

SHELTERFORCE

The journal of affordable housing and community building SUMMER 2008

What Green Means for Communities

Majora Carter

Greening the ghetto with Sustainable South Bronx

Energizing green-collar job training & environmentally friendly development

Growing the urban fresh food revolution

PLUS

Will **Anaheim** house more than **Disney** and **baseball**?

Organizing 2.0
Connecting Rust Belt cities

Moving at Warp Speed

By Alice Chasan

DON'T KNOW MUCH about physics or math. My claim to Einsteinian expertise pretty much begins and ends with The Photo. It hangs on my study wall, framed alongside the letter inviting my father to visit Albert Einstein at his home in Princeton. I never

tire of looking at it, because it tells a great American story.

There's my dad, who arrived at Ellis Island in 1904 at six months of age with his mother (to join his father, who had come earlier, fleeing the Czar's army). Now a thoroughly American gentleman, he's impeccably dressed in the latest haberdashery circa 1950. His expression and stance signal he's bursting with pride to be in the living room of the great man's house on Mercer Street.

Next to him is Einstein—another European immigrant who'd fled oppression—looking the polar opposite of my dapper dad and the very model of a modern genius: rumpled pants, baggy sweater, iconically tangled mane.

They'd met to talk about practical strategies for acting against ethnic and religious hatreds and genocide—a vision born out of the lessons of the Holocaust. Their common goals connected a world-renowned scientist and a New Jersey lawyer who was a grass-roots activist for political reform and racial equality.

So, what I know about relativity owes nothing to scientific knowledge and everything to the lessons of human connection: Sometimes,

the movement of things seems to slow to a molasses-like pace, when people feel isolated and marginalized from the

levers of change; then there are times when events seem to accelerate, as people come together to make it happen.

Lately, the pace of positive change has picked up at the National Housing Institute, in sync with movements on the grass-roots and national levels.

In a few short months, NHI has launched a redesigned *Shelterforce*, a state-of-the-art interactive Web site (www.nhi.org and www.shelterforce.org), and a new group blog, www.Rooflines.org. In a matter of weeks, Rooflines' bloggers have created a conversation that takes NHI far beyond bricks and mortar to the questions that will determine how we revitalize communities in the 21st century. I urge you to visit Rooflines and add your own momentum through your comments.

When I inaugurated Rooflines in early May, I said that it felt like the country is moving out of 40 years in the political wilderness.

In so many ways, the energy is coalescing both in the electoral arena and at the grass-roots level to address the chronic economic, social, and environmental problems that have left the majority of Americans dispirited and yearning for a new set of national priorities.

Charged by that same arc, NHI has reaffirmed its commitment to the examination of the American housing crisis and advocacy for social and economic equity that has spurred us for more than 33 years. And we've expanded our purview to include the environmental, educational, and public-health issues that challenge the vitality of communities.

One of the leaders of the reinvigorated progressive movement is Van Jones, founder of Green for All. He's quoted in Ted Wysocki's article (on page 15 of this issue's cover package), saying "We are on the cusp of incredible change." Green for All's program for joining the drive for social and economic equity with the goal of environmentally sustainable practices in community development and green-collar job training in low-income communities is accelerating that transformation, as is Majora Carter's pathbreaking work through Sustainable South Bronx ("The Green New Deal," *Shelterforce's* interview with Carter, starts on page 8).

Carter and Jones—along with the Democratic Party's standard-bearer, Barack Obama—exemplify the kind of high-impact leadership that can vault us forward toward diverse, vibrant communities in a more just and equitable society. I have no doubt that Dad and Prof. Einstein would have been on board for this exciting ride. ♦

LETTERS

To the Editor:

I just finished reading "Stemming the Red Tide," the article on the subprime crisis by Peter Dreier and John Atlas in the Spring 2008 issue of *Shelterforce*. I'm not sure I totally endorse their punch line—the answer is to elect the Democrats—but that's a discussion for another time. I really just wanted to write and say that it's the best comprehensive piece I've read on the whole deal, the history, the mechanics, etc. for the lay reader, and something I'll definitely have my students read when I teach my housing course this fall. Kudos!

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SHELTER SHORTS

HUD Sec'y Resigns, Questions Linger



Although Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson cited personal reasons for resigning in April, his departure failed to dispel concerns about his conduct in office that led to ongoing ethics investigations by the HUD inspector general, a federal grand jury, and the Justice Department's public integrity section.

President Bush has nominated and the Senate has confirmed Steven Preston, head of the Small Business Administration, to replace Jackson.

Jackson's resignation came as congressional leaders called for his ouster amid allegations that he steered a federal contract toward a South Carolina acquaintance. No charges have been filed, and Jackson—who consistently enjoyed Bush's support—has denied any wrongdoing. The congressional newspaper *The Hill* reported that Senators Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) sent a letter to Bush in March, contending that Jackson could

not effectively address the subprime mortgage slide.

He was also accused in a lawsuit alleging his reprisal against Philadelphia housing officials for reportedly blocking a land deal with a Bush supporter, according to CNN. And he has been under fire for his department's handling of the Gulf housing shortage in Hurricane Katrina's wake as well as his reticence to acknowledge the magnitude of the burgeoning mortgage crisis.

Jackson's resignation also diverted attention from attempts to find a solution to a \$2-billion shortfall in HUD's Section 8 rental-voucher program, which could lead to many of the 1.3 million families housed by the program to lose their homes, according to some housing advocates. This year, Congress would have to budget \$6.5 billion over the administration's requested amount for housing and community development in order to avoid cuts in core programs for low-income families.

School's Out (of Money)

The number of home foreclosures nationwide is up 60 percent from one year ago, and it's not just affecting the homeowner, but children of homeowners as well. According to a report on "NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams," public schools are taking hits as districts funded by local property taxes experience higher levels of foreclosures.

"It's going to hurt the bottom line of state budgets in terms of the monies they give to schools," Douglas H. Palmer, mayor of Trenton, N.J., and president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, told NBC News.

Local property taxes account for about 30 percent of school funding, according to a recent study commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. According to the report, California could lose up to \$3 billion in property taxes as a result of the foreclosure crisis, and New York State could lose up to \$700 million. Sports, advanced placement classes, and much-needed facility repairs could be among the first casualties.

