



DC Green Collar Jobs Initiative

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Background

Over the next decade, the opportunity for green collar job creation in the District of Columbia is large. Our city and many of the surrounding jurisdictions are launching policies and programs designed to improve environmental quality. These include policies related to green buildings, energy and water conservation, wastewater management, residential solar energy, green roofs, lead paint abatement, open space, and transit. In addition, the number of residents choosing to buy goods and services from firms and organizations that are improving the local economy as well as environmental quality is increasing rapidly.

The economic contribution of the “environmental industry” is already quite significant, and America has barely begun to address the major opportunities associated with our necessary transition to an efficient, low carbon economy. A recent study conducted by Management Information Services, Inc., found that in 2005, the environmental industry nationwide generated more than 5 million jobs; \$341 billion in sales; and \$47 billion in tax revenues.¹ The study’s definition of “environmental industry” is broad, but these figures underscore the scale and the potential reach of an economic development strategy that uses environmental transformation as a driver for economic prosperity.

The green-collar economy is already big money, and it continues to boom. According to estimates by the Clean Tech Venture Network, U.S. “green technology” investment (a subset of “environmental industry”) between 2007 and 2010 will be between \$14 billion and \$19 billion, resulting in 400,000 to 500,000 new jobs created. Reorienting our antiquated energy infrastructure around the platforms of sustainability, efficiency and reduced greenhouse gas emissions represents a great economic engine for innovation and productivity growth in coming decades.

DC and the greater Metro area will benefit from early, robust actions to establish the region as a hub for green technology development and the provision of environmental goods and services. Public policies like the new Green Building law will drive new capital investment into greening our local community, this means a growing demand for both skilled and entry level jobs, and new demand for business services. In addition,

¹ <http://www.misi-net.com/publications/9-state-synthesis-0406.pdf>

building this sector can mean new areas of business expansion and location. Already, the region faces formidable competition from Silicon Valley, the Pacific Northwest, and New England, which have all begun promoting their regions as hospitable to green industry, luring companies and jobs. Part of their success thus far is attributable to strong public policies to raise demand for environmental goods and services, thus building a strong local market.

Smart public policy tying economic development and workforce investment to environmental policies is vital to ensure that the benefits of the new green economy reach our communities, business, and individuals most in need. Traditionally marginalized populations and small business will require specific support from government to ensure their inclusion in the many opportunities ahead.

Defining Green Collar Jobs

Green collar jobs are quite diverse, covering a host of environmentally-related employment opportunities from entry level unskilled labor, to technical positions requiring certification, to professions based on college or graduate degrees. The term can cover everything from green building contractors, to lead paint abatement, brownfields cleanup, river restoration or energy efficiency retrofits of buildings.

Urban Habitat, a non-profit organization in the San Francisco Bay Area has recently looked into some of the characteristics of green collar jobs (albeit excluding white collar and administrative positions). They interviewed employers who provide green collar jobs to workers in more than 100 local firms/institutions which are producing jobs in 22 specific sectors including: Energy retrofits to increase energy efficiency and conservation; green building; hauling and reuse of construction materials and debris (C&D) ; hazardous materials clean-up, including lead paint abatement; landscaping; manufacturing jobs related to large scale production of appropriate technologies (i.e. solar panels, bike cargo systems, green waste bins, etc.); materials reuse; non-toxic household cleaning in residential and commercial buildings; parks and open space expansion and maintenance; printing with non-toxic inks and dyes; public transit jobs related to driving, maintenance, and repair; recycling and reuse; small businesses producing products from recycled materials; solar installation; tree cutting and pruning; urban agriculture; water retrofits to increase water efficiency and conservation; whole home performance, including attic insulation, weatherization, etc.

For the purposes of the DC effort, the largest opportunities and central goals are to develop small businesses and a labor market capable of filling the pipeline of demand created by 1) the new Green Building Law, 2) potential responses to storm water management policies, 3) forthcoming comprehensive energy policies, 4) lead paint abatement, 5) river restoration, and 6) a city-wide commitment to reducing carbon emissions to fight climate change. Together these policies can create a large demand for construction, building trades, environmental remediation, and operations workers and new markets for their employers.

Another particular goal of this effort is to connect existing small and local businesses to the emerging market opportunities, meeting the demand for “green” goods and services through LSDBE and First Source contracting, as well as providing career ladders and skills training for low skill workers currently in need of pathways out of poverty. By their nature, green jobs are local jobs -- and these ideas will have extra impact in Washington because of the "multiplier effect" a city gets when money is spent on a local business instead of a chain or out-of-town company.

Key “Green Collar Jobs” Economic Development Strategies

Minorities and individuals with a high school diploma (or less) are the least advantaged groups in the current DC labor market. In order to ensure equity in the emerging green economy, we must develop strategies and programs to ensure that workers with limited initial education and skills have access to local green collar jobs.

