



GROW Ecological Commission
Quarterly Report
January – March 2025

In Quarter 1 2025 (January-March), the GROW Ecological Commission continued its mission to advise the Village of Westchester and help educate the community in environmental programs and practices to improve the quality of our air, water, land, reduce greenhouse gases, minimize waste, and reduce energy consumption. The following was accomplished in Q1 2025:

GROW Goals 2025

Commissioners discussed priorities for 2025 and will focus on: Education/Engagement, Advisement, Climate Action Plan

Commissioner Changes

LeeAnn Kruszynski and Lee Kaufman ended their terms as commissioners. Both were founding members of GROW and invaluable contributors, advancing GROW's mission. We thank them for their dedication and contributions and look forward to their continued engagement with GROW.

- LeeAnn Kruszynski – LeeAnn championed environmental initiatives, started the annual Reuse-a-Palooza, and was instrumental in identifying valuable grant opportunities and assisting with grant writing. Her work resulted in \$90K+ in grant awards and included funding for Westchester's Tree Inventory. She served as co-founder and co-chair of GROW.
- Lee Kaufman – Lee championed bike riding as an environmental mode of transportation, working on safe-biking events and establishing bike lanes for safe riding. He served on the Advisory Committee for the West Cook Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. He initiated electric lawn equipment education and served on the Municipal Operations and Climate subcommittees of the Greenest Region Compact, in addition to being a co-founder of GROW.

Recruitment materials were publicly distributed to fill two open Commissioner seats. Several candidates expressed interest and interviews were conducted. We voted for the Village Board to appoint the following two commissioners. Their 3-year terms will begin in April 2025:

- Demitrus Evans – As an attorney specializing in business law, Demitrus' research, writing, and advisory skills will be valuable assets to the Village of Westchester. As President of the Westchester Library Board of Trustees she led initiatives for environmentally friendly building renovations and an eco-friendly parking lot design and implemented environmental education programs. She has been a contributing writer and speaker for ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) topics for local and international corporations through the Global Chamber of Commerce and has developed expertise in sustainable business practices.
- Alexandra Silva – An environmental sciences teacher at Oak Park & River Forest High School, Alex's expertise in environmental sciences and education will be valuable assets for the Village of Westchester. She has designed and led student tours throughout the world with National Geographic Student Expeditions, curated content for National Geographic Education, and developed strategies for student learning in the Virgin Islands. She currently teaches AP Environmental Science, physics-chemistry, and college-prep biology. She is published on topics regarding bees and implications for conservation.

Commissioners voted to promote Nikki Way into the role of Co-Chair, along with Elizabeth Wiseman-Chase staying on as Chair.

Community Engagement

Events

- Climate Movie Night, “Being the Change” documentary, January 2025
- Westchester Food Pantry Artisan Fair, community tabling event, March 2025
- International World Water Day, posters and signage, March 2025

Newsletter Articles

GROW continued to utilize the Village of Westchester newsletter and enews to reach residents. The newsletter is delivered monthly to 7,200 residences, and the e-newsletter is emailed weekly to 3,700 subscribers. Topics covered in Q1 include:

- January 2025 – [Improving Your Indoor Environment](#)
- February 2025 – [Have a GREEN Valentine’s Day](#)
- March 2025 – [The Global Perspective: World Water Day](#)
- Monthly features: Recipe of the Month, Green Fact, green actions, event promotions

Fiscal Year 2025 Stipend Allocation

Commissioners discussed ideas and voted to approve the spending of the Fiscal Year 2025 stipend of \$2,000 provided by SBC Waste Solutions. The following purchases were approved:

- Portable Bike Racks (2) – to be used at community events, encouraging biking as an environmentally friendly form of transportation
- Aquasana portable water purifier plus educational poster – to be used at GROW tabling/events to educate and engage the community in learning about water purification
- Polder Kitchen Composter and educational poster – to be used during tabling/events to educate and engage the community in learning about at-home composting
- Native seed packets - to be shared with residents at community events and tabling opportunities encouraging the growth of native plants and ecosystem support

Grants

- Buckthorn Grant was approved by the Chicago Regional Tree Initiative. Buckthorn (invasive species) will be removed along the 290 expressway at Wedgewood by Norfolk, and natives will be planted.
- Community Energy Grant RFQ was posted for energy plan consulting services

Policy and Infrastructure

Lawn Care

Commissioners revisited “No Mow ‘til Mother’s Day” and made the recommendation to adopt “Slow Mow Summer” instead. No Mow May was originally established in the UK which has different climate and growth patterns than the Midwest. Slow Mow Summer was deemed more appropriate for our growing region. The pivot to Slow Mow Summer will support insects and plants in our Midwestern ecosystem.

Greenest Region Compact (GRC)

The Commission formed two-person subcommittees for the topics of Climate, Energy, Municipal Operations, and Water. Steps were established to review all line items of the GRC, identify action items, regularly review status, and share updates with residents. The GRC is a framework established by the Environmental Committee of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus by surveying the communities in Northeastern Illinois to identify best practices. It is a tool available to municipalities for planning purposes. The Village of Westchester signed on to the compact around 2014.



In Progress

Additionally, a number of events and projects are in the planning stages.

- Planning for summer/fall events and community engagement
- Identifying tabling opportunities and establishing education materials
- Establishing procedures for budget requests and approval of stipend allocation
- Continuing to review progress on the Greenest Region Compact, action items, and consideration of ways to engage with residents and nearby communities
- Sustainable Purchasing Statement under review by Village as part of responsible bidder ordinance overhaul
- Evaluation of Climate Action Plan by the Village continues

Visit www.westchester-il.org/grow to see GROW's meeting agendas, meeting minutes, articles, and presentations. Meetings are generally held the first Thursday of each month at 6:30pm at the Village Hall. Please join us then and/or reach out to GROW@westchester-il.gov to share your environmental priorities for the Village of Westchester.