promote local food growing initiatives, encourage private sector reinvestment into green technologies, alternative, and efficient energies. Additionally, the city desired to utilize smart growth principles, green building techniques, LEED certification, and promote recycling programs which would focus on education and engagement to increase the public, elected and non-elected officials on the importance of sustainability.

The Benton Harbor Justice40 (J40) Action Plan seeks to expand upon current and future projects that fall within the Justice40 scope of work and build upon the city's desire to promote sustainability and climate resilience efforts. It has identified and assessed ongoing projects and initiatives that address environmental, economic, and social resilience, with the aim of building on and amplifying this foundational work. By creating a cohesive strategy, the J40 Action Plan integrates and enhances these existing efforts, ensuring that they align with the Justice40 mandate to direct 40% of the overall benefits of climate and sustainability programs toward disadvantaged communities.

The action plan focuses on leveraging current projects, such as local climate resilience initiatives, green infrastructure developments, and community education programs, and scaling them to have a broader impact. This approach ensures that Benton Harbor's progress towards sustainability and resilience is rooted in established community efforts while opening doors for new innovations and resources to build upon them.

Through collaboration with local leaders, community organizations, and subject matter experts, the J40 Action Plan is poised to achieve impactful, community-driven outcomes that reflect the priorities and needs of Benton Harbor residents. The J40 Action Plan is actively expanding upon the community's existing goals and objectives, building on identified projects and initiatives under the Justice40 framework. Through close collaboration and continuous input from community leaders, city officials, project managers, and local sponsors, the plan aims to harness and enhance Benton Harbor's foundational work in sustainability and resilience.

Residents have highlighted key priorities for creating a cleaner, more efficient, and sustainable Benton Harbor. These include making local schools more energy-efficient, establishing a convenient drop-off site for large items like tires, furniture, and other materials that often accumulate around the city and its waterways, and forming partnerships with businesses interested in recycling and solar energy initiatives.

Additionally, residents have expressed strong interest in improving public transportation options to connect the community more effectively and reduce the city's carbon footprint.



The J40 Action Plan is structured to support and expand these community-identified needs. By addressing practical issues, such as waste management and energy efficiency, and fostering partnerships with businesses focused on green solutions, the plan works to create long-term environmental, economic, and social benefits. The Action Plan prioritizes direct engagement with the community, ensuring that each initiative resonates with the values and priorities of Benton Harbor's residents and that all efforts contribute to a more resilient and sustainable future.

The community advisory group, convened in August 2024 under the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative, is actively working to identify and strengthen local projects and initiatives that lay the groundwork for Benton Harbor's sustainability and resilience. This initiative, launched in 2023 through a partnership among the City of Benton Harbor, Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation, and the Project NEED Foundation, operates under the Partners for Places Grant from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network.

Since its inception, the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative has focused on engaging the community through educational workshops and involvement opportunities. These efforts aim to empower residents with knowledge about environmental and climate change issues directly impacting Benton Harbor. The advisory group, composed of community leaders and subject matter experts, is currently identifying projects that align with Benton Harbor's vision of sustainability and are essential for building a resilient, equitable community.

In addition to shaping a strategic foundation for local resilience, the advisory group is targeting key funding opportunities and projects to expand the Benton Harbor Justice40 portfolio. By securing additional resources, the group intends to enhance and scale projects that address community-identified priorities. In 2023, community workshops that initiated the Benton Harbor Justice40 initiative identified priorities such as energy-efficient schools, improved waste management, recycling partnerships, and expanded public transportation. These efforts underscore a commitment to driving meaningful, community-led change in Benton Harbor's sustainability journey. Through collaboration, education, and targeted funding, the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative is building a solid, community-rooted pathway to long-term environmental and economic resilience.



# Community Background and Context

Benton Harbor has been designated a Justice40 community, bearing the weight of historical pollution and environmental injustice. The city, with a population of 9,103—87.6% of whom are Black—has a median household income of \$26,592 (Table 1).

Benton Harbor’s economy has been heavily impacted by global shifts, straining manufacturing hubs in older urban areas. The decline of its industrial base and population created financial stress in this majority-Black city, prompting Michigan to impose the emergency manager program in 2010, effectively suspending local governance until 2016.

