



## **Sustainability and Economic Development Go Hand in Hand**

As California communities struggle to rebuild their budgets and local economies, it's helpful to consider the contributions that can be made by investing in sustainability policies, programs and projects. California's green technology boom has both economic development and sustainability implications statewide. At the local level, individual agencies' decisions to promote sustainability also have economic benefits.

### **Identify Sustainability Opportunities**

Local opportunities to promote sustainability policies span a broad range and include:

- Investing in energy efficiency and alternative energy;
- Creating newly designed, vibrant downtowns that welcome visitors, who in turn spend money in shops, restaurants, hotels and other local businesses;
- Helping owners of businesses that use recycled materials find a new location for their enterprise;
- Supporting programs that make it cheaper for businesses to recycle than discard trash.

Because stretching every dollar is essential, creative local officials are looking at individual policies and projects with an eye toward identifying those with multiple benefits.

### **Promote Commercial Recycling**

Promoting commercial recycling helps keep recyclable materials out of landfills. This conserves resources, extends the landfill's life, saves businesses money and reduces the potential generation of methane, a greenhouse gas (GHG) that is released from improperly managed landfills. Successful commercial recycling programs are business-friendly, provide educational assistance and frequently use a tiered pricing system where recycling is cheaper than garbage collection.

The small City of Ojai overcame a barrier to recycling experienced by businesses located in a three-block redevelopment area by working with them to address the issues that made recycling difficult. As a result, the city designed joint enclosures for waste and recycling bins, thus providing businesses with a way to store recyclable materials prior to collection. Combined with tiered pricing that makes it cheaper to recycle than dispose of trash, Ojai has helped to make it easier and economically attractive for the businesses to recycle.

Other communities combine commercial recycling policies with extensive education and assistance for businesses, along with a tiered pricing structure to encourage recycling and save businesses money.

California's Recycling Market Development Zone (RMDZ) program combines recycling with economic development to fuel new businesses, expand existing ones, create jobs, and divert waste from landfills. Thirty-three active RMDZs throughout the state offer low-cost financing to assist businesses and have produced an estimated 20,000 jobs.

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## **Encourage Green Building**

California cities and counties are embracing green building policies and ordinances. Green buildings reduce energy consumption, use water more efficiently and utilize materials with recycled content, thus saving money and natural resources and reducing GHG emissions.

Monterey County has gone one step further in connecting the sustainability concept of green buildings with economic development. The county offers homeowners a voluntary green building certification program, StepUp2Green, as an opportunity to have their home certified green. The goal is to create a standardized certification process that will encourage home retrofitting and assure homeowners that the improvements they make effectively reduce GHG emissions. StepUp2Green helps protect consumers by educating them about appropriate and cost-effective retrofitting, stimulates the economy by making homes more attractive for resale and reduces GHG emissions. According to county staff, the program also helps people sell their homes and thus stimulates the economy.

## **Create Vibrant, Healthy Communities**

Farmers markets may be the epitome of sustainability. They do more than just support local agriculture and bring local farm products to the community — they also contribute to its economy. Residents who come to a farmers market often stay to shop at surrounding businesses. Communities that have reworked their downtowns to be more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly have the added benefit of making it easier for shoppers at farmers markets to navigate the downtown area and contribute to the local economy and tax base.

Well-planned communities with a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, schools and recreation give people the option of walking, biking or using transit rather than driving. This promotes physical activity and more vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities and also results in lower GHG emissions.

The City Center Plaza in Redwood City provides an outstanding example of how successful mixed-use development can rejuvenate and revitalize a neighborhood and use sustainability to promote economic vitality. The project created 43 construction and 21 permanent jobs, built 81 new affordable homes for low- to moderate-income families, and renovated an entire block to create new and welcoming entrances into the downtown area. It attracted several new businesses and created a public space enjoyed by both residents and visitors.

## **Support Energy Efficiency and Jobs**

The Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (CEIP), a joint effort between the county and nine cities in the county, offers low-interest loans to homeowners and businesses to install solar energy systems or energy-efficiency retrofits. The program is based on the new energy financing assessment districts made possible by AB 811. Approximately \$5 million in CEIP projects were contracted in July and August 2009, resulting in about 500 new construction jobs.

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## Promote Local Green Businesses

The Bay Area Green Business Program, coordinated by the Association of Bay Area Governments, assists and recognizes small businesses and public agencies that implement measures to conserve energy and water, minimize waste and prevent pollution. More than 1,800 businesses have been certified since 1996. One participant says, “Becoming a green business is a no-brainer. It’s a win-win situation that saves you money and protects the environment. Customers appreciate our being a green business.”

## For More Information

To learn more about the projects in this article, visit:

- [California Recycling Market Development Zones.](#)
- [Building a Green Economy: The Recycled Market Development Zone Program Provides Help and Resources](#) – May 2009, *Western City* magazine
- [Monterey County’s Step Up2 Green](#)
- [The City Center Plaza in Redwood City](#)
- [Sonoma County Energy Independence Program](#)
- [The Bay Area Green Business Program](#)

## Sustainability Resources from the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government, the nonprofit research affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties, provides a wide range of resources and information for local officials on sustainability. These include the following:

- [Healthy Neighborhoods](#) program provides support and resources local officials can use to protect and improve community health by integrating health considerations into their planning, land use and other decisions.
- [California Climate Action Network](#) provides resources and tools, education and recognition for local leadership and achievement. Key resources include:
  - [Sample Commercial Recycling Ordinance and Resources](#)

This resource is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for California communities.

ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. For more information and to access the Institute's resources on sustainable communities, visit [www.ca-ilg.org/Sustainability](http://www.ca-ilg.org/Sustainability). If you would like to access this resource directly, go to [www.ca-ilg.org/SustainabilityEconDevelopment](http://www.ca-ilg.org/SustainabilityEconDevelopment).

The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

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