

# SHELTERFORCE *The journal of affordable housing and community building*

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## Taking the LEED in Your Community

Through local and regional initiatives, communities are tailoring the eco-revolution for their backyards. By [TED WYSOCKI](#)

By now the green revolution should be underway in your town. The question is: What does it mean for your community? For the construction and architectural professions, the answer increasingly revolves around [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design \(LEED\) certification](#).

Established by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in 2000, LEED certification is actively being pursued not only for new commercial development but also for renovation of existing buildings, including homes and offices, and for entire neighborhoods.

LEED certification also presents opportunities for community development professionals to pursue another LEED—local economic and employment development for our communities. From *The Wall Street Journal*, which devoted a special section on March 24, 2008 to “ECO:nomics—Creating Environmental Capital,” to *The New York Times Magazine’s* “Green Issue” on April 20, 2008, to National Public Radio, which reports almost daily on the varied nuances of green practices, there’s no shortage of media attention to sustainable development. The challenge remains for us to make “green” real for all American communities.

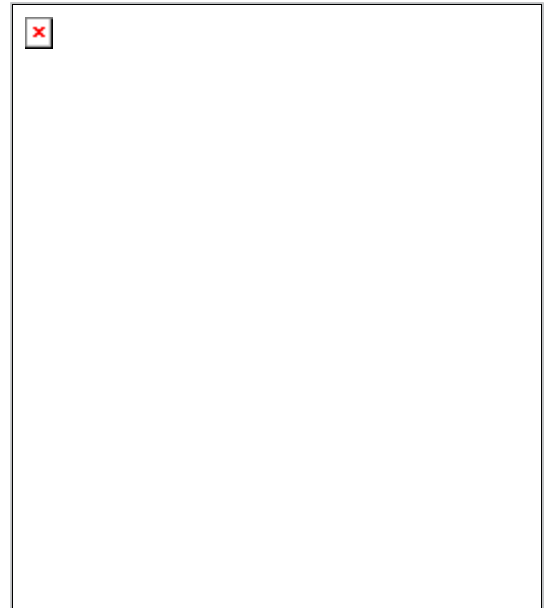
As the buzz spreads, local initiatives are sparking up and striving to define “green.” State and local governments are promoting energy efficiency and exploring renewable energy options. Traditional environmental efforts continue to focus on waste and pollution reduction. Communities are turning vacant land into urban farms to grow fresh produce locally. Perhaps above all, the public is beginning to better understand and accept that reducing emissions is imperative to combating climate change.

It is this imperative, more than any other, which has moved green from a lot of talk to the engine of profound market change that is creating a host of job opportunities. But in a society with a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, the question of who benefits from the advent of the green economy remains open. Community development practitioners have a vital role to play in ensuring that the answer is both inclusive and equitable.

### What Kind of Jobs?

Under the leadership of [Green For All](#), a national movement is arising with the mission to “build a green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty.” This nascent coalition was launched at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2007. It grew out of the work of [Van Jones](#), who founded the Oakland, California-based [Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#) in 1996. Green For All is advocating for governmental commitments to job training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the green economy, especially for people from disadvantaged communities.

In March, Green For All, in partnership with the [Apollo Alliance](#), the [Center for American Progress](#), and the [Center on Wisconsin Strategy](#), released “Green-Collar Jobs in America’s Cities.” To spur the creation of green-collar jobs and opportunity in local communities, the report offers 14 case studies of successful green-collar job training programs in 11 communities on both coasts, as well as in the Midwest and the South.



LEED Council's skills trainer, Dean Rennie (lower left), shows trainees how to build a green partition wall connection to maximize effective weatherization.

“Green-Collar Jobs in America’s Cities” defines these jobs as “well-paid, career track jobs that contribute directly to preserving or enhancing environmental quality.” The report notes that like blue-collar jobs, “green-collar jobs range from low-skill, entry level positions to high-skill, higher-paid jobs, and include opportunities for advancement in both skills and wages.”

