

Chapter 5 – Business Community

Green businesses operate under a set of principles, policies and practices that maximize the conservation of resources and the reduction of pollution. Such businesses can improve the quality of life for their customers, employees, community and planet. Often these green businesses will both increase their operating efficiency and generate unique marketing appeal to their customers and business partners alike. Businesses that adhere to green principles and practices are leaders on a local, regional and even global scale.

5.1 – The Rationale for a Green Business

Business owners often view cooperation with the environment as a hurdle in the pursuit of greater profits. However, environmentally sound business practices can often serve as a shortcut to financial savings. The federal government's Energy Star program reports that practicing recommended energy conservation methods typically yields savings of 25 percent or more. For instance, an auto body shop in Philadelphia began saving more than \$5,500 annually simply by retrofitting the facility with more efficient lighting system and appliances. The owner of the auto body shop reports that the investment into retrofitting his business was paid back in less than eighteen months. Improved lighting systems also saved a bookstore owner in Boulder, Colorado \$4,800 annually (Energy Star, nd. a).

Beyond the direct economic benefits there are significant indirect benefits of owning and operating a green business. For example, employers seeking LEED certification will see that being "green" is about more than conserving resources. There is general improvement in the quality of life of employees through achieving the LEED standards outlined that focus on indoor environmental quality. Creating a quality working environment often induces higher employee morale and productivity.

By emerging as an advocate for and practitioner of sustainability, businesses find themselves with a competitive advantage over their peers. For instance, Volkswagen improved their image in recent years by investing in environmental protection. As a result, VW developed a bond with consumers as an eco-conscious car manufacturer that provokes a sense of high integrity and value within consumers (De Simone & Poppff, 1997). Obviously, a juggernaut corporation like Volkswagen does not represent the small-business community of Highland Park. Yet, the success of the VW experience is a model for all business, showing how green business practices are profitable.

Of course, green business practices are not universally applicable across all types of economic activity. Depending on the business type, different programmatic avenues are most appropriate. The following section will explore the composition of Highland Park's CBD and provide examples of solutions to the environmental issues that arise in grocery and convenience stores, dry cleaners, automotive shops, restaurants, and nail salons.

5.2 – The Business Community in Highland Park

The Central Business District

The Central Business District (CBD) in Highland Park forms the spine of the borough, running along Raritan Avenue, or “Main Street,” from South Adelaide Avenue, to the intersection of Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue, or the “Y.” While 155 commercial entities reside within the CBD, another 97 lie westward in the “Y.” Among the commercial uses in Highland Park, the most dominant are professional offices, restaurants, auto sales and service stations, as well as general retail services. In addition, of the 19 hair and nail salons in the borough, 14 operate within the CBD.

Commercial uses in Highland Park comprise only six percent of total land area. As noted in Chapter 2, commercial establishments represent 39 percent of total electricity use and 68 percent of natural gas. Overall, commercial properties use over half of the total energy use in Highland Park (53 percent) measured in BTU’s, thus emphasizing its significant role in the Borough’s total energy use.

Different Business Types

Grocery/Convenience Stores. Highland Park already stands tall in Middlesex County in terms of the availability of organic produce and products. The *Stop and Shop*, located on the corner of Raritan Avenue and Fifth Avenue, reports the highest sales of organic products of all their stores located in the region. In addition, Highland Park is home to Ana’s Health Food Center, which boasts a variety of organic products. Organic foods represent a step in the right direction, and suggest a base for the development of greener grocery and convenience stores.

Lighting and insulation issues affect all businesses, but grocery and convenience stores (as well as restaurants) uniquely face the issue of refrigeration. According to Energy Star, refrigeration represents the largest piece of a grocery store’s energy cost, consuming 38 percent of a store’s electricity. Consequently, improving refrigeration efficiency serves as a prime target for energy conservation. In addition to providing an inventory of recommended products, Energy Star outlines some simple way to reduce electricity use:

- Keep refrigerator doors shut
- Clean cooling coils
- Maintain equipment
- Check door seals
- Check temperature settings

(Energy Star, nd. b)

A good example of the savings to be had by grocery stores can be found in Sacramento, California at Vic’s Market. After completing upgrades in their lighting and cooling systems, the owners of this 29,000 square foot market saw savings of \$48,000 annually. These savings paid back the investment within three years (Energy Star, nd. b). Another route for greening the grocery and convenience businesses in Highland Park lies in addressing the supply chain. The New World Victoria Park Supermarket in New Zealand tracks the path of its products to ensure it sells truly organic items (Sustainable Business Network, 2003a). This program not only increased customer satisfaction, but instilled a sense of pride in its employees.

