SUMMARY REPORT

Greening Affordable Housing in the City of Los Angeles

By

Global Green USA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1996, Global Green USA created the Greening Affordable Housing Initiative (GAHI). A year later, Global Green USA partnered with the City of Los Angeles to create the Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program. GG USA strongly believes in working with the City of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program has provided many opportunities for collaboration. The new Mayor and City Council are currently in a position to make unprecedented progress toward sustainable building, starting with affordable housing. In light of the current energy crisis, consumers are showing growing interest in changes that are essential to preserving the environment, including more energy-efficient housing.

The successful construction of green affordable housing will demonstrate that residents of any income level can enjoy the benefits of healthy, environmentally responsible, energy-efficient housing. By encouraging the use of renewable energy, energy efficiency, water efficiency, environmental and healthy-building materials and other sustainable features, the City of Los Angeles will not only greatly improve the affordable housing sector, but could also become a national, and indeed global, leader in sustainable building.

To stimulate the widespread use of green building practices, Global Green USA recommends the following actions.

- Create incentives to encourage developers to apply green building practices.
- Facilitate better coordination among City departments.
- Educate public, policymakers and the affordable housing development community about green building.
- Remove regulatory barriers to green building (i.e. code revision).
- Create economic opportunities for green businesses.

These ideas are discussed in greater detail in the attached memo.

Greening Affordable Housing in the City of Los Angeles

Sustainability, or using natural resources in a renewable manner, is attainable with a concerted effort led by the City. Global Green USA (GG USA) is devoted to playing a key role in the development of sustainability in Los Angeles, with a focus on green affordable housing. To that end, Global Green USA created the Greening Affordable Housing Initiative (GAHI) in 1996. A year later, we partnered with the City of Los Angeles to create the Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program. This memorandum summarizes the purpose and scope of Global Green USA's commitment to green affordable housing, and includes a number of recommendations to help the City assume the leadership role so essential to the widespread promotion of sustainable building.

Global Green USA is the US affiliate of Green Cross International (GCI), and is the only national environmental organization headquartered in Los Angeles. Launched in 1994 by Mikhail Gorbachev, the founder and current president of GCI, Global Green USA's mission is to foster a global value shift toward a sustainable and secure world. GG USA works in cooperation with government, industry and individuals to facilitate practical solutions to environmental challenges.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The Built Environment: A Drain on Our Resources

Consider the following statistics, bearing in mind the current energy crisis. The construction and operation of buildings consume 35% of total US energy output. Buildings consume more than 60 % of the electricity generated in the US. This energy consumption accounts for at least 35 % of US carbon dioxide (CO2) emission. Buildings utilize 35 % of all materials produced in the US and more than 25 % of the world's harvested wood. Besides consuming resources at an unprecedented rate, buildings also produce immense waste. Of the 210 million tons of solid waste generated each year, a significant portion, approximately 30% emanates from construction and demolition.

Wasteful Resource Use: Consequences for Los Angeles

The recent Environmental Defense report "Hot Prospects: The Potential Impacts of Global Warming on Los Angeles and the Southland" describes how continued pollution, caused by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas, will affect Los Angeles in the coming decades. Among the hazards:

- More smog and an increase in respiratory illnesses;
- Increased erosion of beaches and hillsides;
- Accelerated decline of numerous marine species;
- Increased uncertainty and challenges to water management;
- Possibility for more large fires during some years.

AN ATTAINABLE SOLUTION

The related problems of energy inefficient building, waste, and climate change can effectively be dealt with through a committed program of sustainable building. Now is the time: the new City leadership can make an early commitment to leading Los Angeles into a new era of widespread sustainable building, and, in light of the energy crisis, acknowledge the growing demand among consumers to build housing that is cheaper to heat and cool.

Sustainable building provides a broad array of benefits. Green buildings:

- Use resources such as land, water, energy, and lumber more efficiently.
- Are economical to maintain, with lower water and energy bills.
- Help optimize light, improve indoor air flow and quality, and help alleviate a number of other aspects relating to human health.
- Extend the longevity of buildings.
- Enhance communities and local economies.

GLOBAL GREEN USA'S GREENING AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE & LOS ANGELES GREENING AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT

Affordable Housing as an Area of Focus

While every building sector can employ green building strategies and improve the built environment, Global Green USA has chosen to focus on affordable housing. We believe the sustainable construction of affordable housing projects can help accomplish three important goals at once:

- Create healthier housing for occupants regardless of income level.
- Create more affordable living conditions through improved energy efficiency.
- Provide evidence that green building is a viable and accessible option for all income levels.