During this period, emergency managers implemented austerity measures similar to those seen in Flint, Mich., which drastically reduced city staff and experimented with water and service contracts. These decisions undermined the city’s capacity to deliver essential services: a recently upgraded water treatment plant operates at just 12% capacity; unreliable waste contractors left the city without garbage collection for extended periods; and an emergency order mandated residents to use bottled water until service lines could be replaced.

**Table 1:**  
**City of Benton Harbor Socioeconomic Data**

Data	Benton Harbor
Population Total	9,103
Population by Race	8,714
Median Household Income	\$26, 592
Unemployment Rate	4.8%
Median Age	33.6

Under emergency management, Benton Harbor residents faced restricted participation in decision-making and in programs designed to address local economic and environmental challenges. The legacy of this program has left the community with enduring environmental and racial injustices that continue to impact residents today. Before the implementation of the emergency management program (2009 – 2016), the City of Benton Harbor had a workforce of 100 employees, which was reduced to 50. Due to the capacity constraints, the once functional municipal led water system began to produce an annual \$2.5 million deficit, leading to a significant financial loss and drain to the city’s general fund. The city has faced ongoing challenges with its leadership, experienced the loss and sale of essential equipment, and was excluded from recreational contracts with the Department of Natural Resources for over a decade, resulting in a consent decree violation.

## Demographic, Climate, & Economic Justice Analyses

The demographic analysis in this section provides a breakdown of Benton Harbor by population, educational attainment, employment rate, and age. Table 1 illustrates the total population of 9,103, the median household income — \$26,592, with an unemployment rate of 4.8%, and median age is 33.6. Additionally, 35% of the population holds a Bachelor’s, Graduate, or Professional degree (Chart 2).

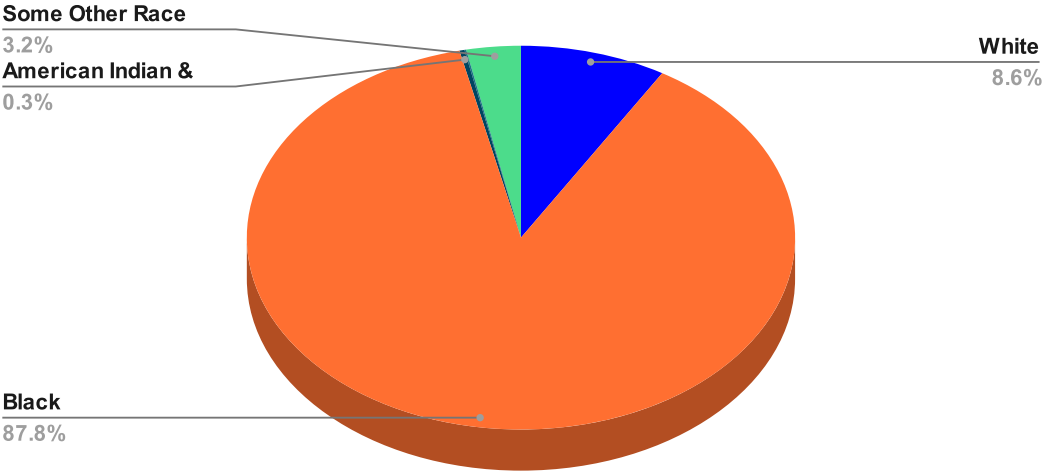
The data highlights a significantly educated population with a lower median income and moderate unemployment rate which underscores the community’s economic vulnerabilities.

These factors in parallel with the city’s history of environmental challenges position the need for targeted economic development and environmental justice initiatives that leverage the community’s educational assets to build a more just and sustainable Benton Harbor.

