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My eco-hero is not one individual person. Rather, made up of a team of people all nobly working towards a more environmentally conscious future, my eco-hero is the city of Newark, New Jersey.



Home to almost 300,000 people, Newark is the most populous city in New Jersey. And, with that large population comes a number of environmental issues currently affecting the city from air pollution, to sewage overflow, to contamination in the Passaic River. Yet, the city of Newark, NJ has done a remarkable job of working to address many of these environmental issues through the work of the local government and of grassroots organizations alike.

The city just recently released an official Newark Sustainability Action Plan. The plan outlines specific and tangible actions that the city plans on taking in order to reduce litter and waste, preserve open space in the city, promote a healthy lifestyle for all Newark residents, prepare the city for the effects of climate change, and make environmentally-friendly choices feasible for all Newark residents and businesses. The actions have been spearheaded by Mayor Ras J. Baraka who says that *"all of Newark's children should grow up in an environment that nurtures them. This means getting dangerous toxins out of our neighborhoods, and making sure families have access to the same environmental assets that their suburban counterparts enjoy – parks, playgrounds, trees, healthy food, affordable energy bills, working water infrastructure, and green job opportunities."*



The city of Newark launched a new initiative in the spring of this past year encouraging Newark "citizen-scientists" to get involved in sustainability efforts themselves. Volunteers locate and record information about city trees in designated areas. Once an inventory of the trees in the city is developed, the Newark Office of Sustainability will be better equipped to manage its "urban forest" -- an important task since the relatively low number of trees in the city increases the city's average temperature, especially during the summer.

Grassroots efforts in Newark have proven to be similarly effective and mobilizing. The Greater Newark Conservancy currently works to promote urban farming in Newark by partnering with local schools. The organization also offers job training for ex-offenders by providing "green" job opportunities (cleaning vacant lots in Newark, learning the principles of organic farming etc.).

Similarly, an organization called Newark Science and Sustainability operates with the mission statement of "creating self-sustaining communities." The organization is currently working towards this goal by offering an ambassador program that educates Newark youth about topics ranging from renewable energy to urban agriculture to wellness/nutrition.

Whether through the work of the local government or through the work of grass-roots non-profit organizations all working towards creating a greener future for their city, the "heroic" sustainability efforts in Newark today serve as an inspiring and powerful example for cities worldwide.

**Pictures courtesy of:*

- 1.) https://www.viamichelin.com/web/Maps/Map-Newark--New_Jersey-United_States
- 2.) <https://sustainablenewarknj.wordpress.com/newark-environmental-commission/>
- 3.) <https://www.newarknj.gov/>

Questions I Would Ask the City (Mayor Ras J. Baraka):

- 1.) How has Newark's environment shaped its history? How do you think this unique environment will continue to shape the city in the future?
- 2.) What kind of national-level government action could help sustainability efforts in cities like Newark?
- 3.) How do you think the efforts of environmental grassroots organizations are helping the city government make progress in creating a greener Newark?

Email:

Dear Mayor Ras Baraka,

My name is Sophia Ludtke, and I am a Gladstone resident/a high school junior at Newark Academy in Livingston, NJ. I am currently participating in a month-long environmental challenge (called Project Green Challenge). Today's challenge encouraged us to write an article about an "environmental-hero". I have included what I wrote about the city of Newark below:

My eco-hero is not one individual person. Rather, made up of a team of people all nobly working towards a more environmentally conscious future, my eco-hero is the city of Newark, New Jersey.

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I just wanted to share this article that I wrote with you -- all the work that the city of Newark is doing is definitely very inspiring, especially for a young person who has grown particularly concerned about environmental issues in recent years.

Thank you for your time,

Sophia Ludtke