Climate change is here. December 2015 was the warmest on record in Pennsylvania. That same month saw unprecedented tornadoes and flooding in the South and Midwest. Meanwhile, California is in its fourth year of drought.

There are more weather extremes to come, and the window to avert the worst of global warming is closing fast. We will need to reduce and eventually eliminate fossil fuels to generate our energy — an effort best handled on the state and national levels.

But on the local level, living in a traditional town like Pottstown is the best way people can reduce their negative impact on the earth’s ecosystem. Because of its closely connected mixture of houses, offices and stores, which can be reached by walking, bicycling, and short car and bus trips, Pottstown is more environmentally friendly than the surrounding suburbs and semi-rural areas.

The suburbs boast newer, bigger houses, which consume lots of energy for heating and cooling. Large housing tracts and isolated subdivisions require people to drive for everything, which increases tailpipe pollution. Excess driving requires abundant roads and parking lots, which in turn increase storm water runoff.

That’s why rediscovering towns like Pottstown is vitally important to the health of our planet. Last year, Pottstown began work on a sustainability plan under the guidance of the Montgomery County Planning Commission.

So far, a committee working on the plan has developed a draft vision statement. But the real work begins this year, when members will list specific actions to be taken.

In October, the Pottstown School District began its “walking school bus” for elementary school students attending the Rupert School. Three groups of students have been walking to school daily, escorted by volunteer adults.

The numbers are small — about 20 students per day — but the program demonstrates that even kindergartners can walk a mile and a half, rain or shine—even bitter cold.

This year will see the construction of a grant-funded bike lane system extending the current lanes on High Street east to Roland Street, north to Jackson Street, and west to the high school/middle school complex and beyond to the Lincoln and Franklin schools.

The most effective way to promote Pottstown’s merits is to get as many pedestrians and bicyclists using our streets and sidewalks as possible.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY — Because of its compact form, Pottstown is more environmentally friendly than surrounding suburbs, which require a car for every errand. The borough’s greatest asset is its long-term sustainability.