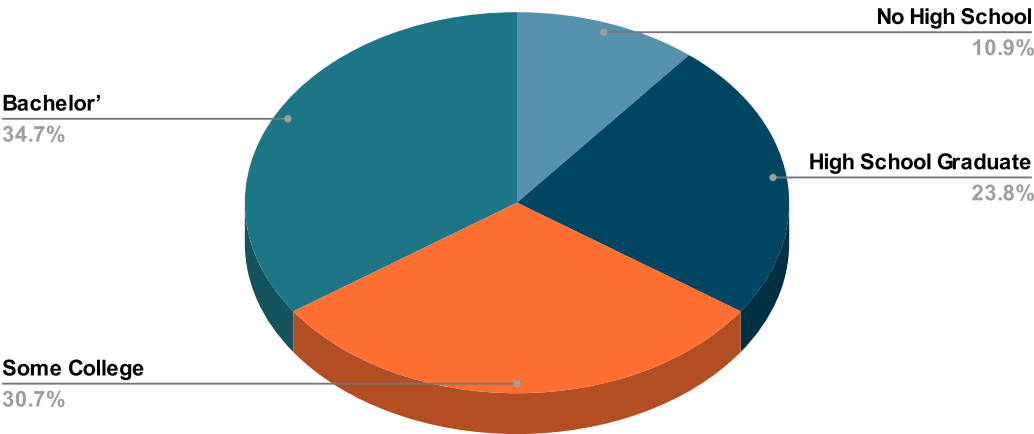
Furthermore, Charts 1–3 provide a breakdown of the community’s population by race, educational attainment, and age distribution.



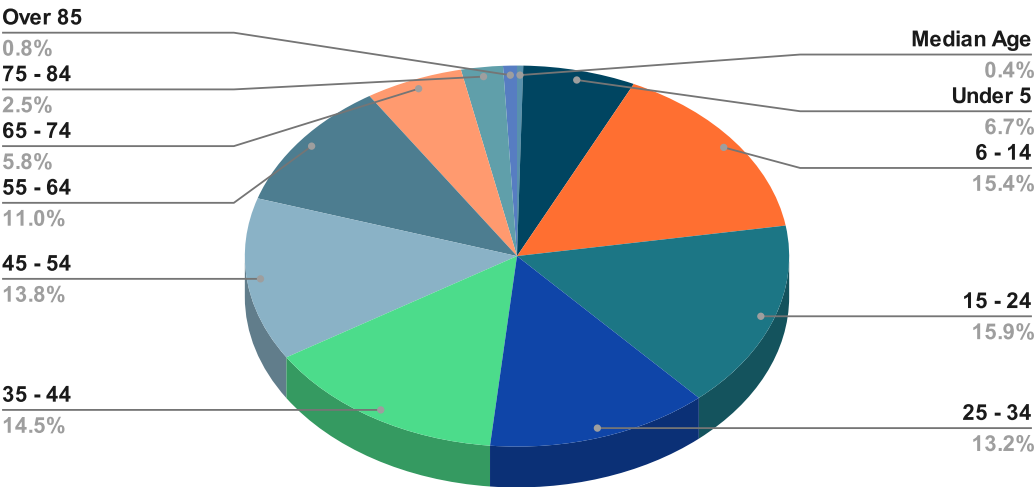
**Chart 1: City of Benton Harbor Population by Race**



**Chart 2: City of Benton Harbor Educational Attainment**



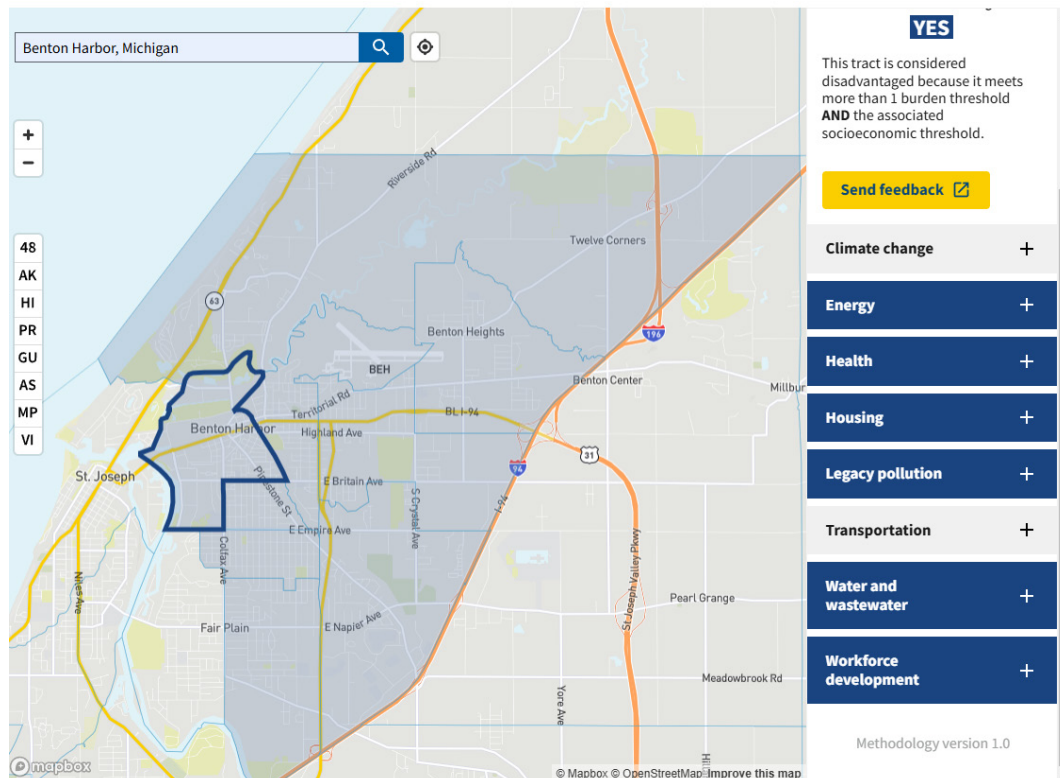
**Chart 3: City of Benton Harbor Age Distribution**



## Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) Analysis

Beyond its experience with emergency management, Benton Harbor has been disproportionately impacted by pollution, and is a definitive environmental justice community as analyzed by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (Figure 1). It is at the highest percentile for “People of Color” (95–100th U.S. percentile), “Low-life Expectancy” (95–100th U.S. percentile), “Low Income” (99–100th U.S. percentile), “Unemployment Rate” (95–100 U.S. percentile) and multiple census tracts that are characterized as “Linguistically Isolated” (95–100 U.S. percentile).

Figure 1: CEJST Analysis for Benton Harbor



## Community Engagement & Participation

### Ensuring Transparent and Participatory Decision-Making

In 2023, the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative launched with a series of community engagement and education workshops on Justice40 and sustainability. These workshops focused on local issues and opportunities to leverage this federal opportunity for the Benton Harbor Community. At the initial Justice40 Community Engagement Meeting held on January 20, 2023 at The Citadel Center where 31 residents attended and weighed in on how they envision sustainability.

The meeting included input and feedback from four City Commission members, the Deputy City Manager, Planning Commission, community based organizations such as Color Me Green Recycling, LLC, and Benton Harbor residents. Meeting participants were asked the following questions:

- What does sustainability look like in Benton Harbor?
- What role do you expect the government to take in sustainability efforts?
- What does the community need in terms of sustainability?

## **Key feedback received that influenced the Justice40 Action Plan's Development**

**Sustainability Vision:** Residents emphasized the need for positive investments in public education, with a focus on energy-efficient upgrades for schools to help keep them open. They envisioned city programs that develop skills to support sustainability and foster a circular economy. A city drop-off site for large items like tires and furniture was suggested to address littering issues.

**Role of Government:** The community urged the city to collaborate more openly with local organizations. They want the city to lead workforce development and education initiatives, especially with business partnerships in recycling, public transportation, and solar energy. They also suggested expanding waste services to include recycling carts.

**Community Needs:** Residents highlighted the need for funding to support sustainability training and job opportunities. They also expressed the desire for a dedicated "sustainability champion" within the local government to drive these efforts and secure state and federal resources for Benton Harbor.

## **A Summary of the feedback for the 2023 Benton Harbor Justice40 Community Engagement Meeting**

Since its inception, the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative has focused on engaging the community through educational workshops and involvement opportunities. These efforts aim to empower residents with knowledge about environmental and climate change issues directly impacting Benton Harbor. The advisory group, composed of community leaders and subject matter experts, is currently identifying projects that align with Benton Harbor's vision of sustainability and are essential for building a resilient, equitable community.

### **Question: What does sustainability look like in Benton Harbor?**

The community stated that their vision for sustainability in Benton Harbor would be positive investments in the currently failing public education system. The lack of funding in public education is leading to the closing of most of their schools. In reference to sustainability we talked about how helping to make the existing schools more energy efficient could help alleviate the strain on the budgets that is leading to the continuous closing of these schools.

They also believe that by keeping the schools in the area open and establishing sustainable practices in the school could lead to those practices being instilled throughout the community. City-based programs that encompasses the development of skills that will support city sustainability efforts.