Many of the jobs described do not require high levels of education. The majority of workers holding green collar jobs in the Bay Area’s 22 sectors obtained their skills on the job or through training paid for by their employers. Employers describe basic work skills of being responsible, being on time, having good communication skills, etc. as the most critical skills for the green jobs they offer. Bay Area employers were willing to hire workers with limited initial education and skills.

To ensure that green collar jobs are offered to workers with limited initial education and skills, we can rely in part on our local hiring requirements, but we will also need training for green collar jobs in high schools, workforce training programs, certification programs, matching programs, and employer incentives targeted to local small business.

There are three distinct strategies for “green jobs” economic and workforce development. All are highly complementary and can be pursued in tandem. These are:

1. **Skill development and worker training:** Including apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training for job readiness. This strategy involves making individual workers more able to participate in the job market, and linking job seekers with emerging green collar job opportunities. Weatherization, energy efficiency retrofits, renewable energy installations, and other construction related professions are prime targets. Ready partners are present in existing union and employer based-building and construction trades training programs.
2. **Assisting existing local firms participate in emerging green markets:** As the demand for green construction grows, existing firms that may not currently self-identify as green businesses may be well positioned to compete for the demand for these services. A diverse range of local businesses could participate in this market, from building supply companies, to electrical subcontractors, to building maintenance operators and landscaping firms, and numerous other classes of

employers. With modest training and modification to existing practices, these local businesses could be well positioned to serve the growing demand for green construction practices, energy conservation, and carbon management.

3. **Business Recruitment and Industrial Development:** A final strategy for developing a green collar jobs sector involves recruiting larger regional and national firms to locate in the area, from solar panel manufacturing facilities, to energy service companies who perform energy audits, to modular home construction plants. There are numerous opportunities to use policy-driven market creation along with traditional economic development incentives as a draw for new business recruitment.

Choosing a Strategy for the City and Matching Solutions to Current Gaps

The DC landmark “Green Building Act of 2006” offers an excellent foundation upon which to advance a broader “green” economic growth agenda for the District of Columbia. An informal scan of the current needs in the local construction industry uncovers one clear area of opportunity: the need for low to moderate skill entry-level employment. This need can be met utilizing vocational education and apprenticeship programs to create career ladders into green collar jobs. Additional need for higher skill technical positions in energy audits, engineering and architecture, and LEED accredited building certification also exists, but these positions represent a second tier opportunity in the development of a phased policy.

If the initial focus chosen for new policy is on workforce development, there is a need not only to prepare individual workers to participate in this emerging job market, but also to prepare existing local firms, especially small and disadvantaged businesses, to compete for contracts in this area. These two tracks must be pursued simultaneously to ensure that both supply and demand for a green labor market evolve in tandem. In particular, the pipeline for skilled workers to meet the need for first source hiring and LSDBE contracts must be cultivated to ensure a robust green collar jobs market in the District.

Next Steps, Key Questions, and Bringing New Partners to the Table:

To develop a concrete strategy for laying the groundwork for a Green Collar Jobs Policy, several outreach efforts should be undertaken, and a few key questions answered immediately. These include defining answers to the following questions:

- What training resources exist now that could be modified to include training in green collar jobs skills, certification for particular careers, and job readiness programs?

- What public programs exist currently for economic development and business support that could be brought to bear to help businesses enter the growing green collar jobs market?
- What sub-contractors and existing businesses exist that could benefit from additional training or resources for capacity building, to access the green collar jobs market?
- Who are the existing certified LSDBE businesses that are serving the current market, and what steps are needed to expand their capacity in green sectors, and their capacity overall, to fill the pipeline of demand for LSDBE contracts?
- What are the areas of greatest capacity in small and local businesses to serve this growing market, and where are the gaps in DC's pool of local businesses?
- Who are the key leaders, trainers, and businesses who should be brought to the table early in the policy development to help answer these questions, both from the perspective of skills development for workers, and hiring by employers?
- What are the immediate and short term steps that could be taken to bring together these partners and programs to launch a green collar jobs effort, and what are the mid-term and longer range research and capacity building needs in the districts job market to promote the development of green industries?

To move forward quickly in developing this effort, the following should be top priority

- *Who can we bring to the table now, in job training and on the employer side?*
- *What employers and industries can move most quickly into creating green collar jobs?*
- *What public and non-profit programs can be easily expanded or enhanced to serve the green collar jobs market?*
- *What additional research needs must be answered in the short term to design an effective and strategic program?*

About the Paper

This white paper is the result of a series of conversations on how to make the District a sustainable, 21st century city with a robust, inclusive economy and a healthy environment. The conversations included District agency representatives especially the Office of Planning, local businesses, city colleges and universities, and area non-profits with special leadership by Enterprise Community Partners and Green HOME.