Housing Perpetuates Racial Segregation, Group Says

A Dallas-based civil-rights group is charging the largest affordable-housing rental program in Texas with perpetuating racial segregation and asking the courts to require an equal number of tax-credit projects in non-minority areas as there are in minority areas.

The suit, filed against the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs in March by the Inclusive Communities Project Inc., claims that the department has allowed too many housing tax credit-financed projects to be built in urban areas with high levels of crime and poverty.

According to ICP President Elizabeth K. Julian, areas like the mostly white Dallas suburbs have a high proportion of apartment complexes that do not accept Section 8 rental vouchers. "The issue of segregation in the tax-credit program is obviously not a news flash," Julian told *Shelterforce*, "and this is just another example of the greater problem."

Julian said that her organization has not sued any landlords in the past three years for rejecting vouchers, but she would not rule out that option. For now, "this is about addressing the role of the state and the tax-credit program as a barrier of being able to find high-quality housing," Julian said.



Blocking the 'Bayonne Box'

Newark, N.J., is one of a handful of Garden State cities that is enjoying something of a housing renaissance, but city government and some residents don't like the look of the housing boom.

Much of the redevelopment has ushered in a type of housing known as the "Bayonne Box," named after the nearby city of Bayonne, where entire post-World War II neighborhoods were built in the three-story, vinyl-clad fashion. The style is appealing to developers because of its pre-fab construction and adaptability to the narrow lots, in this case conforming to the zoning in Newark's historic Ironbound district.

But some Newark officials, including Mayor Corey Booker, took umbrage at the Bayonne Boxes as a threat to the area's historic character. "We didn't uniformly attack the Bayonne Box," says Carlos Rodrigues, vice president and New Jersey director for the Regional Plan Association, the organization that worked with the city in crafting new zoning more in line with the neighborhood's

historic character. Bayonne Boxes were replacing handsome industrial buildings, according to Rodrigues, who advocates the practice of adaptive reuse, where old buildings are retrofitted to accommodate modern needs. The low-density nature of the Bayonne Box was another problem, particularly for an urban area near a major transit hub, Rodrigues says.

And what about Bayonne? It's a middle-income town known for its well-kept late 19th- and early 20th-century housing stock, and for newer dwellings built since the 1960s, where officials are quick to set the record straight. "The term is unrepresentative of Bayonne, and we're very proud of the fact that our town has a lot of variety to it," says Joseph Ryan, the city's public information director. Bayonne, it should be noted, is going through its own renaissance, where former industrial sites are being redeveloped for commercial and residential purposes. With so much going on, Ryan said the town takes loose terminology in stride: "We'll be fine."

A House Divided?

Couples seeking divorce are finding that breaking up is, indeed, hard to do—particularly during the recent slump in the housing market. Janell Weinstein, a family-law attorney and legal analyst discusses the legal ramifications of divorce at firstwivesworld.com, and she's saying that increasing numbers of couples

are waiting to physically separate until their house is sold. "You may be forced to live together for some period of time, after the divorce, until the house is sold," she says. "It may be impossible for you to imagine living with your spouse after you're divorced, but it's a realistic expectation that you must consider."

Walkin' Blues

They say leaving home ain't easy, but some homeowners in Florida find they have no other options.

More and more homeowners are finding ways to leave their mortgages, hoping to avoid the serious credit damage done by delinquency. These are not homeowners in arrears on their mortgage payments; they simply see a bleak road lined with rising interest rates ahead and want to take the nearest exit.

While Florida has been central in this trend, it's happening in other states, including California and Nevada.

No financial adviser would ever recommend taking the "walk away" route, but it's an attractive alternative for some who want to hold their housing fate in their own hands, before the payments increase and the banks take over. Companies like the San Diego-based You Walk Away have opened offices across the country, and are benefitting from an uptick in business.

Watch out for penalties, however. Mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, to name a few, are unlikely to make available to banks funding for new mortgages—at least for a few years—for former homeowners who have taken this route.

No, Not That Kind of Green

While one of New York City's newest housing developments will bring in the green in ratables, the project shows that it can be easy being environmentally green as well.

In March, David & Joyce Dinkins Gardens, an exclusively green, \$19.5-million, 85-unit affordable-housing complex opened in Manhattan's Harlem. It's part of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan, first announced in 2003, to build 165,000 units of affordable housing for 500,000 residents over the next decade. The completion of Dinkins Gardens, which includes 24 units for youths aging out of foster care, could signal a trend toward more eco-minded housing solutions.

The block-and-plank building uses innovative energy and water-efficient designs, mechanical systems, and equipment; non-toxic and recycled material; a green roof; rain-water harvesting; permeable paving; and natural day lighting—all strategies to demonstrate that green affordable housing can be cost-effective in dense urban neighborhoods.

Co-developed by Jonathan Rose Companies and the Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI), the building—directly across the Harlem River from Yankee Stadium—is named for the former New York City mayor and his wife. It is being touted as a new model for affordable housing, according to Rose, because it offers social services and job training. HCCI, a nonprofit interfaith consortium of more than 90 congregations, owns and operates the complex.

Awards

New Jersey Future, a state-wide research and policy group advocating smart growth, held its annual Smart Growth Awards event on June 5 in Newark, N.J. The awards recognize smart growth planning and development throughout the state. For a complete listing of awardees, go to www.nhi.org/go/smartgrowthawards

Events

June 23-26

Housing Credit Conference & Marketplace; National Council of State Housing Agencies; Miami.
www.nhi.org/go/miami

July 10

Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care; Project Homeless Connect. Trenton, N.J. To register, write to jrosado@merceralliance.org

July 17-20

Planning in Challenging Climates, 2008; Planners Network Conference. Winnipeg, Manitoba.
www.nhi.org/go/climates

Publications & Resources

Green Rehabilitation of Multi-family Rental Properties: A Resource Guide is a guide for affordable housing developers looking to make their existing properties greener. A joint project of the Bay Area LISC and California-based Build it Green, the guide aims to help developers and their consultants integrate green building and energy efficiency when upgrading multifamily properties and is intended to be used during energy audits, building walkthroughs, or site assessments of rehab projects. It can be downloaded at www.nhi.org/go/greenguide