A business development and workforce development plan that will improve the City's current challenges economically. To leverage community geographic assets to develop infrastructure of industries that would help with the development of a circular economy. Examples that were brought up by attendees were the formation of a drop-off site for tires, furniture and other large items that don't fit in normal sized trash carts, since these are items that are seen littered in abundance around the city and waterways



**Question: What role do you expect the government to take in sustainability efforts?**

When asked this question the community responded that they would like the local government to be intentional and more open to collaborating with community organizations to help move this work forward. More specifically, they would like to see the City formulate a workforce development and education initiative that would target residents, which in return would help build up city capacity and community knowledge towards future environmental sustainability projects. An example that was discussed included the City partnering with area businesses that are interested in recycling, public transportation, solar, to obtain grants and other funding sources to help develop the infrastructure for these sorts of projects.

Being proactive and offering education and training around these matters in this community could lead to local residents acquiring these positions once funds and resources are made available. The attendees also stated that they would like their current city waste services to offer the dumpster recycling cart options to the residents.

**Question: What does the community need in terms of sustainability?**

The city needs funding to invest in training and educating the community on future sustainability projects and job opportunities. The event participants also stated that they need and want a sustainability champion that serves in some sort of a local government capacity to lead the charge on making sure this work gets done and the City is taking advantage of all state and federal opportunities that correlate to the City of Benton Harbor.

(Above) 2023 Benton Harbor Justice40 Community Engagement Meeting hosted in partnership with MISBF, Project NEED Foundation, City of Benton Harbor, Mosaic CCDA, Let Us R.E.S.T, and Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation

MISBF and frontline community partners Benton Harbor Development Corporation and Project Need Foundation hosted multiple education and engagement events on various local issues and opportunities to advance equitable climate action (below).





Naomi Davis, President of Blacks in Green, traveled from Chicago to Benton Harbor to support our stakeholder engagement efforts on behalf of the Benton Harbor Justice40 initiative.

### Building Partnerships with Local Organizations

In 2024, Michigan Sustainable Business Forum (MiSBF) worked to create opportunities for stakeholder engagement on behalf of the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative, further providing the opportunity to bring in key stakeholders, community-based organizations, and other environmental organizations such as Blacks in Green. Events discussed projects such as the Sustainable Square Mile, a cornerstone of community development in some Black communities, best practices for high-water strategies, and projects such as the community gardens in Benton Harbor. The Coastal Zone Management events convened over 30 local and regional stakeholders, which included representatives of the Benton Harbor City Commission, community organizations, Benton Harbor Brownfield Authority, surrounding city, county, and township officials, real estate, and utility industries.

Additionally, the Benton Harbor Community Advisory Group was formed to provide input and feedback on the Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan process. The unique group assembled subject matter experts working to build Benton Harbor's sustainability and climate resilience portfolio through project development and grant procurement. The group worked from August to December of 2024 to develop and weigh in on local projects under the Justice40 scope and the funding mechanisms to support efforts such as remediation of the Ox Creek Corridor, revitalization of the Bobo Brazil Armory into a community resilience hub, promotion of local food access through community garden development. The group was composed of representatives from the Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, City of Benton Harbor, Berrien County Conservation District, Emerge Innovation Hub, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Project NEED Foundation, Be Healthy Berrien, Project Pillars, Total Wellness by Choice, and Abonmarche.



Benton Harbor Justice40 Community Advisory Group Kickoff Meeting where industry professionals, city leadership and leaders of frontline organizations gathered to discuss the development of the Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan.

# Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan, Key Projects and Initiatives

The Benton Harbor Justice40 Action Plan, grounded in the Justice40 Initiative’s priorities, draws from the 2023 Best Benton Harbor Community Plan, the Ox Creek Revitalization Strategic Plan, and the Benton Harbor Master Plan.

It aims to address critical areas like climate change, clean energy, pollution remediation, sustainable housing, workforce development, water infrastructure, and food systems. Each category includes targeted action items and objectives tailored to the Benton Harbor community to improve residents’ quality of life and promote long-term environmental and economic resilience.

Table 2 highlights the action items and objectives drawn from the aforementioned plans budded up against the Justice40 investment priorities, while Table 3 illustrates key projects and initiatives working toward implementation of the action plan.