Activities to Date: The Greening Affordable Housing Initiative

General activities

To promote sustainable building in the affordable housing sector, Global Green USA launched the Greening Affordable Housing Initiative (GAHI) in 1996. Since then, GG USA has conducted local and national projects to encourage the development of green affordable housing:

- Helping Habitat for Humanity International develop their Green Team.
- Holding a design charrette for Los Angeles affordable housing developers.

- Working on specific development projects with Venice Community Housing and the Los Angeles Community Design Center.
- Developing green-building training for the Youth Build Program.

GG USA has also been involved in policy work at the state and national level:

- Most recently, GG USA helped add language to amend the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee Guidelines to give points for green building and energy efficiency strategies.
- In 1998, GG USA held the Policy Roundtable on Resource and Energy Efficiency in Public and Assisted Housing in Washington. The meeting produced several recommendations for HUD that could help save between $300 million and $1 billion if fully implemented.
- GG USA conducts workshops around the country on greening affordable housing.

The Los Angeles Greening Affordable Housing Project

One of the first GAHI projects was the Los Angeles Greening Sustainable Building Program, launched in 1997. The goal of the program is to promote and facilitate the building of green affordable housing in Los Angeles. Project activities to date include:

- Educating City and California State staff, developers, contractors, and others about green building through the "Creating Green Homes: Residential Design and Construction Workshops" held in Los Angeles and Sacramento;
- Participating in the Los Angeles Housing Crisis Task Force;
- Creating the City of Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program Guidebook and Sourcebook;
- Holding a participatory design charrette for four affordable housing developers in Southern California.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the past five years Global Green USA has undertaken several activities with the City of Los Angeles and other stakeholders to encourage green affordable housing. The Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program resulted in a number of recommendations for helping the City promote green building. We suggest that the City:

- **Adopt a Policy Stating the City's Support for Green Building**

- **Establish Incentives for Green Building**

  Provide reduced fees or expedited processing for projects that
  - are located in and empowerment zone or on a brownfield site
  - incorporate adaptive reuse of an existing building
  - exceed the State Title 24 energy code by at least 15 percent

- incorporate renewable energy
- exceed local water efficiency requirements

- Allocate higher point ratings to firm's that can demonstrate green building experience for applications for existing City Housing Funds or to the proposed Housing Trust Fund

- **Improve Coordination Among City Departments**
  - Revitalize the City's Sustainability Task Force and provide staff to support its activities.
  - Establish a formal process for the Planning, Building and Safety, Public Works Departments to discuss conflicting requirements, with a focus on facilitating the construction of green projects

- **Continue to Educate Building Industry Stakeholders**
  - Establish a regular green building training program for City staff and architects, developers, and contractors active in the City
  - Develop and distribute information about existing codes, regulations, and resources in the City that support green building

- **Remove Barriers to Green Building Practices**
  - Conduct a thorough analysis of existing City Planning, Building, and Engineering codes to determine if there are conflicts with green building approaches and practices
  - Revise codes to eliminate any conflicts and encourage green building practices to the greatest extent possible

- **Create Economic Development Opportunities for Green Manufacturers**
  - Establish financial incentives to encourage green product manufactures to locate in the City of Los Angeles

A summary of detailed recommendations from Global Green initiatives for the City of Los Angeles since 1997 appear in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

Los Angeles Housing Crisis Task Force Recommendations

As a participant in the Los Angeles Housing Crisis Task Force, GG USA recommends that the City of Los Angeles implement the following Task Force recommendations to promote sustainable development and green building practices.

- **Provide incentives to projects that incorporate sustainable building practices.** Provide fee reductions or waivers, expedited processing and/or other incentives for projects that do the following:

- **Make more efficient use of sites.**
  Provide incentives to projects that are developed in an empowerment zone or on a brownfield site, include community gardens or other forms of onsite food production, and/or are an adaptive reuse of an existing building.

- **Incorporate more efficient energy systems.**
  Provide incentives to projects that incorporate renewable energy systems such as solar or wind, provide on-site storm water retention, exceed State Title 24 Energy Standards by 20 % or more, include electric vehicle charging stations, and/or exceed State and City water efficiency requirements through either system design or provision of additional drought tolerant landscaping.

- **Emphasize recycling.**
  Provide incentives to projects that supply superior on-site recycling services such as bins in each unit, commit to a comprehensive demolition and construction recycling program, utilize a minimum of 30 % of building materials with recycled content, and/or specify non-toxic building materials or utilize only certified lumber products.