Steered Wrong: Brokers, Borrowers, and Subprime Loans, by Keith Ernst, Debbie Bocian, and Wei Li of the Center for Responsible Lending, released in April 2008, looks at the rapid growth of subprime lending. The report is based on 1.7 million mortgages originated between 2004 and 2006. It can be found at www.nhi.org/go/responsiblelending

A new Housing Assistance Council study, **Connecting the Dots: A Location Analysis of USDA's Section 515 Rental Housing and Other Federally Subsidized Rental Properties in Rural Areas**, says that counties farthest from urban centers, those with shortages of affordable housing, and those with relatively large minority populations are most likely to have high proportions of U.S. Department of Agriculture Section 515 apartments among their federally assisted rentals. The Section 515 program makes direct loans to developers of affordable multifamily rental housing in rural areas. It can be downloaded at www.nhi.org/go/ruralhomes

NJ and Its Cities: An Agenda for Urban Transformation, the second major report by the Housing Community Development Network of New Jersey on the state's urban centers and their impact, says that city growth can help restore state economic prosperity. The report,

by HCDNNJ executive director Diane Sterner and National Housing Institute senior fellow Alan Mallach, calls for a "fundamental change in the relationship between the state and its cities." Online at www.nhi.org/go/urbantransformation

Out of Reach 2007-2008, the National Low Income Housing Coalition's annual report outlining affordable housing needs, studies the growing gap between wages and the cost of rental housing and argues that the two problems share the same root: a national housing policy that has failed to provide and protect safe, decent, affordable housing for millions of Americans. U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) wrote the study's preface. Online at www.nhi.org/go/outofreach

The Effects of Inclusionary Zoning on Local Housing Markets: Lessons from the San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Suburban Boston Areas, a study released in March by

the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy and the Center for Housing Policy at New York University, examines inclusionary zoning—the mechanism that links affordable-housing production to market-rate housing production. The report argues that IZ is not “one-size-fits-all” and should be tailored to reflect the local climate. Online at www.nhi.org/go/inclusionaryzoning

Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes, a collaborative effort by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, identifies the connections between retail food establishments, obesity and diabetes, and community income. “Designed for Disease” reports that the highest rates of obesity and diabetes are in lower-income communities that have poor food environments. Online at www.nhi.org/go/disease

Industry News

Organizations

JP Morgan Chase Bank NA is giving a team of students from Washington University in St. Louis and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology seed money to embark on a \$2.1-million renovation of the Franz Building, a turn-of-the-century storefront in New Orleans' Orthea Castle Haley corridor. The money is being awarded as the first-ever community development competition in New Orleans. The building will house and support the activities of the Good Work Network, a nonprofit incubator. The restoration of the building fulfills the goal of the Unified New Orleans Plan to establish a mixed-use arts and cultural corridor, one of four Main Street Projects. Second place went to the Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans' Renaissance Neighborhood Development Corp. for a project by the Milano New School for Management and Urban Policy outlining a mixed-income, mixed-use, LEED-certified development in the Lower Garden District. Third place went to Tulane University students for a plan to build senior housing in the Gentilly Woods-Pontchartrain Park area. Fourth place went to the Pontilly Disaster Collaborative.

The Assets for Independence (AFI) program has awarded more than \$4 million in grants to 16 organizations helping low-income families build wealth and achieve financial independence through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Each dollar deposited into an IDA is matched between \$1 and \$8 by AFI. The grantees are the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority; the Iowa Credit Union Foundation; Penquis Community Action Program; the Residential Care Consortium; Citizens for Citizens, Inc.; Beyond Housing; Montana Credit Unions for Community Development; New Mexico Association of Community Action Agencies; Community and Shelter Assistance Corporation; Lake MicroBusiness; United Way of Lancaster County; Northeast South Dakota Community Action Program; Church Koinonia Federal Credit Union; Foundation Communities; Community Action Program, Inc. of Taylor County; and the Central Vermont Community Action Council, Inc.

The University at Buffalo East Side Neighborhood Transformation Partnership (ESNTP), a 2-year-old, university-assisted approach to the regeneration of Buffalo's Fruit Belt and Martin Luther King Jr. Park communities, has received the 2008 Outstanding Program Award from the international Community Development Society. Members of the winning team—all from the Center for Urban Studies in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning in the School of Architecture and Planning—are Henry L. Taylor, center director and

professor; Robert Silverman, associate professor; Kelly Patterson, assistant professor; Jacqueline Hall, ESNTP project administrative officer; Jeff Kujawa, assistant director; and Frida Ferrer, program coordinator.

In May, **NeighborWorks America** unveiled a partnership with the Federal Reserve aimed at assisting local communities across the country in assessing area housing conditions. The agreement will help local governments and nonprofit organizations evaluate strategies and tailor responses to the rise in foreclosures and real-estate owned properties (REO).

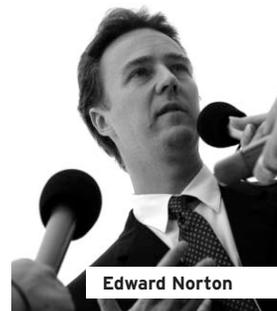
People

Enterprise Community Partners has launched the **Bart Harvey Enterprise Fellowship**, a two-year program providing awardees with an opportunity to explore community development. The fellowship is named after **Bart Harvey**, the Enterprise chairman and executive who retired in March after a 23-year tenure. The selected candidate will work on projects under Doris W. Koo, president and CEO of Enterprise Community Partners, as well as board chairs and other senior management staff.

Actor, director, producer, and Enterprise Community Partners board trustee **Edward Norton** testified in May before the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. Norton called on Congress to make a national commitment to bring home the benefits of green building practices to low-income families, as a part of comprehensive efforts to fight global warming. His testimony was based on the results of the Enterprise Green Communities initiative, the nation's largest effort to create green affordable homes, with more than \$570 million invested to support 250 developments with more than 11,000 green affordable units complete or underway.