Table 2: Benton Harbor Action Plan Matrix with Justice40 Investment Priorities

Investment Priority	Objectives	Action Items
Climate Change Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify and protect environmental and ecologically sensitive areas for the health and well-being of Benton Harbor residents.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improve environmental, health, and wellness conditions for Benton Harbor residents.</li></ul>
Clean Energy & Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Microgrid implementation with Bobo Brazil Community Resilience Center.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improve energy efficiency of city owned facilities</li><li>Improve energy efficiency of residences and businesses</li><li>Explore alternative energy opportunities</li></ul>
Legacy Pollution Remediation & Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Continue to invest in neighborhood pride with clean-up days, block parties, and events at neighborhood parks.</li><li>Work toward development of outdoor green spaces and parks for residents.</li><li>Work with City of Benton Harbor, state and regional organizations to clean-up illegal dump sites and condemned structures, and take action to prevent future occurrences.</li><li>Support and perform environmental studies on Ox Creek to ensure the environmental safety of the area. Look for and secure funding from state, federal, and private sources to remove waste and improve poor conditions found in environmental studies.</li><li>Provide frequent seating along paths to allow visitors to enjoy passive recreation.</li><li>Work with city, county, regional, state and federal agencies to clean up legacy contaminated sites such as Harbor Plating and Modern Plastics.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improve environmental, health, and wellness conditions for Benton Harbor residents.</li><li>Improve Ox Creek to be a recreational and natural amenity.</li></ul>



**Table 2: Benton Harbor Action Plan Matrix with Justice40 Investment Priorities Continued...**

Investment Priority	Objectives	Action Items
Clean Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create bike parking and bike infrastructure in key places in the city. Add electric vehicle charging stations at designated locations.</li> <li>• Encourage shared off-street parking and public access / shared parking agreements in areas where public parking is needed.</li> <li>• Work with regional stakeholders to connect Berrien County bike trails to South Bend, South Haven, Kalamazoo, and Chicago. Improve streets, sidewalks, and trails to create an efficient transportation network for cars, public transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians.</li> <li>• Consider creating connected entertainment options, like a drive-in movie theater, with space for bicycles and pedestrians to view in Benton Harbor. : Improve streets, sidewalks, and trails to create an efficient transportation network for cars, public transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians.</li> <li>• Add electric vehicle charging stations at designated locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage transportation system improvements that support all modes of transportation and prioritize the safety of vulnerable users.</li> </ul>
Affordable & Sustainable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage public agencies to urgently respond to issues relating to fair housing discrimination, absentee landlords, and unsafe rental housing conditions.</li> <li>• Create and implement a program to utilize the roughly 500 City-owned lots for middle housing and attainable workforce housing.</li> <li>• Protect existing housing stock, especially structures of historic significance, with renovation and rehabilitation programs. Develop programs to attract new Black and minority residents to the City.</li> <li>• Develop programs to attract new artists, musicians, and creative professionals to the City.</li> <li>• Consider creating a new position, or designating a City employee, to work with residents to address issues relating to fair housing discrimination, gentrification, and the unhoused/ or the displacement of people or cultural assets.</li> <li>• Develop 1,000 new housing units in the City within five years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase city population through new housing development and new resident outreach. Improve housing conditions, including public housing complexes. Increase homeownership. Mitigate gentrification.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Benton Harbor Action Plan Matrix with Justice40 Investment Priorities Continued...**

