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Sustainable Colorado

Climate Prosperity Project finds ways to make sustainability efforts financially viable

Premium content from Denver Business Journal by Radia Amari

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Radia Amari

As Colorado and the country turn to the new energy economy as a source of job creation and future financial stability, the business community still is wrestling with the capital investments required during a time of recession.

Marc Weiss, chairman of the Climate Prosperity Project (CPP), said his initiative allows counties, cities and states to become "richer by becoming greener."

Becoming greener means becoming wiser and efficient in the use of resources, Weiss said.

"Sustainability is an ancient idea," said Weiss, who is also chairman and CEO of the Global Urban Development organization. "It's how people used to live until now."

The CPP is a program that designs economic-development strategies for governments in which sustainability is the focus. The program's three main components are green savings (cutting costs through a reduction in waste), green opportunities (increasing green job opportunities) and green talent (investing in people and infrastructure).

CPP is running eight pilot projects: in Denver, Portland, Seattle, St. Louis, Silicon Valley in California, an eight-county region in southwest Florida, Montgomery, Md., and Delaware, where Weiss resides.

Weiss predicts that most cities and states will become participants within the next few years, despite certain challenges.

According to Weiss, the obstacle has been to eradicate the fallacy of sustainable practices costing a lot and being bad for the economy. Sustainable economies provide stronger economies, create healthier environments and produce more peaceful societies, he said.

“[And] even if you don’t care about the environment, this is still the right economic plan,” Weiss said.

The Denver Office of Economic Development (OED) and Greenprint Denver are working with Weiss to make the city more sustainable.

According to Greenprint Denver director Michele Weingarden, the goal is “to make the community healthy and provide a good quality of life for residents and businesses.”

Since signing the U.S. Mayor’s Climate Protection Agreement in 2005, Mayor John Hickenlooper established the Greenprint Advisory Council. The Council’s 33 civic and government leaders provided recommendations on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They also drafted a plan for achieving a 10 percent carbon reduction per capita by 2012.

Denver’s other sustainable goals include weatherizing neighborhoods, helping businesses go green, establishing green building standards for city buildings, reducing landfill waste by 30 percent by 2012 and showcasing Denver as a green economic hub, Weingarden said.

“We’re investing in a marketplace that provides the right mechanisms to invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and to embrace the future of the new economy,” she said.

The OED, in collaboration with the **Colorado Coalition for the Homeless** (CCH) and **Enterprise Community Partners Inc.**, is building affordable housing units using green standards such as solar energy. Next month, 100 units along the South Platte River will be available for rent, said BJ Iacino, CCH director of education and advocacy.

Also, the city, with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor, developed Energy Boost, a Front Range Community College student certification program for energy-based jobs. The program began in April 2008.

Energy companies, such as **Vestas**, Woodward and Solix Biofuels, have interviewed program graduates for job openings.

As of January, the program had graduated 107 students, said Lynn Vosler, director of the Institute for Community and Professional Development. Also, 25 of the 65 December graduates have been placed in jobs, she said.

André Pettigrew, OED executive director, said he hopes Denver’s programs can be models for cities wanting to implement CPP initiatives.
