



Key Points

- *Buildings account for the largest source of energy consumption in America. They are also major generators of air pollution and stormwater runoff.*
- *Lower energy and other utility costs are especially beneficial for low-income residents.*
- *Technologies now exist that diminish the 'green premium,' making low-impact design accessible to all.*
- *The AIA supports the merger of green standards with existing affordable housing projects and policies.*
- *Cities like San Francisco, Boston, and Elizabeth, NJ, have already developed successful green practices for low-income housing.*
- *Community Enterprise Partners, a national non-profit with 25 years of experience in low-income housing, can help provide loans, grants, and other information.*

Green Affordable Housing

AIA Position

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) supports an increase in the number of high-performance, energy-efficient "green" affordable housing units. This change is vital to further the goals of reducing our nation's dependence on foreign energy sources, protecting the environment, enhancing public health, and reducing poverty nationwide.

Action Sought

The AIA urges the following legislative steps: (1) Amend local ordinances to require low-income housing and development projects that receive public funding to incorporate standards of green design; (2) Create programs that provide free or subsidized retrofitting of existing low-income residences; (3) The AIA also supports a transparent, consensus-based process, undertaken by a national body, to develop green building standards that include life-cycle costing, regional climate differences, environmental context, and building type differences.

Explanation and Justification

Buildings are major users of energy, generating air pollution and stormwater runoff. Affordable technologies now exist that diminish the environmental impact of all building types. As energy and other utility costs continue to rise, they have a disproportionately large effect on low-income citizens. At the same time, these citizens are the least able to install technology to achieve greater efficiency in their residences. Low-income families spend up to 15 percent of their annual income on energy to heat and power their homes. Even a modest effort to improve a residence's green features can reduce energy consumption by 40 percent, saving families hundreds or even thousands of dollars. A recent case study conducted by the Southface Energy Institute in Atlanta found that investing just \$500 in up-front construction costs for efficient features resulted in a 25 percent reduction in utility costs, saving residents \$400 annually.

In addition to the simple economic rationale for providing low income green housing, public officials should consider the health, safety, and welfare of the residents. There is strong evidence that occupants of low-income housing suffer from asthma and other respiratory ailments more than the general public. Green building practices that reduce harmful environmental effects of buildings on the environment have also been shown to reduce harmful effects on residents. The average buyer is now indicating that the potential health benefits are as attractive, if not more so, than the environmental benefits. Improvements in indoor air quality have also been linked to benefits ranging from increased health and productivity to higher attendance rates at work and school.

Green building is good for the environment, good for the economy, and good for America. It is important for local governments to lead by example and incorporate these practices in to affordable green housing.