James Upchurch, president and CEO of the Interfaith Housing Alliance, has announced his retirement after 15 years of working to provide affordable housing for needy families and senior citizens in and around Frederick County, Md. During Upchurch's tenure, Interfaith Housing has produced more than 1,000 affordable houses in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Matthew O. Franklin has been named president of Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition, a nonprofit affordable-housing developer in Northern California. Franklin served as executive director of the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing since 2004. He previously was director of California's Department of Housing and Community Development. He succeeds Fran Wagstaff, who retires July 1. ♦



Edward Norton

The Green New Deal

Majora Carter saw natural beauty and economic empowerment in her South Bronx neighborhood where others only saw a dumping ground. She's changing the urban landscape in a way that's been an eye-opener to people around the globe. Interview by Matthew Hersh



THE TERM “SUSTAINABILITY” now ranks with “organic” on the buzzword index. In recent years, cities, small towns, local communities, and social organizations with finite economic resources have begun to explore the benefits of energy- and cost-saving policies that support the environment. As these initiatives coalesce, the sustainable-development movement could have profound, long-term effects. And if the world is a greener place in a generation or two, we’ll have people like Majora Carter to thank for it.

Carter’s star continues to rise in her field since she founded Sustainable South Bronx, a non-profit environmental justice solutions corporation. She founded the group in 2001 following a community-based effort to defeat a Giuliani proposal to install a municipal waste-handling facility in her native Hunts Point neighborhood in the South Bronx. As then-project director for Community Restoration at the Point CDC, Carter wrote the \$1.25-million federal transportation planning grant for planning funds to design the South Bronx Greenway, replete with 11 miles of bike and pedestrian paths, low-impact storm-water management, and recreational space—all providing local economic development.

Once work was underway on the waterfront, Carter, having then founded Sustainable South Bronx, identified a market niche for work in what is now known as the green-collar industry, and created the Bronx Environmental Stewardship Training program (BEST), a 10-week course and one of the nation’s first urban green-collar job-training and placement systems.

A winner of a 2005 MacArthur Fellowship—commonly referred to as the “genius” award—and named one of *Newsweek’s* “Who’s Next in 2007,” Carter says that a holistic vision of neighborhood improvement could be taken to global scale if both societies and political leaders had the will to persist.

What is the driving philosophy behind Sustainable South Bronx?

First, what we tried to do was look at our environment as a holistic place. I’ll point to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because this is the 40th anniversary of his death. Dr. King was always preaching in favor of racial justice, but if you look at the evolution of his thinking as he got older, his preaching was also as much about economic justice. You can make a man as free as you want, but if his community is struggling, what does that freedom really mean if he can’t put food on the table for his family or keep his head above water?

The freedom to actually have a livelihood that is not degenerative in any way is an excruciatingly important thing—to actually be able to provide for people everywhere. And so, like Dr. King, we worked really hard on our end to build the kind of capacity in our community to help folks understand how important the environment was, because it was affecting our public health.

And that ties into the work Sustainable South Bronx did with the South Bronx Greenway project.

Yes. Take the work we did for our waterfront, and then to circle back a little bit on that, we got started in this work

because we were fighting against a huge waste facility that former Mayor Giuliani and [former New York Gov. George Pataki] wanted to bring to our waterfront.

We discovered that there was an enormous amount of waste that was already handled in the community, and then, later on, we were slated for more power plants. We already had 60,000 truck trips coming through the neighborhood and a huge sewage treatment plant that processed an enormous amount of the city sewage sludge. It just seemed like it would be adding insult to injury if the planned waste facility was ever built.

So, Sustainable South Bronx allowed residents to understand that there were alternatives for the waterfront?

In fighting against that waste facility, we did have to do some work to help the community understand that there were other things they could be hoping for in their own community. Giving people an opportunity to think

about what our future could be, especially when they never really thought about it before, was incredibly difficult.

You know, it’s easy to get demoralized when we don’t really think that there are any options. It’s hard to have a vision when all you see is destruction around you. So in developing waterfront parks in the community and realizing that we had a waterfront worth revitalizing, it helped support our community desire, and allowed folks to see themselves differently—and also to force people on the outside to see us as not just communities filled with garbage. That was really incredible.

But the beautiful part was really what happened after that. We were able to apply for a little bit of seed grant money and turn that little dump into the first waterfront park my neighborhood’s had in more than 60 years.

How did this project and projects like it help to fuel the green economy? What happened when people were employed to work on the restoration?

We noticed that, as we worked to restore the waterfront,

“The freedom to actually have a livelihood that is not degenerative in any way is an excruciatingly important thing.”

Cover Story

people were being imported into the community to do this work. It was, after all, restoration work, and obviously involved a good deal of skill, but it was a skill that you can train somebody to do.

And we asked ourselves "Why aren't we teaching our young people and adults about how to do this?" That's when it occurred to us that people from within our community could serve as stewards of their environment—making sure that they have both a personal and a financial stake in it.

We were able to get some initial funding to do a Bronx River Restoration job training program that we called River Heroes. The goal was that folks got the training, went through this fast-track program for the project.

Then, what happened was that we realized there's actually even more opportunities out there. We started thinking about expanding our reach so that we could work to make our students more marketable and to see what other opportunities there are. After doing some market research ourselves, we realized that there were

landscaping companies doing things like brownfield remediation. There were folks who needed tree pruners—you name it—any kind of thing that had to do with horticultural infrastructure, there was a need for it.

We realized that we had to tailor our program to make sure that we were training people to do that, and the program has grown since. For instance, we're working now to move into solar installations and also building retrofits and performing energy audits, because we see an upcoming market, [for which] we want to prepare our students to perform well!

"Sustainability" is a very sexy term right now, but it probably still doesn't carry a lot of weight with some people. What are some of the obstacles you've hit in getting people to understand what Sustainable South Bronx is trying to achieve?

I'm front-row center for so much of this, it's like living and working in an environmental-justice community. We're living in a city that professes to be one of the greenest cities in the world, and it's just not true when it gets right down to it. When you look at "the shining jewel" of New York City, which is Manhattan, you might see a nice, clean, shining jewel. Yes, it is clean. Yes, it is booming. Yes, it is lovely, you know? But, you have to ask the question: "Does Manhattan handle any of its own waste?" The answer would be "No." If you ask the question: "Does it deal with any of its own power-generation needs?" The

answer would be "No." If you ask if it's a place where you can find different people with mixed incomes living in one geographic area? The answer would be "No."