While the global economy has resulted in a steady loss of American jobs as corporations outsource production and service operations, the report emphasizes, “Green-collar jobs tend to be local because many involve work transforming and upgrading the immediate built and natural environment—retrofitting buildings, installing solar panels, constructing transit lines, and landscaping.”

Although some green-collar jobs are in new occupations, most are existing jobs that require knowledge about new green practices. But the key factor is whether the job advances two complementary goals: improving the environment and providing family-supporting wages or a career ladder.

“Our green future will be invented at the local level,” insists Jones, founder and president of Green For All. “We are on the cusp of incredible change. We hope that this publication helps people in cities across the country realize their own dreams of a strong green economy that provides pathways to prosperity for people in need.”

The community-development movement should be embracing green as a new paradigm for our work—not just adding LEED certification for our brick and mortar, but more importantly as a strategy for local economic and employment development to improve the health and wealth of our communities and constituents. That’s what we are striving to do in Chicago.

### **LEEDing the Way**

[The Local Economic & Employment Development \(LEED\) Council in Chicago](#) has been striving to lead the way in green development for 26 years as a delegate agency of Chicago’s Department of Planning & Development. The department works with businesses in the North River Industrial Corridor, which follows the Chicago River northwest from downtown. This area is home to a diverse business base from Vienna hot dogs to Wrigley gum; from Water Saver Faucets to C.H. Robinson, a global third-party logistics firm. While we identify solutions for business expansion and retention, the second “E” in our mission is for “employment,” providing job training and placement for low-skilled, unemployed people to match local employment needs.

In 2004, LEED Council began promoting green or sustainable development as a new programming area to improve air quality and to mitigate traffic congestion as a demonstration corridor for the regional Clean Air Counts campaign of the [Metropolitan Mayors Caucus](#). As part of our strategic plan, we define “sustainable development” as fostering economic growth while reducing environmental impact. LEED Council now has several projects within the context of our local economic and employment development mission to encourage both green business growth and skills training for green jobs.

The council is encouraging business and community awareness and adoption of green practices, such as the use of non-toxic paints and cleaning products. It is promoting the use of public transit with the corporate sponsorship of an express bus that links to commuter rail. It is working with member businesses to decrease emissions by promoting energy efficiency. And it is also striving to improve the ecological footprint of the corridor by advancing new technology for alternative fuels, recycling, and green building development.

Spurred by LEED Council’s public information efforts, council member Chicago Scenic Studios voluntarily started using low VOC (volatile organic compound) paints in 2006 to participate in Clean Air Counts’ regional goal of reducing polluting emissions by five tons per day. According to Bob Doepel, the company’s founder and owner, “our change was calculated to reduce emissions by 616 pounds that year.” Stressing what a difference even one small, first step of this kind can make, Doepel says, “Today, implementing sustainable practices and reducing energy consumption have become essential for our business and our clients, whether they be Oprah Winfrey or the public art project, Cool Globes, that we did in the summer of 2007.”

### **From Shuttered Factory to Green Business Hub**

Many communities throughout the country, especially here in the Midwest, are faced with shuttered factories; but these liabilities can have new life as valuable assets for green businesses. When Chicago lamp maker Frederick Cooper revealed in 2004 that it planned to close down its factory at US 94 (Kennedy Expressway) and Diversey Avenue, many expected that the factory would become a condominium development. In fact, one of the city’s biggest condo developers was ready to sweep in.

[The Logan Square Neighborhood Association](#) (LSNA) is a grass-roots community organization serving the multi-ethnic communities of Logan Square and the Lathrop Homes, a public-housing development. LSNA organized neighbors, veteran Cooper workers, and the LEED Council to form the Cooper Lamps Task Force. As Cooper began to lay off 125 workers during the summer of 2005, the task force obtained enhanced job-training from the city and severance benefits from the owners, as they organized a community campaign to preserve the factory as a site for jobs. With the support of Alderman Manny Flores (1st Ward) for a jobs-

focused use for the plant, the big condo developer backed off and sold the plant to Baum Realty, a commercial developer.