- **Eliminate City regulations that hinder sustainable development approaches.**

  Remove requirements that parking areas be paved with asphalt or other non-porous surfaces. Allow the installation and use of grey water systems for landscaping in all project types. Modify regulations related to fire walls to allow for a reduction in materials use (specifically in townhouse designs where stringent fire rating between first and second levels is redundant). Modify regulations for permitted projects to allow for efficient overhangs on southern and western exposures and to provide light shelves.

Creating Green Homes Workshops Recommendations

The "Creating Green Homes" workshops, held in February and March 2001, were based on the Los Angeles Sustainable Building Program Guidebooks and were designed to help further educate City and State staff, developers, architects, contractors, and property

managers about residential green building. (The full description of the workshop is documented in Appendix A, and Appendices B and C are sample evaluation forms from the workshops.) Participant evaluations provided valuable feedback regarding what both Los Angeles and California can do to promote a more sustainable built environment at the local and state level. Suggestions included:

- **Initiate and encourage further discussion regarding incentives that can encourage green building.**

- **Investigate the best types of incentives** - changing building codes, expediting the permitting processes, placing green building materials on approved lists, or providing funding such as grants, loans, or tax credits.

- **Investigate how the incentives should be implemented.**

- **Establish programs and provide resources** to enable local governments and the state to better educate stakeholders about green building, green building programs, and incentives.

- **In Los Angeles, facilitate coordination among departments working on green building**, such as Sanitation, Environmental Affairs, Department of Water and Power, and Engineering. Develop a broader and stronger impact through increased cooperation and collaboration, and share knowledge about what different departments can do to encourage and increase green building activities.

Charrette Recommendations and Action Items for the City of Los Angeles

The Charrette, with over 85 participants from architecture, landscape design, finance, economic development, engineering, construction, academia, and local and national government, generated the most comprehensive set of recommendations and proposed guidelines for the City of Los Angeles based on their work on four affordable housing projects located within the City.

City-Owned and –Influenced Development: prepare guidelines on green development practices and strategies for local affordable housing developers; favor green developers in city contracts; invite housing providers to participate on the City's Sustainable Building Task Force; appoint an ombudsman from the City to help developers adopt green approaches.

Zoning: revise zoning ordinances to require one parking space for each residential unit instead of two, which would allow room for more housing, commercial space and open space while reducing infrastructure costs and impacts; revise code requirements, such as wide street widths and low-density standards that impede green development by increasing costs.

Community Integration: provide jobs, child care, stores, education and other social services vital to resident on-site or nearby, which will reduce the need for motorized transportation and create more diverse, resilient neighborhoods.

Resident Participation: encourage residents and community participants to be involved in the planning and design process, therefore enabling the project team to create design solutions which address cultural diversity issues and needs.

Transportation Planning: coordinate affordable housing development with the location of transportation hubs, pedestrian access, and retail and local amenities to reduce development dispersion; develop methods and tools (including software) for planners and developers to weigh such factors at a regional scale.

Landscaping: encourage urban agriculture in common areas to support community interaction, local employment, green spaces, food production, and educational activities; strategically design landscaped areas in order to minimize water use and maintenance; avoid using plants and shrubbery which can become hiding places for criminal activity; use landscaping to soften the appearance of security fences.

Security: address site and project security issues with design team at the beginning of the project in order to incorporate their concerns into the project; design open spaces for specific residential uses such as gardens and plan areas for children in order to avoid underutilized/unsafe areas; strategically locate lighting in parking and play areas for increased security.

Management: use resident managers to train residents to operate their home's climate control systems and appliances; provide multi-lingual videos to train residents about resource and energy efficiency in their homes; create incentives for residents to conserve water and energy.

Economic Development Funding: create jobs and job training in construction, building demolition, recycling and reuse opportunities; support resident training in building operations and maintenance programs; and encourage food production for resale at local farmers' markets.

Financing: increase financing of green developments; modify lending rules to allow use of comparables for green projects in other areas; support new mortgage products that recognize the financial advantages of location and resource efficiency, such as Location-Efficient and Community and Flexible Home Power Performance Mortgages; provide incentives for developers to mix low-, mid- and high-income housing units.

Green Incentives: provide code flexibility and allow incentives for green development; expedite permits for green development; reduce water and sewer service fees for projects that employ xeriscaping or on-site storm water management; lower power and gas hook-up charges to reward alternative energy use.

General: use environmental solutions to make affordable housing better for residents and communities; do not use affordable housing as a laboratory to solve environmental problems; consider that low-income residents already consume fewer resources than other groups.

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