How is that sustainable, especially for the other communities, when the outer boroughs of New York City are bearing the burdens of Manhattan's glory? I find that kind of scary, when it gets right down to it.

It's not just talking about New York City. I'm saying this for all over the country, because what we have in so many of our cities are many, many poor communities of all colors, that are struggling, and they're being left out of much of these economic booms again. We're trying to make the link between living and working, from health impacts of global warming and poverty, and even prisons.

You know, when I say something like that, most folks will say, "Well, you need prisons." And while that's true, when you've got poverty, you've got diminished opportunities for employment. It's easier for people to end up in jail because there are the attractions of the illegal economy. Combine that with lack of greenery, you have higher stress rates. You've got higher crime. You've got higher cost to government, businesses, and communities.

What we're trying to do, in terms of green jobs, is link the two ideas of poverty alleviation and environment remediation so that they're dependent on each other. And it helps to support the environment. The economic fabric of communities needs to be strong if we're going to have strong communities. Our country is simply a bunch of communities all pushed together and we need them all to be strong.

This goes back to your point about holistic planning. Looking at New York City, how has Sustainable South Bronx gone about working with city and state government to achieve those holistic goals?

It's difficult, because right now their idea of "holistic" is putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. For example, they'll plant a whole bunch of trees, but many of those trees will die because we haven't built in stewardship opportunities to support them. And as for quality of neighborhoods, even though we are living in an era of falling crime rates, the city is trying to build a huge 1,500-bed jail in the neighborhood! Up until very recently, they wanted to build it on a site that was a really wonderful place, a unique place in New York City. The area is 28 acres that had both barge and rail access, and it's where we are actively pushing for an eco-industrial center, which is a collection of businesses that use recycled materials as raw materials.

So, here we are providing both economic development and solid-waste mitigation through what could be a beautiful facility and provide hundreds and hundreds of jobs. Fortunately, the city backed off that particular

"It occurred to us that people within our community could serve as stewards of their environment."



site, but they're still hell-bent on building this jail.

We've got a really high unemployment rate here. We should be looking at people not as problems. We need to get people to think about quality of life and putting food on the table not in terms of selling a couple of bags of weed, but through opportunity and what's out there for them. That is something that our city has to take responsibility for. It hasn't.

So Sustainable South Bronx's goals can be attained, but the city needs to get on board. That's basically what you're saying?

We need large-scale training opportunities. And by that, I mean, large-scale (laughs). I mean, believe me, we do great work in my agency, but it's small, you know?

We are limited by the private dollars that we raise. However, if the city wants to make some real investments that could pay dividends back to the communities that had been formerly written off, it could invest in training people to do the kind of environmental services that are going to help them mitigate and manage their storm water. For instance, it would cost the city billions to install green roofs [on government buildings]. The city is going to need trained individuals to do energy audits. The communities and the city would be one step ahead of the game, and people would not have to be running around

trying to make money in the underground economy.

And then, on top of all of that, you add the cost savings in terms of public health, because, again, if cities are cooler, well, you know the rest. Hotter places are point sources for greenhouse gases—like New York City. The hotter the areas are, the more asthma you have. So, why aren't we working to cool our cities and making sure that all of those trees live!

I'm more concerned about the fact that there are huge public-health costs, because poor people do not pay for their own care. Somebody else does, whether it's the city or the state, and we need to recognize the value of investing in people and the environment and at the same time try to recoup the benefits of making people a part of their own city development.

It would seem that, outlined logically as you have been trying to do all around the country, it should make perfect sense to a lot of folks. But are you finding it hard for government to respond enthusiastically in working with poorer neighborhoods?

The biggest obstacle is that investments in people like this are not considered important. We've got the commissioner of the Department of Corrections running around talking about how wonderful this jail is going to be. Also, who's being held accountable for how crappy

Majora Carter, left, says that getting residents involved in community revitalization will have long-term effects on schools, health, and quality of life.

“If you green up cities, then you have healthier places—physically, spiritually, and economically.”

our schools are? Or figuring out ways that we can actually be supportive of people?

I think, when it comes right down to it, there are some people in our society who place different values on different people. In our communities, we're not considered particularly valuable. It's because—I believe—we are poor and because we are of color.

Because of that, certain things are thought about us, and there's really not much we can do to deal with that other than the approach that we're trying to do. It's just the culture that we live in now. But it's costing us. The social mores that we hold dear are costing us more than they are creating for us.

But I'm hoping that people start to realize that it is costing society as a whole, because these are the kind of things that you just don't see in wealthier, whiter parts of the city. These are things that are obviously not in our best interest as a society.

So "Greening the Ghetto," to use the Sustainable South Bronx term, is far more than fixing up waterfronts and creating jobs. It's a way of life.

Just look at all of the research and the information that's out there. If you green up cities, then you have healthier places—physically, spiritually, and economically. We need to look at everything that we're doing in that context, particularly our cities, but everywhere, quite frankly.

But the roots of this country I think run really deep, and I do think the value that's placed on poor people and poor people of color is really not that high.

You're saying that you have to look at the big picture, but when you put it like that, there must be some people in the communities you're working with who are simply overwhelmed by this prospect.

You're right (laughs). Four hundred years of this and then Majora Carter from the Bronx is going to try to deal with it. It drives me a little crazy sometimes, I'll admit.

How do you get people to think positively about this?

The same way that we're trying to get our city and our state and anybody, you know, who's looking at us to look at us differently. We try to help them see how developing their neighborhoods and being a part of the green economy will benefit them.

Human beings might not be that smart about supporting their own or preserving their species, but we're pretty cool at understanding how this going to benefit us. And

by "us," I mean "me, myself and I." And don't forget that we did a really wonderful thing with the waste facility, when, at first it was just Guiliani telling people that he wants to build another waste facility. Back then, I remember hearing the resignation in people's voices, people saying "Well, it's the South Bronx. Clearly you've been away for a while, little girl. This is what happens here."