Today, Baum is renovating the shuttered factory into the [Green Exchange](#), a sustainable business community designed for the advancement of the green marketplace. With a mix of green businesses under one very green roof, this four-story 272,000-square-foot space will foster synergies and provide a variety of opportunities for its tenants to grow green exponentially. The developers plan to deliver space to tenants in late 2008 and are currently negotiating with green businesses seeking a retail presence, showroom galleries, office or working/living space. The mission of the Green Exchange is to “move the green marketplace from niche to mainstream while furthering the green economy and serving people, planet and profit,” according to David Baum.

Meanwhile, as construction continues, LSNA and LEED Council are identifying residents who have the skills for the spectrum of jobs to be offered by the incoming tenants. “If it weren’t for neighborhood leaders, this building would have been condos,” notes LSNA organizer John McDermott. “We want to make sure that neighborhood families who are low and moderate income get to participate in and benefit from this innovative project.”

### **Chicagoland Green Collar Jobs Initiative**

Leveraging the opportunity that one building offers for a more far-reaching impact requires partnering on a broader scale. With the leadership of Mayor Richard M. Daley, the City of Chicago has become a national model for promoting green practices and development. Building on existing relationships and forging new ones, LEED Council reached out to build a coalition for green jobs all over Chicago.

Since the fall of 2007, Chicago groups that support a green agenda have been collaborating—first informally and now deliberately—to pursue the promise of green jobs. The first joint project was to convene a December 2007 summit to explore both local and national efforts promoting green-collar jobs. Representatives from Green for All and its national partners, the Apollo Alliance and the Workforce Alliance, were speakers at the summit, which attracted more than 150 attendees from a wide variety of professional and community backgrounds.

A steering committee now guides the [Chicagoland Green Collar Jobs Initiative](#). Members include BIG: Blacks in Green; Chicago Federation of Labor Workers Assistance Committee; Chicago Sustainable Business Alliance; City of Chicago Department of Environment; Delta Institute; LEED Council; Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance; U.S. Green Building Council Chicago Chapter; and Wilbur Wright College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago. Quarterly meetings with other interested organizations are fostering ongoing dialogue on both policy and programs.

The diversity of these agencies and the growing number of 2008 partners demonstrate the breadth of stakeholders that can be assembled to collaborate and are necessary to develop a skilled workforce that is ready to meet employer demands in the new “green” market. The initiative will engage Chicago-area employers, job-seekers, training providers, and public agencies in the development of workforce programs for emerging green jobs and to capture these new employment opportunities for Chicagoland’s low-skilled individuals.

Emerging green-collar jobs in the Chicago region can be categorized in several sectors:

- Energy efficiency for homes and commercial buildings
- Building construction and operations, such as green cleaning
- Alternative energy service providers (solar, wind, geothermal)
- Installation and maintenance of storm water management systems (green roof, permeable pavement, rain-water collection)
- Urban horticulture and agriculture (landscaping and farming)
- Green-related products and services (recycling and supplies)

The initiative will interview businesses to determine the number and type of green jobs and the skills and training required for these jobs. We will then invite businesses to become engaged with the Initiative’s Employer Advisory Council to review current training programs and, based on identified employer demand, to advise on new curriculum development for both incumbent workers and those seeking entry into green jobs with career ladders.

Victoria Cooper, director of the Environmental Technology Program at Chicago’s Wilbur Wright Community College, pioneered a six-course, 21-credit-hour occupational certificate in building energy technologies. As a founding partner, Victoria offers both her environmental and educational expertise to the initiative. Cooper notes, “The initiative is bringing the right partners to the table to identify the most promising green-collar jobs and then to design a career-ladder approach so an individual can first gain entry to a green job and then pursue further training. This is a great example of how educational institutions and non-profits can work together with employers to promote green.”

The timing of the initiative has coincided with the formulation of the City of Chicago's Climate Action Plan, which is developing strategies to reduce emissions centered on buildings, renewable energy, transportation, waste, and pollution. The initiative will work with the City's Climate Action Jobs Task Force to also study employers' demand for green-skilled workers in these sectors and to identify funding opportunities for new green-jobs skills-training.

