

Developing Policy Incentives to Promote Green Building Practices in Boston

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Problem Statement and Significance

Cities across the country are now experiencing the impacts of several decades of environmentally damaging growth and development patterns. They are realizing these impacts through the loss of open space, the shortage of water supplies, a growing dependence on energy and electricity from non-renewable resources, the decay of urban centers and attendant negative health impacts as suburbs continue to sprawl. Recently, many cities have embraced sustainability as a solution and a long-term approach to continued growth with 'green' or environmentally-appropriate building as a key element for success. Green building principles encompass all aspects of sustainable development and enable cities to understand and control their small- and large-scale impacts on land use, water, energy, air quality, material resources and human health. As cities gear up for a new era of building, innovative policy initiatives are essential to enable this paradigm change and guide development towards a sustainable future.

The City of Boston has recognized the necessity and immediacy of this work and Mayor Tom Menino with the Boston Redevelopment Authority created the Mayor's Green Building Task Force (GBTF) in June 2003 to "be on the forefront of environmentally progressive policies and practices" (see References). I discovered this effort while researching a project on urban sprawl last semester and immediately pursued involvement in the project. The GBTF has charged the Green Roundtable, a small nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and support green building in Boston, as a consultant to provide background research and develop case study models that will shape policy recommendations for the City of Boston. This work coincides beautifully with the development of my proposed thesis work on policy development to promote and enable smart growth and green building practices.

The Green Roundtable welcomes my expertise and support to complete this work which will result in concrete policy recommendations to be adopted by the City of Boston, as well as provide valuable investigative research into my thesis topic. They view my unique background in architecture, building research and environmental policy as an invaluable asset for the research and implementation of this project. This is a unique and timely opportunity for interdisciplinary work in policy and practice, integrating the fields of architecture, urban planning, and environmental stewardship. It is a wonderful opportunity for me, for the Green Roundtable, and for Tufts.

Goals of This Research

- To create a database of policy approaches implemented by state and local governments across the country through research and by conducting interviews
- To understand the opportunities and barriers inherent in each approach as well as the success of their implementation to date
- To assess the applicability of these policy approaches to Boston in order to formulate concrete recommendations for the Mayor's Green Building Task Force
- To publish the findings of this research in several formats including papers and a website to increase awareness and promote education of environmental building and planning issues

Research Methodology and Approaches

The first step will be to collect information and data on state and local government policies across the country through internet research, and create an extensive database that captures the breadth of the work being done. The next step consists of identifying the approaches and programs considered most successful and/or most applicable to Boston, and conducting interviews with key personnel to understand and document the details of the programs. Producing consistent case studies of these policies and programs including their history and background, successes and failures, and future goals will enable them to be compared across a range of variables. The case studies will be used to analyze various policy initiatives in the context of Boston's current development process to produce plausible recommendations to promote green building in our region. Research and case studies will be presented and discussed at monthly meetings of the Mayor's GBTF throughout the spring and summer.

Anticipated Results

Specific deliverables will include:

- A detailed database of local and state government policies implemented across the country to promote green building
- Case studies of key government policies detailing the history, successes and obstacles to implementation
- An assessment of the current state of green building in the Boston Metro area and an analysis of the process for implementing green buildings in Boston including obstacles and opportunities
- Specific policy recommendations for Boston that will promote green building in accordance with the mission of the Mayor's Green Building Task Force to be included in the Final Report of the GBTF, and ultimately implemented

Resources and References

In June 2003, Boston Mayor Tom Menino created the Mayor's Green Building Task Force (GBTF) to recommend policy initiatives to promote green building practices.

Website: www.bostongreenbuilding.org

The Green Roundtable, a local nonprofit organization, is the consultant to the GBTF to provide research and expertise on green building policy initiatives.

Website: www.greenroundtable.org

Education and Career Goals

As a candidate for the Masters in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning with an undergraduate degree in Architecture, my primary interest is in transforming the built environment from its current state of burdening our environment and depleting its resources to a model working in concert with our environment for long-term sustainability and growth. My career goals are to work as a consultant to develop and promote large-scale policy changes at the local government level as well as to implement sustainable design projects on a smaller scale by practicing as an architect and urban planner. In addition, my previous teaching and public speaking experiences have sparked my interest in education and opened my eyes to the positive impact that spreading awareness can have. I would like to implement positive change through both practice and dissemination of knowledge.