Green housing is usually considered a luxury for premium housing customers, but sustainability should not be considered a rich person’s privilege, but rather a way of life for all of us. Low-income residents are usually the ones who could benefit most from access to lower energy costs and access to public transportation. This research makes environmental and social sustainability initiatives accessible to low-income housing developers, by revealing which initiatives frequently offer a high return for their investment, through interviews with various participants involved with sustainable housing, and through a review of the Green Communities Criteria by Enterprise.

**Research Objective**

To review and assess environmental sustainability programs for housing and particularly low-income housing communities through interviews and analysis of the “Enterprise Green Communities Criteria – Incremental Costs, Measurable Savings Update;” which provides a “best practices” guideline for low-income housing developers that focused on economically efficient, sustainable housing.

**Learning Outcomes**

- This project taught me a lot about what happens in the housing development process when considering sustainability features.
- It is important when advocating for sustainability to keep in mind practicality, and understand that it takes everyone working together in all fields in order to produce something effective.
- Implementation of sustainability in housing development is broad and multi-dimensional and requires input from everyone from grounds maintenance, to architects, to residents, to contractors.

**Landscaping**

Replacing turf and using native or drought-tolerant landscaping where possible costs about has much as hiring a landscape architect, and has huge savings potential by way of reduced water costs, and in some cases reduced maintenance costs. It can be very aesthetically pleasing, and turf removal often has city-based incentives.

**Energy**

One of the most recommended energy-saving programs was solar-thermal for heating water. It is very inexpensive to implement, and can save huge amounts on the gas that is usually used to heat water, especially as every tenant would be using hot water. Solar panels and other large reusable energy projects offer huge savings, but also at very high costs and often are not efficient to implement. If put into practice in a community, you must first consider how much energy the residents use, what kind of government incentives you can round up, and how long it is going to take to get a return on the initial investment, as well as technical considerations such as where will they be placed so they will get enough sun. Replacing old appliances with energy efficient ones is useful, but is often already included in low-income housing development due to intense competition in the bidding process.

**Low-hanging fruit**

The “low-hanging fruit” includes such things as fixing water pipes that are leaking, replacing showerheads and light bulbs, and generally seeing where the most waste is being generated in a community. Every community should begin by checking for any easily-fixed problem areas, and for local programs that can be incorporated into the community. For example, if energy costs are extremely high in this community, changing the lighting might be an easy and quick fix, and if the surrounding area has a composting program, it might be extended to the community.

**Education**

Education is essential in communities that are going green, both for the residents and for the maintenance staff, as it teaches them how to work with the new system, which otherwise might be utilized inefficiently. Tenant education should emphasize involving children in the household, as they are more effective in pressuring adults to follow efficient living practices.

**Cooperation**

As key to a successful project, you should start early and involve someone from every aspect of the project, including architects, property management, residents, contractors, etc. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and understands what is going on, as well as precluding potential critical oversights. It also guarantees that the problem is assessed from a variety of viewpoints, to create the most efficient and appropriate solution.