Investment Priority	Objectives	Action Items
Training & Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a small business incubator with EIH to encourage and support small business start-ups.</li> <li>• Work with existing property owners to relocate existing heavy industrial uses into designated industrial business parks and away from waterways, key redevelopment sites, and neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Encourage and support small businesses in neighborhoods to improve access to services and employment. Encourage programs to support the development and training of minority contractors.</li> <li>• Create linkages so that trained and licensed minority contractors and business owners can be easily pre-approved to do business in the city.</li> <li>• Work with businesses to establish training opportunities and recruitment programs for residents.</li> <li>• Work with existing educational organizations and businesses to connect with and provide training and job placement services to returning citizens to reduce stigma and discrimination, as well as reduce potential impacts like homelessness, substance misuse, and recidivism.</li> <li>• Create a co-op program with Benton Harbor Area Schools (BHAS) for high school students to gain employment experience, or collaborate with BHAS on the existing Career and Technical Education program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve environmental, health, and wellness conditions for Benton Harbor residents.</li> <li>• Develop and offer employment training with wrap around services.</li> <li>• Encourage job growth and build expertise. Increase entrepreneurship.</li> <li>• Increase the population of workers through new affordable workforce housing.</li> </ul>
Development of Critical Clean Water & Wastewater Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to promote sustainability as a part of assisting City policy and decision-making.</li> <li>• Identify and protect environmental and ecologically sensitive areas, including wooded areas, ravines, and waterways from the impacts of development.</li> <li>• Continue to utilize asset management to protect and invest in the City's water, sewer and stormwater facilities.</li> <li>• When designing projects look for opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure to handle stormwater.</li> <li>• Manage Japanese Knotweed so that it does not impact infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize environmental justice. Utilize green infrastructure to manage stormwater.</li> </ul>

Table 2: Benton Harbor Action Plan Matrix with Justice40 Investment Priorities Continued...

Investment Priority	Objectives	Action Items
Revitalization of Food Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create community gardens to increase freshly grown food and to educate youth about growing food.</li><li>• Continue to support the Farmer's Market and consider expanding to create a farmer's market that operates year-round, with indoor spaces.</li><li>• Support private businesses and nonprofits dedicated to healthy food provision and access within the City.</li><li>• Encourage new markets, specialty food shops, groceries, restaurants, and expanding the farmer's market.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitate the revitalization of local and regional food systems</li><li>• Conduct a comprehensive community food assessment.</li></ul>

Feedback Type	Feedback Description	Feedback Color
Taken from 2011 Benton Harbor Master Plan	Elements of the 2011 Benton Harbor Master Plan that fall within the Justice40 criteria.	
Taken from 2023 Benton Harbor Best Plan	Action Items & Objectives taken from the 2023 Best Benton Harbor Plan that fall within the Justice40 criteria.	
Provided by Subject Matter Expert/CAG Member	Recommendations provided by Subject Matter Experts and Community Advisory Group Members.	



**Table 3: Benton Harbor Key Projects & Initiatives**

Project/Initiative	Description	Project/Initiative Sponsor
Ox Creek Corridor Revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore Ox Creek &amp; Hall Park</li> <li>Ox Creek Trail</li> <li>Housing development</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor, Benton Charter Township, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, EGLE, NOAA, EPA
Bobo Brazil Armory Revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revitalization of vacant community center within Ox Creek Corridor</li> <li>Create a Community Resilience Center</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Riverview Drive Redevelopment and Addressing High Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities to redevelop Riverview Drive area by addressing high water issues with green stormwater techniques as much as possible, increase public access to the River and implement placemaking elements</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor, SWMPC, Cornerstone Alliance, EGLE
Empire Corridor Redevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target area for Sustainable Square Mile</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor Community Development Department, Benton Harbor Brownfield Authority, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation (BHCDC)
Materials Management (recycling and composting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing project for the creation of a MultiCounty plan to address diversion from landfill, with a focus on recycling and composting</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor, Berrien County, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, EGLE, Let Us Rest
The Corner at Wall Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>55 affordable housing units</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor, MHT Housing
Flourish Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free community garden supports local community and school based food pantries</li> </ul>	Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation
Homegrown Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assistance for Benton Harbor residents to start backyard gardens</li> </ul>	Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation
Benton Harbor Black Wall Street Incubator Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supports minority entrepreneurs with mentorship and funding.</li> </ul>	Emerge Innovation Hub, City of Benton Harbor
Benton Harbor Green Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings, equipment upgrades, creation and implementation of a sustainability plan.</li> </ul>	City of Benton Harbor

## Funding & Resources

### Overview of Available Funding Sources

As a part of the Biden Administration's initiative to address environmental justice in disadvantaged communities, funding sources pulled investments from the Inflation Reduction Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and American Rescue Plan. Additionally, the state of Michigan has worked to invest additional funds and resources into disadvantaged communities to address climate change, energy efficiency, and legacy pollution. Through the Mi Healthy Climate Plan, Michigan is working toward becoming carbon neutral by 2050 through modernization of its electric grid and production.