And maybe I was away for a little while, and didn't get it. But when we help people understand the links between their kids' health and the waste facilities that were already here, they were like, "Oh, we're not gonna let another one get built here," and then the city got that.

Are you finding that contractors or specialists in the green economies are picking up the workers that you are training?

It's a daily game, literally. We have to work to talk to potential employers about their needs and what they consider valuable in an employee. We have to work that way and see what they're doing so we can make sure that we have the best possible person out there for folks.

Describe the job-training program.

It's a 10-week program that we run three times a year. We can handle up to 20 people per semester, and the students learn skills in a variety of fields from urban forestry management to green roof installation, from wetland and stream-bank restoration to brownfield remediation. Graduating students get two certifications in cleaning up contaminated land safely. They also get a whole bunch of other certifications, everything from first aid and CPR.

It's a pretty intensive program, but what's really important is the fact that we try really hard to work on the development of life skills, because so many of the folks that come through our program had actually never worked; many of them were formerly incarcerated. These are not folks with the best job skills out there, and so we have to teach things like getting up on time and so forth.

It's important for workers to understand that they're not lone wolves when they go out on a job. We need to be helping people deal with some of the really antisocial behavior that has often become perfectly acceptable in our communities. It's a really difficult thing, but many people really struggle to make sure that folks realize that they don't have to be like that. So, the soft skills, or life skills, as we like to call them, are really important for us to learn and teach our young people.

Are employers hesitant to get on board?

No. Everything that we do is seriously all about building relationships. So we have to talk to the employers, because much of the work doesn't really require a college education, but base-level training. We're finding that

most employers are thrilled to have an employee who will show up on time, understands how to be part of a team, and has a basic knowledge in horticultural infrastructure and stuff like that. And that's what we know we can give folks, which is really great.

We're not asking anybody to make amends for our people. We are training our folks to compete and be marketable. We're not asking for any handouts. We're not asking for them to accept second best. We can't do that. We fully expect our people to be able to explore and do really well. We're expecting them to have aspirations in their thinking and for their own career. Most folks who come to us are adults. This program is not for anybody under 18. As a matter of fact, we find that the best people in our program are in their mid-30s.

Let's end on a political note. What kind of dialogue would you like to see during the upcoming presidential elections?

I don't think any of the candidates truly understand what the green economy can mean for our communities. People are still looking at it from more of a mainstream kind of environmental perspective, which doesn't really include the capacity to develop poor communities and to bring them into this economy. It is much, much more

about the elite. And I think even all of the candidates, to some extent, are more influenced by that.

However, I think that the capacity for change is more heightened. I think in Obama there is a willingness to really explore new things. I think he'll be a much quicker study and won't be afraid to make the kind of changes that we need on a federal level to support a green economy, because it's not just going to be groups like Sustainable South Bronx that are doing wonderful green-collar job-training programs.

We need to make sure that there are federal investments. I'm calling it the Green New Deal that actually supports the kind of major investment incentives that support the birth, the maintenance, and the growth of the green economy with results that are from the top down and the bottom up. We are looking to close the gap between rich and poor, and making life green for all—the name of the group that I co-founded along with Van Jones.

This requires the vigorous advocacy and public relations campaigns that both you and Mr. Jones have embarked on.

Yes. It's a punishing schedule (laughs). But it's not a pie-in-the-sky kind of thing. This is a really beautiful way to make these things happen. ♦



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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.

“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 occupa-



tions, 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 cor-

ridor 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

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

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

RESOURCES

Local Economic & Employment
Development Council
www.nhi.org/go/leedcouncil

Chicagoland Green Collar
Jobs Initiative
www.nhi.org/go/greencouncilchicago

Green Exchange
www.nhi.org/go/greenexchange

Logan Square Neighborhood
Association
www.nhi.org/go/logansquare

Wilbur Wright Community College
www.nhi.org/go/wilburwright

Green for All
www.nhi.org/go/greenforall

Ella Baker Center
www.nhi.org/go/ellabakercenter

Apollo Alliance
www.nhi.org/go/apolloalliance

The Workforce Alliance
www.nhi.org/go/workforcealliance

U.S. Green Building Council
www.nhi.org/go/usgreenbuilding

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. ♦

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and CEO of the
Local Economic
& Employment
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Chicago, Ill.*



Corner stores, like this one on the south side of Chicago, face challenges in stocking fresh, quality, affordable produce.

Making Food Deserts Bloom

Finding fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods can be a struggle, but community efforts are striving to fill the void. By Kari Lydersen

IN LOW-INCOME URBAN, particularly African-American, neighborhoods across the country, you can often go dozens of city blocks without encountering a fresh vegetable or a piece of fruit.

That's largely because major chain grocery stores have deemed it uneconomical to do business in these neighborhoods. Corner stores, ubiquitous in low-income neighborhoods, stock mostly processed packaged snacks, and smaller independent groceries often have sub-par offerings, many past their peak.

For people living in America's food deserts, there is generally a high incidence of diet-linked health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

A distance of several miles to a grocery store, which might not seem like a big deal in a more affluent area, becomes a problem for people who don't have cars or access to quality public transportation, and who may be at risk while making long treks on foot through crime-plagued streets.

"There is a tremendous lack of fresh produce in these neighborhoods," said Jacquie Berger, executive director of the New York nonprofit group Just Food. "There aren't many full-service groceries, and even if there are the produce tends not to be great. Everyone goes to the bodegas, with notoriously bad, overpriced produce. You get four peppers wrapped in plastic, and one is rotten."

Mapping Food Deserts

A study released in April tracking food access in Chicago and its suburbs found that low-income communities lack access to full-service grocery stores, and the situation is getting worse. In the mostly African-American neighborhood of Riverdale on the far south side, a resident would have to travel on average 3.2 miles to reach a major grocery store.

Daniel Block, an associate geography professor at Chicago State University who co-authored the study, says that chains such as Cub Foods, Jewel, and Dominick's

have closed many urban locations in the past two years.

“These companies are financially scrunched. They need to be specific about where they’re opening, and they don’t want to change their model much,” he says.

