



SPECIAL REPORT

Building Green Sustainable Communities

Winter 2008

At the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), our perspective on green is decidedly local and grounded in real-world impact. Our green efforts are part of a broad-based strategy to revitalize distressed neighborhoods and improve the quality of life for those who live there. The strategy is called *Building Sustainable Communities*, and it includes five fundamental goals: 1) expanding investment in real estate; 2) increasing family income and wealth; 3) stimulating economic development; 4) improving access to quality education; and 5) supporting healthy environments and lifestyles.

To date, LISC and its National Equity Fund (NEF) affiliate have invested \$440 million in grants, loans and equity to a wide range of green projects that help achieve all five goals, including training for green jobs; construction of new affordable housing and retrofit of existing homes; urban farms and farmers markets; green schools and environmental education programs; and parks and city street clean-up efforts.

LISC's Green Development Center

LISC established its Green Development Center (GDC) because integrating green strategies into our work is important to our mission. The GDC is LISC's clearing-house for green information, providing consulting and policy advocacy to help ensure that low-income commu-

nities are part of federal, state and local green conversations. Green isn't an add-on, it is intertwined into all five of our *Building Sustainable Communities* goals. The GDC provides necessary support to projects and programs to make this happen.

Green Jobs and Businesses

When Van Jones, founder of the advocacy group Green For All, addressed a national gathering of LISC staff members in late 2008, he emphasized that there are green pathways out of poverty to prosperity. He concluded his remarks by saying, "Don't underestimate the power of this idea."

LISC is acting on that powerful idea. We helped finance **Women in Construction Co. LLC** in Duluth, Minnesota, which teaches women the skills needed to work in construction and puts them to work on jobs that pay living wages. Women in Construction is committed to using green building practices and products on all its projects.

In Chicago's Englewood community, LISC supports an urban farming program known as **Growing Home**, which grows produce and offers employment opportunities to people who typically have great difficulty finding work, like those with criminal records.



Women in Construction; Duluth, Minn.

In some cases, help comes from innovative mixed-use projects like the **Center for Changing Lives** in Minneapolis. There, LISC and NEF supported the development of a green facility that includes retail space and supportive housing for low-income families who need social services.

Our leadership in the use of federal New Markets Tax Credits has allowed us to innovate with green businesses. **Oddfellows Hall**, in Detroit, is the historic renovation of a deteriorating three-story brick/masonry building that sat vacant for many years. It includes geothermal heating, recycled flooring installed without glues or resins, and an energy recovery system. This former blighted building is now home to offices and businesses that have generated 50 new jobs.



Englewood urban farming program; Chicago, Ill.

Green Housing

The lion's share of the \$440 million we have invested in green efforts across the country is tied to housing, with projects that span from Washington to Florida. As with all our work, it employs a national strategy with very specific, local tactics. Our housing projects include both new and existing homes. We are actively engaged in ensuring affordable housing is as energy efficient as possible. Energy efficient retrofitting is a part of our strategy as we rehab properties in foreclosure.

Green housing can include solar panels and wind turbines that win awards for innovation and design. Rain-water recovery systems, thoughtful green design, and environmentally sensitive landscaping that makes use of



Solara; San Diego

natural vegetation are hallmarks of some of our housing. But green building doesn't have to be high cost and high tech to be effective. It can include weather stripping, insulation, and even the right boilers. The basics of quality construction make a tremendous difference. Attention to design and installation detail has real-world impact with relatively little added cost.

Near San Diego, LISC and its tax credit equity partner, NEF, provided financing for **Solara**, an affordable housing development with the lowest carbon footprint of any development in California. It uses solar panels to power the entire development, even putting power back to the power grid. That saves its low-income residents money and benefits the broader community.

LISC and NEF also helped fund the LEED-certified **Verne Barry Place** in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a complex of affordable apartments with supportive services to



Verne Barry Place; Grand Rapids, Mich.

Green Education

For a number of years, LISC has financed construction of charter schools and child care centers, funded in-classroom and after-school programs, and underwritten a variety of service-learning programs. We think green can and should be a part of these projects and programs, creating healthier environments in which to learn, more cost-effective operations for schools, and an overall lower carbon footprint for a neighborhood.

In Los Angeles, LISC has joined forces with Global Green USA – the U.S. branch of Green Cross International, the international environmental organization founded by Mikhail Gorbachev – on a pilot program to green charter schools in low-income communities.

One of the newly green campuses is **Ánimo Justice and Ánimo Ralph Bunche Charter High Schools**, which share a newly rehabbed facility in South Los Angeles. LISC provided financing for this Green Dot Schools-managed facility, which is one of the first schools in the country to receive LEED certification. It includes the



Ánimo Justice and Ánimo Ralph Bunche Charter High Schools; Los Angeles

re-use of a former garment manufacturing building, use of recycled building materials, and the installation of water-efficient landscaping and bathroom fixtures.

Greening education is about more than facilities. In Milwaukee, LISC is funding the **Urban Ecology Center** to help kids develop hands-on experience with science and the environment. In Indianapolis, children are learning about the ecology of parks through service projects in **Skiles Test Nature Park** – also funded by the local LISC program.

homeless veterans and other homeless residents. An historic preservation and new construction project, it is helping revitalize a downtown arts district. Most importantly, it gives people who were living on the streets the chance to stabilize their lives.

In Marlborough, Massachusetts, **Christopher House** at Marlborough replaced an environmentally hazardous eyesore (a former tannery) with an energy efficient affordable assisted living facility for seniors and open green space.



Christopher House; Marlborough, Mass.



Skiles Test Nature Park; Indianapolis, Ind.

Green Neighborhoods

Clean streets and access to healthy food alternatives are important elements of green neighborhoods. Residents of Philadelphia's **University City District** have embarked upon local clean-up efforts. In the neighborhood surrounding the University of Pennsylvania, LISC provides funding for a consortium that keeps sidewalks clean with biodiesel fueled street sweepers, clears weeds and plants, and waters trees. Teams deal with abandoned vehicles, illegal dumping and graffiti, and organize community clean-ups and summer jobs programs for teens who sign on to help with physical revitalization.

In San Diego, LISC supports the **International Rescue Committee's Healthy Foods Program**, which created the New Roots Farm, a two-acre community farm that allows Asian, African and Latino residents to grow culturally-appropriate produce on rented plots. This effort is not unusual; LISC has worked with its community partners to develop community gardens in communities across the country from Buffalo to the Mississippi Delta to Los Angeles.

In Richmond, California, LISC is working with the **Richmond Children's Foundation** on the pilot of a green neighborhood. This program includes improved access to healthy food as well as green affordable housing and community space – just one example of the way Bay Area LISC has seamlessly incorporated green practices into all of its work.

Conclusion

LISC's view of green reflects our belief that sustainability is about more than environmental impact, even though that is a critical goal. Our work is about creating good places to live, work, do business and raise families over the long-term: sustainable communities in the fullest sense of the word. We firmly believe that low-income communities have a great deal to gain from the increasing focus on green. But going green is about more than boosting property values and reducing energy costs. It's about putting people to work, supporting farmers markets and community gardens, cleaning up parks and city streets, and teaching children how to steward their environment. Communities can benefit from greener living in ways that go well beyond energy efficiency. LISC's work is green. But more importantly, it is transformative for the communities where it takes place. That is what *Building Sustainable Communities* is really all about.



University City District; Philadelphia, Pa.



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