

# What's Happening Around the Region: HUD Announces Better Building Challenge in D.C. to Reduce Energy Consumption Over 10 Years

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The District of Columbia Housing Authority accepted President Obama's Better Buildings Challenge to reduce the agency's energy use by 20 percent within 10 years. U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro made the announcement on September 18 in Ivy City at a Habitat for Humanity site where U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Regina "Gina" McCarthy, GRID Alternatives volunteers, including HUD's Regional Administrators, and staff were adding solar panels to affordable homes.

Castro said part of the President's Climate Action Plan is to triple the amount of solar capacity at affordable housing sites across the nation. He praised DCHA's commitment, calling it "a fantastic example of what we can do when we all partner together."

Signing on to this challenge and being a part of the larger Climate Action Plan allows the authority to build upon the work it has already done as part of the \$26 million Energy Capital Improvement Plan (ECIP) and the many energy efficiency upgrades and improvements that have been included at many DCHA properties since 2007.

"We are committed to identifying even more solar opportunities at up to 20 different sites in our portfolio," said DCHA Executive Director Adrienne Todman. "We always strive to not only improve our customers' lives, but those of our neighbors – and the environment."

The authority will work with experts in new and renewable energy sources—the first being solar—to locate areas that will benefit from new technology and improved efficiency. Based on initial estimates, adding solar panels to 20 sites could achieve an annual reduction of 707,000 kilowatt hours at these properties—that equates to 1,160,744 miles less of car emissions (488 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>) in our air. DCHA's portfolio currently consumes 67.4 million kilowatt hours of energy each year.

DCHA began "greening" its properties in 2007. The Regency House, a senior building located in Ward 3, features a green roof and solar panel arrays, among other efficiencies. The first phase of Sheridan Station, located in Ward 8, has similar energy-saving features plus a rain-water cistern and is the District's first LEED Platinum HOPE VI project. DCHA has a standardized building product guide given to its partnering developers that features only sustainable products. The authority also worked with Habitat for Humanity to connect a Housing Choice Voucher Participant with an affordable homeownership opportunity, but also to a passive net-zero home, Empowerhouse, which consumes 90 percent less energy than a typical home.

The authority is also in the midst of installing geothermal technology at Highland Dwellings in Ward 8. There are also plans to install flue-gas at 10 sites throughout the city, which is estimated to reduce energy consumption by up to 15 percent. A new community building, located in Ward 6, scheduled to open late 2015, aims to become LEED Gold certified.

Since DCHA began to focus on renewable energy and efficiencies, the agency has reduced its electricity usage by 1,047,093 kilowatt hours and natural gas consumption by 635,346 therms annually. This reduction is the equivalent of preventing 4,091 metric tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted into the atmosphere, the same amount of energy used by 373 typical homes or 9,740,476 million miles driven by a passenger vehicle.

These types of projects are "generating not just environmental benefits, but job benefits," Castro said. Todman agrees and is committed to working with GRID Alternatives to explore job training opportunities for DCHA residents.

"We look forward to working with local and federal partners to become a leader of the nation's housing authorities in creating more environmentally sound and sustainable communities," Todman said.



HUD Secretary Julian Castro (center) announced DCHA's solar energy plans in Ivy City. To his immediate left, HUD Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Jane C.W. Vincent, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy and DCHA Executive Director Adrienne Todman joined the Secretary and others attending the announcement for the official photo.