USGBC Chapters Lead Sustainability Initiatives in Convention Cities

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USGBC's Charlotte Region Chapter worked with partners to build "Legacy House"

As host cities for the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, Tampa, Fla. and Charlotte, N.C. were gathering spots for the nation's political elite – both being a mecca for U.S. policy-makers. For USGBC chapters in these areas, this was a prime opportunity to educate and engage policy-makers on sustainability initiatives.

While the RNC carried on in Tampa, USGBC's Florida Gulf Coast (USGBC-FGC) chapter hosted a luncheon and panel discussion of private sector financing for commercial energy retrofits.

"We wanted to create an educational panel conversation geared toward energy efficiency retrofits being done with only private capital," said USGBC-FGC Chair, Judah Rubin. "This topic can be lost in the political landscape, so we wanted to show the value of these projects and their byproducts – a sustainable built environment."

Public and private sector professionals gathered at the full-capacity event, hosted by Florida State Senator Jack Latvala, and moderated by John Scott of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) International.

The topic de jour? Policy discussion specifically addressed the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) programs being implemented in Florida today. The program is designed to provide innovative financing options for energy efficient building upgrades, and represents a promising avenue for pushing resource-efficient and renewable energy upgrades forward. Panelist John Wakefield from Ygrene Energy Fund (the company responsible for implementing PACE) sought to demystify the program by educating policy-makers on its mechanics.

"It opened some eyes to the realities we're facing today," Rubin said of the overall impact of the event. "It also generated good discussion on what is working and what isn't. "

Jay Fechtel of Olive Tree Energy and Jon Ahrendt of Bloomin' Brands (known for popular restaurants like Outback Steakhouse) grounded the discussion with their results-based approaches to energy savings. As founder and CEO of a company that manufactures energy-saving products, Fechtel evaluated real payback for various energy tech products, including energy usage percentages based on actual applications. Arendt is a business development pro who knows how to achieve energy savings through strategies centered on human behavior and preventative action.

USGBC's Charlotte Region chapter (USGBC-CRC) also promoted sustainability initiatives this week in Charlotte, the location of the DNC. USGBC-CRC partnered with Bank of America, Habitat Charlotte and Goodwill to build "Legacy House," a LEED-certified home built next to the convention center where convention events were held.

In addition, USGBC was well-represented at the American Sustainable Business Council's "Summit for a Sustainable Economy" which also occurred in Charlotte this week. John Komison from USGBC-CRC's advocacy committee was a panelist, and USGBC Legislative Director Bryan Howard moderated the discussion.

Komison spoke from an architectural standpoint on neighborhood planning and development, providing a foundation for other panelists to address the social and

economic factors that make up sustainable communities – factors including health, food and sustainable product manufacturing practices.

“Physical components provide a framework for adding a whole multitude of depth to the discussion. As a panel, we tried to create a vision of what a sustainable community looks like.”

The discussion that followed addressed how state- and federal-level policy can aid or hinder sustainable community development. The topics covered included transportation policy, development incentives, and regulation, among others.

Komison said that the discussion challenged people to take a comprehensive look at sustainable community development. “From an architecture and urban planning perspective, it was interesting to broaden the conversation to economic and social factors that help create whole sustainable communities.”

Both Rubin and Komison agree that overlapping these discussions with national political events was a major part of their success. “Achieving this level of interaction among industry professionals and policy-makers is very difficult to do,” Rubin explained. “This was a rare opportunity to reach an audience we don’t normally have access to.”

In addition, Roger Platt and Jason Hartke of USGBC participated in events hosted by the Atlantic and the National Journal in both host cities. The panel sessions explored the role cities play to drive sustainability.

"Energy efficiency in our buildings ought to be helping to power all of our cities," said Hartke during his session.

Jessie Andrews
Marketing and Communications Summer Associate

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Kevin Smith 1 year 37 weeks ago
Energy Engineer, Energy Wise Solutions, Inc

Energy Wise Solutions is proud to have performed the LEED Certification on this home. Josh Turner lead an extensive effort to build an efficient and sustainable home that incorporated a Solar Hot Water System. This is the first Platinum level LEED certification for the Charlotte Habitat Program.

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