Block adds that many small independent grocery stores are converting to dollar stores that carry little or no fresh food. An increasing number of small discount grocery stores such as Aldi and Food 4 Less have opened in urban Chicago neighborhoods, offering some fresh produce, but far from an ideal or high-quality selection.

However, Block’s study found that some immigrant communities, particularly Latino enclaves, still had ample access to fresh produce thanks to local ethnic markets and street vendors. The relatively low-income, largely immigrant neighborhoods of Pilsen and Uptown in Chicago boasted fresh produce within only a quarter-mile on average. But a full-service grocery store was still more than a mile away for Pilsen residents.

(This is not true in every city; immigrant neighborhoods in other major urban areas do suffer serious lack of access to fresh food.)

Block noted that even with local produce outlets, residents interviewed in Chicago immigrant communities feel they still suffer from the lack of adequate grocery stores. Partly because of community pride, they want their neighborhood recognized as worthy of mainstream investment. Local stores are also unlikely to stock organic produce, tend to charge higher prices, and generally carry produce that is slightly less fresh than at chain grocery stores with more efficient economies of scale and delivery systems.

A 2004 report in the “Food for Every Child” series by the Food Trust in Philadelphia (www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/super.market.campaign.php#2) notes the city has the second lowest per-capita number of supermarkets nationwide. Based on a 1995 study of 21 metro areas by the Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, the report says Philadelphia has 70 too few supermarkets to serve the city’s low-income communities. The Food Trust uses statistical mapping methodology to track supermarket prevalence in relation to income, auto ownership, and other factors. Using 1998 city data on mortality, the study found there were 7,586 diet-related deaths per square mile in the city, including stomach, cardiovascular, and other diseases. The rate of such deaths was notably higher in low-income, supermarket-deprived areas.

In a 2004 survey of more than 10,000 Philadelphia households, the Food Trust found that more than 30 percent of African Americans reported fair- or poor-quality grocery access, compared to 24 percent of Latinos, 15 percent of Asians, and 11 percent of whites. Adults in fair or poor health were twice as likely to report fair or poor access to groceries compared to adults in good health.

At that time, about 71,000 Philadelphians reported having a hard time finding fresh produce in their neighborhood, according to the Food Trust. It is not surprising that lower-income residents in the grocery-deprived areas were also significantly more likely to eat takeout or fast food more than three times a week.

CSAs, Urban Gardens, Growing Power, Fighting Worms

Fortunately, a wide and growing number of government- and nonprofit-funded and purely grass-roots projects across the country have coalesced into a movement known as sustainable “food justice” and “food security,” promoting access to fresh, often organic produce in low-income areas and, in many cases, also creating job opportunities and a holistic connection with food production for residents of these communities.

This is part of a growing trend of “sustainable agriculture;” sustainable in at least two senses.

First, when produce is grown on small organic farms or in community gardens, it is ecologically sustainable as opposed to large-scale corporate monoculture that relies heavily on pesticides and herbicides and leaves soil depleted. And when food is grown locally, it avoids the emission of greenhouse gases and other ills associated with long-distance transportation.

Second, these projects are economically sustainable for low-income communities, because they are operated on a small scale with a sense of purpose and hence not obligated to turn a significant profit to justify their existence—though it would be preferable for the often-volunteer participants to earn more income from them. Major grocery chains bound to a bottom-line analysis, by contrast, are usually extremely reluctant to open branches in disinvested neighborhoods, and they are liable to pull out quickly if business is not going well.

Small-scale community projects are usually designed to operate on shoestring budgets and are mission-rather than market-driven, funded by grants, government subsidies, and donations.

Community-supported agriculture projects (CSAs) often stem from such community action. A typical CSA involves a small farm in or near an urban area that has subscribers pay a seasonal fee for weekly deliveries of mixed produce (often along with organic eggs, coffee, and other goods). Many CSAs charge higher prices to people who can afford it—usually asking subscribers to voluntarily identify themselves as capable of paying a higher price to help subsidize free or low-cost deliveries for low-

“Any time you get them outside it’s great. My motto is, ‘Leave no child inside.’ “



ROBERT THORNTON

Carolyn Thomas, a retired postal carrier in Chicago, leads inner-city youth in tending geese and chickens and raising organic vegetables through the group God's Gang.

income people. Some CSAs include programs that bring urban youth and adults to the farms to work and learn.

Meanwhile, community gardens and indoor urban agriculture projects foster the production of fresh produce right in an urban neighborhood and sometimes generate income for community residents. The NGO Heifer Project International funds various urban agriculture projects in low-income U.S. communities, similar to their food-security efforts in developing countries. A staple of such projects are worm compost bins, where natural food waste and table scraps are composted with the help of worms to create a rich, loamy soil that can be sold or used for gardening. Participants in those projects also often raise tilapia—a hardy fish with market value—in indoor bins, and even cycle the water from the tilapia projects through organic vegetable beds for natural filtration, creating a sustainable self-contained system.

In Chicago, retired postal carrier Carolyn Thomas involves young people from public housing and other marginalized neighborhoods in farming through God's Gang—a positive alternative to the street gangs which might otherwise claim their attention. God's Gang farms five acres in southwest Michigan and also helps raise and sell free-range poultry from a central Illinois farm. The young people sell the produce at farmers markets in low-income, vegetable-poor areas of Chicago, as well as to some local stores, and bring healthy food home to their families. Already this year the group has planted 250 pounds of garlic, which should yield a 1,000-pound harvest.

"Any time you get them outside it's great," said Thomas. "My motto is, 'Leave no child inside'"—a play on President Bush's education slogan. Meanwhile, the yard of Thomas's South Side home is a labyrinth of organic vegetables, herbs, ducks, and chickens, all cared for by local kids.

God's Gang tended worm-compost bins and tilapia in the violence-plagued Robert Taylor Homes high-rises until the buildings were closed and torn down as part of the city's plan for transformation of public housing. Residents—and the worms—remained in the development after being or-

dered out by the housing authority. A banner was hung outside the condemned building pleading for the life of Robert Taylor's "Fighting Worms." The worms and tilapia finally froze to death just before Christmas in 1999 after the housing authority shut off the power.