### **A Green White House?**

As the Chicago efforts and other sustainable-development initiatives nationwide build momentum, practitioners and policymakers alike are becoming more aware that the November elections are likely to have a profound effect on their outcomes. It's not only about a change in environmental policies; it's about economic incentives for green businesses and federal funding for green jobs.

Whoever occupies the White House during the next four years will have to heed the calls for green policies and practices. How much the next president embraces the green economy will have lasting environmental and economic impact on the nation and our communities.

A starting point for the next administration is the Green Jobs Act of 2007, (H.R. 2847), introduced by representatives Hilda Solis (D-Calif.) and John Tierney (D-Mass.), with significant support from Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). The Senate version was sponsored by senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.).

Promoted by Green for All in conjunction with The Workforce Alliance, the [Green Jobs Act of 2007](#) authorized \$125 million annually to create an Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Worker Training Program as an amendment to the [Workforce Investment Act](#) (WIA). The Green Jobs Act (GJA) is a pilot program to identify needed skills, develop training programs, and train workers for jobs in a range of industries—including energy-efficient building, construction and retrofits, renewable electric power, energy-efficient vehicles, biofuels, and manufacturing that produces sustainable products and uses sustainable processes and materials. It targets a broad range of populations for eligibility, but has a special focus on creating “green pathways out of poverty.”

The Green Jobs Act became Title X of the [Energy Independence and Security Act](#): (often referred to as the “2007 Energy Bill”), which Congress passed and President Bush signed in late 2007. The program will be administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) in consultation with the Department of Energy.

However, while funds were authorized, they were not appropriated, so full funding will have to be secured in the next appropriations cycle—which will not be completed until late 2008. It is also possible that Congress will find a way to fund the GJA programs in a supplementary spending bill or an economic stimulus package before the end of 2008.

### **Eco-Development or Eco-Apartheid?**

Whether authorization happens in 2008 or whether it is delayed until a new administration takes office, the community-development field should not wait to organize around a green agenda.

The [National Community Reinvestment Coalition](#) held a plenary at its March 2008 annual conference titled “The Nexus between Environmental and Economic Justice: Harnessing the Green Economy for Community Reinvestment.” The session included a screening of the documentary, “The New Dream...the 3rd Wave of Environmentalism.” This enlightening documentary produced by the Ella Baker Center presents opportunities for future community development such as installing solar panels to make homes more energy efficient and affordable.

However, as Van Jones predicts in his closing comments in the film, inaction on our part will only further divide our country—with “eco-development” and green benefits for some, but “eco-apartheid” for low-income and minority communities exposed to hazardous environmental conditions and denied access to the skills training necessary to participate in and benefit from a green economy.

The nation cannot afford to squander the opportunity to coalesce around an environmental and community development agenda that offers pathways out of poverty and moves us toward energy-efficient, healthy communities. As community-development professionals, we must embrace green as a local economic and employment-development strategy to fulfill our mission.

Ted has been the CEO of the LEED Council since February, 2002. For over 26 years, LEED Council has been instrumental in supporting businesses and creating job opportunities on Chicagos Near North side.

During his 17-year tenure as CEO of the Chicago Association of Neighborhood Development Organizations (CANDO), Ted built CANDO into the largest city-wide economic development coalition in the U.S.

Previously, Ted worked for over 12 years for Gale Cincotta and the National Training & Information Center [NTIC] on community reinvestment. Ted was the founding editor of NTIC's national publication, DISCLOSURE.

Ted is currently a board director of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.

## **RELATED RESOURCES**

Local Economic & Employment Development Council "[www.nhi/go/leedcouncil](http://www.nhi/go/leedcouncil)":<http://www.nhi/go/leedcouncil>  
Chicagoland Green Collar Jobs Initiative "[www.nhi/go/greencouncilchicago](http://www.nhi/go/greencouncilchicago)":<http://www.nhi/go/greencouncilchicago>  
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