

BUILDING OAKLAND'S GREEN ECONOMY ONE GREEN BUILDING AT A TIME:
GREEN BUILDING POLICIES IN OAKLAND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oakland, California is embracing a green economic future. As non-renewable resources diminish and the global climate crisis becomes dire, the nature of the economy is shifting in response to the billions of dollars being invested in the “green economy.” In the first three quarters of 2007, venture capital firms poured \$2.6 billion into clean technology startups.¹ Green building construction startups are projected to amount to \$12 billion in 2008. Both Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama have made a greener economy a key platform in their Presidential campaigns. Reports estimate that the green economy could produce as many as 40 million jobs and \$4.53 trillion in annual revenue by 2030. This might be overly optimistic if new policies are not adopted, such as those that redirect funds to support green business, and green building and retrofits at the federal, state and local level.

In the United States, land use policies are typically adopted, implemented, and enforced at the local level, where they are subject to local political influences. Oakland government has asserted the need for adopting sustainable buildings policies in Oakland. And given their goal to build a green economy in Oakland, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights should continue to advocate for the adoption of city level policies that require sustainable building policies in Oakland.

This report seeks to answer the question of how Oakland might undertake the adoption of sustainable building practices. However, Oakland faces complex obstacles to adopting sustainable building policies. In many cases, obstacles are a result of the key role that developers play in the planning process at the city level. In the planning process of new development projects, developers confront barriers to employing sustainable building practices, such as added upfront costs, a problem of externalities, misaligned incentives, and a lack of consistent and easily accessible information and technical support. In the case of existing building stock (including residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial), building owners also face externality problems that are disincentives to retrofitting buildings to be more sustainable. The City also faces influential political challenges to adopting sustainable building policies that must be negotiated.

This report concludes with recommendations for proceeding, given the barriers Oakland faces. Encouraging and pressuring the City to transgress and work around barriers is key to eliciting policy changes in the area of sustainable building. Three levels of recommendations that progress in their political rigidity are suggested for continued advocacy efforts pursued by the Ella Baker Center: removing barriers, offering incentives, and requiring building standards through policy changes. Significantly, cities across the country are modeling the passing of sustainable building policies and lessons from these cases are presented throughout this report.

¹ Business Week. “America's Green Policy Vacuum.” February 11, 2008, http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/feb2008/id20080211_334519.htm?campaign_id=rss_innovate. Accessed on April 22, 2008.