Thomas continues the compost and tilapia projects in other locations.

"They do everything from making their own soil to composting it to raising vegetables to eating them to sharing them with their neighbors," she said.

The Chicory Center, based on the same southwest Michigan farm as God's Gang, operates a CSA on a shoe-string budget, delivering organic produce to paying subscribers and free deliveries to immigrant families in Chicago. Chicory Center founder David Meyers also uses the organization as a vehicle for social justice, donating proceeds from his fair-trade coffee sales to various local activist groups and including leaflets about political prisoners and community struggles along with recipes in his CSA deliveries.

And in Milwaukee, Will Allen, who once played for the now-defunct American Basketball Association, runs the organization Growing Power, a farm within the city limits that sells food to upscale Chicago restaurants. Growing Power has trained more than 1,000 low-income kids in farming and now employs more than 50 young people in Chicago and Milwaukee doing outreach, education, farming and other jobs.

Healthier Corner Stores

Meanwhile, in cities from New Orleans to Boston to Oakland, nonprofit and government-funded programs are striving to improve the availability and quality of produce in small neighborhood groceries, colloquially (and often literally) referred to as "corner stores."

The national Healthy Corner Stores Network counts 200 member organizations in different cities, which use grant funding to urge corner stores to stock and advertise healthier fare.

In New Orleans last fall, Dora's Supermarket in the Bywater neighborhood hard-hit by Hurricane Katrina became the poster child for a joint project of the city government and Louisiana Public Health Institute to place fresh fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy and whole-grain products in corner stores. Since New Orleans lost 21 of its 36 major grocery stores in Katrina, corner stores have been a staple food source for residents of all income levels.

In Washington D.C., a similar program involves the Korean American Grocers Association, the city health department, and various community groups.

"It wasn't as hard as you might think to convince owners to participate," says Hannah Laurison, a senior associate at Public Health Law and Policy, one of the conveners

of the Healthy Corner Stores Network. “One of the challenges for advocates is to create sustainable projects to get the stores to do it themselves,” adding that shop owners are often under the mistaken impression that local residents aren’t interested in fresh produce.

“We’ve done focus groups with low-income residents who said their corner stores didn’t sell quality products, they’re too expensive, unsafe and unclean, so they’re getting on buses to get fruit and vegetables. But the store owners said residents didn’t want fruit and vegetables, only alcohol and cigarettes—so there is a gap there.”

A 2003 report by California Food Policy Advocates (www.cfpa.net/Grocery.PDF) describes large unmet market demand for fresh produce in low-income urban areas nationwide, and prescribed market-based solutions including investment by major chain grocery stores and the conversion of corner stores currently specializing in liquor into small groceries.

Food Justice

In New York City, the group Just Food offers a range of programs to support fresh-food access and community economic development. They play matchmaker to connect regional farmers with community organizations to run CSAs—with a total of about 60 CSAs running in all five boroughs. Their City Farms program has helped start more than 600 community gardens including a “training trainers” program where low-income residents receive a stipend to train other locals in gardening.

Additionally, a market program helps community gardeners set up and run their own farmers markets, including helping them obtain insurance, meet city codes, and set up systems to accept food stamps. The City Chicken Project, supported by Heifer Project International, helps low-income people and groups set up humane chicken-raising operations, with initial gifts of coops and chickens that the groups later pass on to new chapters. Just Food’s Community Food Education Program trains people in cooking healthy meals, with a focus on cultural and family culinary traditions. A Food Pantry program connects regional farmers with food pantries. And finally, the group’s Food Justice Program works on policy including the federal farm bill and other legislation to facilitate sustainable local agriculture.

“Our theme is that fresh, locally grown produce should be available to everyone,” said Berger. She adds that there is clear demand in low-income neighborhoods for fresh produce, as demonstrated by the success of farmers markets the group has helped start in the South Bronx, Harlem, and central Brooklyn.

“Once we bring in these farmers markets, they just grow and grow,” she said.

A West Indian immigrant in her late 70s went through

Food Justice’s training and now gives presentations on making healthy baby food at farmers markets around the city. Food Justice initially paid her \$100 for two-hour workshops, and now she commands similar rates for presentations she sets up herself.

In San Francisco, a city-funded pilot project, San Francisco victory gardens, was launched in 2007 and is helping residents of all income levels grow vegetables in their own yards. The project is based on the Victory Gardens movement during World Wars I and II, when city dwellers supported the war effort by growing their own food, freeing up farms to feed the troops. The San Francisco project gives participants, including low-income residents in the Bayview Hunter’s Point neighborhood, a starter kit and lessons in gardening and seed-saving. In a city short on open space, the effort focuses on using rooftops, window boxes, and yard space for growing vegetables appropriate to the local micro-climate.

The project is largely designed by Amy Franceschini, an accomplished artist who views urban agriculture as a form of exploring “the politics of space” and the effects of globalization.

“It’s reminiscent of the early conversations about recycling,” garden education program manager Blair Randall says of the project. “You think what difference does one garden make? But if someone can grow a small amount of greens, that’s food not being transported all those miles. It’s freedom from food made with values we don’t support.”

Randall notes that compared to the World War eras, when city residents weren’t far removed from their families’ farming roots, many urbanites today are completely disconnected from the land.

“When people know more about the growing of food, the back story of plants, they get more interested in food itself,” he said.

Block and other advocates note that the web of health and economic problems afflicting disinvested, segregated low-income communities is too wide and complex to be solved by local community-agriculture projects alone.

“You need a lot more than that,” said Block of farmers markets, CSAs, and the like. “But these things build community connections, and bring in produce that wouldn’t be there otherwise. If you think of building healthier communities on a broader level, they really are important.” ♦

RESOURCES

Growing Power (Milwaukee)
www.nhi.org/go/growingpower

Heifer Project International
www.nhi.org/go/heifer

Just Food (New York)
www.nhi.org/go/justfood

The Food Trust (Philadelphia)
www.nhi.org/go/foodtrust

Victory Gardens (San Francisco)
www.nhi.org/go/futurefarmers

Healthy Corner Stores Network
www.nhi.org/go/healthycornerstores

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