Unfortunately, many of the federal programs have been or are likely to be rescinded by the Trump Administration directly or as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

- **Inflation Reduction Act:** Pollution reduction, clean transit improvements, affordable and accessible clean energy solutions, climate resilience.
  - Funding Potential: Rebates on electric vehicles—up to \$7,500 purchased for a new vehicle, \$4,000 for a used vehicle, 30% off the cost of rooftop solar, \$14,000 in rebates to transition to electric appliances.
- **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law:** Clean drinking water, legacy pollution, public transit, clean school buses, modern and clean infrastructure and climate resilience.
  - Funding Potential: Expansion of access to clean drinking water, elimination of lead services lines and investments into wastewater infrastructure, addressing cleanup of Superfund and brownfield sites, expansion of high-speed internet access, climate-resilient and efficient electric grid, investments into clean energy transmission and electric vehicle infrastructure.
- **American Rescue Plan:** Delivery of financial relief to Americans to support COVID-19 related economic challenges.
- **Mi Healthy Climate Plan:** Renew Michigan Fund is investing \$15 million to Michigan entrepreneurs and communities for recycling and materials management.
  - Funding Potential: \$110 million on electric vehicle charging infrastructure, \$15 million for recycling and materials management.

### Examples of eligible Justice40 funding activities include:

- Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions
- Mobility and Transportation Options
- Preventing Air Pollution, Improving Public Health and Climate Resilience
- Energy-Efficient, Healthy, and Resilient Housing and Buildings
- Community Resilience Hubs
- Clean Energy and Energy Innovation
- Waste Reduction and Management to Support a Circular Economy
- Brownfield Redevelopment for Emissions Reduction and Climate Resilience
- Workforce Development Programs for Occupations that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Pollution

## Grant Opportunities

- **EPA Community Change Grant:** \$2 billion in grants available for clean energy, electric vehicles, green infrastructure, circular economy, pollution prevention, civic engagement, and workforce development.
- **EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Grants:** \$55 million to support solid waste infrastructure.
- **EGLE Recycling Infrastructure Grants:** Mid-size grants for recycling investments.
- **Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit:** Provides 2.75 cents per kilowatt-hour of electricity generated from qualified energy sources.
- **Farm Bill Conservation Programs:** \$6 billion in conversation to improve habitat, access, soil, and water quality on private lands.
- **NOAA Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Underserved Communities:** \$1 million towards development of habitat restoration plans and projects.
- **Community Energy Management Program:**
- **NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge:** \$15 million toward designing, permitting, and construction of adaption strategies.
- **EGLE Brownfields Grants:** \$1 million toward grants and loans that promote economic development and reuse of blighted and contaminated properties.
- **EGLE Substantial Public Health Risk Project Grants:** \$2 million toward critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure by removal of direct and continuous discharges of wastewater from surface of groundwater.

## Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships & Recommendations

Public-private partnerships can play a pivotal role in establishing an Office of Sustainability for the City of Benton Harbor, building on the foundation set by the Benton Harbor Justice40 Initiative. By leveraging collaboration between the city, organizations like the Project NEED Foundation, Total Wellness by Choice, Benton Harbor Community Development Corporation, and Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, these partnerships will continue to attract funding, technical expertise, and innovative solutions to drive sustainability goals.

Public-private partnerships can support these initiatives by securing grants, fostering investment from private entities, and co-developing projects that align with the city's climate resilience and equity goals. These partnerships would also help mobilize additional resources, such as community-based fundraising and municipal contributions, ensuring the office has the capacity to promote environmental justice and economic opportunity through community-driven solutions.





## Glossary of Terms

Terms	Definition
Consent Decree	A consent decree is a legally binding agreement between parties that can be viewed as a performance improvement plan, oftentimes used in cases for environmental law and government regulation.
Environmental Justice	The just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making.
Justice40	The Biden-Harris Administration established the Justice40 Initiative through Executive Order 14008 where 40% of federal funding for climate solutions would be invested into disadvantaged communities.

Agency/Organization Abbreviation	Agency/Organization Name
EGLE	Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, & Energy
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
MisBF	Michigan Sustainable Business Forum
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Project NEED Foundation	Project Neighborhood Economic Equality Development Foundation
SWMPC	Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

**[misbf.org/bentonharbor](https://misbf.org/bentonharbor)**