Dry Cleaners. The process of dry cleaning typically involves the chemical perchloroethylene (perc) or petroleum solvents. Although the disposal of perc must be regulated, it may result in air emissions, water pollution or the generation of hazardous waste (OEPA, 1996). As an alternative to perc, Blue-N-Green Dry Cleaners of Auckland, New Zealand implemented a dry cleaning system that uses an aliphatic hydrocarbon, an odorless, biodegradable substance. Though the equipment required to operate a dry cleaning system based on this chemical runs about 10 percent more than perc systems, savings achieved in the disposal process made up for the additional costs. While the costs of disposing perc waste run between \$250-\$285 per 53 gallons, aliphatic hydrocarbons can be disposed of for \$10.64 per 53 gallons – a savings of approximately 96 percent. Perc can not be burned, buried or flushed, while aliphatic hydrocarbons burn off to carbon dioxide and water (SBN, 2003b).

Auto-Related. In addition to the energy cost savings mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, auto repair shops can contribute to a green community in several other ways. As general housekeeping practices, recommendations include:

- Cleaning up spills immediately using dry clean-up practices
- Replacing absorbent materials with a squeegee and a receptacle
- Using aqueous-based sinks instead of petroleum naphtha solvent sinks
- Reducing solid waste generation through recycling and purchasing oil in bulk
- Utilizing refillable spray containers or brake cleaning sinks rather than spray cans
- Monitoring storm drains to prevent stormwater contamination

5.3 – Recommendations

Although many green improvements in a business yield noteworthy financial savings, it can be difficult to stimulate change in the practices of the business community. Proprietors do not fully believe in the current trends, or are just too comfortable in their ways, so it remains vital for the municipality to actively encourage change. One creative approach to this problem was undertaken by the Bay Area counties in California. In a partnership of local governments and environmental agencies, the Bay Area Green Business Program actively campaigns for businesses to turn green (Bay Area Green Business Program, 2003). The result has been somewhat of a bandwagon effect. As the popularity of the program increases, more businesses want to be included. By adopting the outlined principles and practices -- tailored by business type -- businesses earn a certification that effectively increases their presence in the marketplace. As shoppers become aware of the Green Business Program, they are likely give preference to businesses that share their goals as a green community.

Not surprisingly, suppliers of good and services in Highland Park are also the biggest consumers of resources. The economic engine of a community brings profit, as well as pollution. Thus a green community should earn the active support of its local businesses. An aggressive campaign by the municipality to capture the attention of the business community will be essential to the success of the overall green initiative.

- Establish a green business program, which provides incentives for business to “go green,” through a system of:
 - Certification
 - Recommended business practices
 - Building management techniques
 - Special marketing and networking for participating business owners
- Use the “Main Street” redevelopment plan as a catalyst for setting a goal for a certain percentage of new and renovated buildings to achieve LEED certification
- Educate local businesses on green practices by demonstrating the financial gains incurred by existing green businesses around the country.
- Explore the opportunity of creating and sponsoring a “Green Store”

5.4 – Useful links

LEED- Commercial Interiors

- For further details on commercial LEED compliance, visit their website at: http://www.usgbc.org/LEED/leed_interiors.asp

Resource Renewal Institute

- Working for a sustainable future, RRI answers the incentive question for business: <http://greenplans.rri.org/forme/forbusiness.html>

Sustainable Business Network

- Offers stories and strategies in achieving a sustainable business community: <http://www.sustainable.org.nz>

Bay Area Green Business Program

- Sharing proven strategies in stimulating the “greening” of local businesses: <http://www.greenbiz.ca.gov>

Coordinating Committee For Automotive Repair (CCAR-Greenlink)

- CCAR-GreenLink, is “the National Automotive Environmental Compliance Assistance Center for the automotive industry.” This site offers standards and strategies in dealing with the environmental impacts of automotive repair businesses: <http://www.ccar-greenlink.org>

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