

December 31, 2008

TO: Interested parties
FR: Gerry Hudson, Joel Rogers, Phil Thompson*
RE: Eyes on the Prize: Program Architecture of Emerald Cities

This memo offers suggestions on program architecture for a national effort to build “emerald” cities, our shorthand for high-road cities committed to greening their economies in equitable and democratically accountable ways.¹

As background to these suggestions, we take the argument for the desirability and viability of high-road as against low-road strategies of economic development and governance to be largely won intellectually; what remains is the political work of enacting them. We would say the same of argument for renewed national focus on cities and their metropolitan regions. We also assume, of the proposed emerald cities effort: (1) wide recognition of the enormous wealth, employment, income, health, and other gains from such an effort; (2) substantial commitment by the Obama-Biden administration-elect to making it; (3) sincerity among those many groups essential to its success — labor, social justice and environmental advocates, socially responsible business, public and private training providers, progressive elected officials — who say they want it made.

Our focus here is on moving from this real but diffuse enthusiasm to encoding some mutual understandings and obligations among such groups in the effort’s DNA: its program architecture. Two concerns motivate us. One is that the construction of emerald cities, however much good it will do their residents, this country, and the world, will be resisted from some powerful quarters. Two is that the task these cities set themselves as “emerald” — to make simultaneous progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other waste of nonrenewable resources, increasing community wealth and equity, and improving democratic performance — is complicated.

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¹ To define our terms: By “high-road” strategy we mean, for firms, a value-based competitive strategy that seeks to increase net by (a) increasing product market value by increasing product performance, distinctiveness, or customization and (b) minimizing waste (of natural and human capital) in product production and distribution while (c) sharing that net with those who helped produce it in worker compensation and/or taxes. The contrasting “low-road” strategy is price-based, with firms competing largely on cost reduction and indifferent or hostile to sustainability concerns or equity. A “high-road government” is a government that seeks to generalize firm adoption of high-road strategy by foreclosing or raising the cost of pursuing the low-road one and facilitating or lowering the costs of pursuing the high road, in particular through policy or public goods of benefit to high-road firms and their employees. A “high-road city” is simply a municipal instance of such a government, though the structural and political assets of cities (in particular, the density of firms and people that produce positive agglomeration effects and make public goods more cost-effective; and their more progressive political culture) make them natural centers of high-road activity. By “emerald cities” we mean high-road cities that give particular attention to more efficient or restorative use of nature, particularly regarding energy.

Success in overcoming that opposition and navigating that complexity will require unusually close coordination among what are now very different constituencies and groups. Before opposition forms or big money starts flowing to an emerald cities effort, we think it important be as clear and united as possible on the terms of that coordination.

SOLIDARITY BY DESIGN?

Our chief problem is that we lack robust means, starting from where sympathetic but divided parties currently are in practice, to engage their full capacities and prevent their differences from becoming conflict fatal to the achievement of their common emerald goals. We offer our solution to this problem in the next section. Here we say something about the problem itself.

The broad goals of emerald cities are easily stated. We want the greenest and most equitable cities possible, with the most efficient and accountable use of public resources in furthering those ends. So we want cities that are maximally efficient and restorative in their use of natural capital (as measured for example in energy and CO₂ productivity or absolute emissions reductions); maximally fair in their distribution of the benefits and burdens of doing this work, particularly in their assurance of equal opportunity to make and be rewarded for contribution to it (as measured for example by decline in family background as a predictor of training, entry-level employment, career progression, and compensation); and that, in spending public money, do so only with clear goals, achievement of which is carefully measured, that learn and revise in light of experience, that benchmark and share best practices, that leverage private capital and citizen engagement in the achievement of public ends, that are transparent in their standards, evaluation methods, and process for allocating effort.

We do not think that technical problems or money scarcity (though both are real) are the chief barriers to realizing these goals. We have more than enough technical ability and material resources to make cities far greener than they are today; to make their labor markets far more transparent and fair; and even to ensure greater performance, accountability, enterprise, and learning in government. We just haven't organized available resources for this task.

That we haven't is chiefly a function of missing political capacity, which relates to the cooperation problem above. Stated broadly, we lack in cities an organized democratic public that is able both to authoritatively enact emerald goals in policy and help in the ongoing monitoring, adjustment, and new problem-solving that success in achieving those goals requires.² The cooperation problem is that almost all potential members of this public, who in fact have broad agreement on emerald ends, have different "first" interests in acting on them. Labor first wants job standards and new members, community groups first want economic opportunity and respect, business first wants a return on its capital, environmentalists first want progress repairing nature, and so on. These first interests are often in conflict, stalling progress in achieving the bigger end, and often making them worse off individually, not just as a group.

² The idealized "democratic public" would be community of political equals that was capable of rational deliberation and debate, political decision, intentional collective action, and wide contribution to achieving it declared ends (making it a source of value, not just values, in public decision-making).

Now, we can imagine a world (and communities within it) where all these interests were satisfied and the different parts of the public corresponding to them worked together in efficient ways. This would realize economies of scope and scale in their shared activities, making their whole greater than the sum of these parts. As a public, they could launch any number of scaled projects to find and capture value now lost to waste in their communities. They could also reinvest that value, increasing their collective capacity to find even more of it, making this a self-fueling engine of democratic wealth generation.

So, for example, a project to apply comprehensive cost-effective energy efficiency and distributed clean energy generation measures to a city's building stock — a source of enormous employment and wealth, and our own recommendation for first action by would-be emerald cities — could use some of that new wealth and income to improve public goods (education, transit, public safety, etc.) in ways that further reduced climate damage, further spread opportunity, and further lowered basic living costs, thus making that community even richer and more productive. Wealth-creating interaction effects among such investment would also come into view. Higher employment and better schools, for example, would lower public safety costs, freeing up yet more money for reinvestment. A city with these sorts of public goods and organization would also be better able to retain and improve existing business and attract new investment. It would also be able to demand more of business. With enough popular support (why wouldn't it have it?) and harnessed citizen contribution, indeed, this green machine could probably handle all comers. The process of working together, learning together, benefitting from collective action together, and even occasionally failing together, would also work to solidify the democratic public whose absence we mourned above.

But we don't live in such a world now. Simply infusing public money into the world we do live in, including the space occupied by all who profess emerald interest (including some people of good will and a fair number of charlatans and swindlers), will chiefly advantage those used to "working" such money. It certainly won't deliver our self-fueling green wealth machine or democratic public. It won't even get near immediate potentials for better climate and employment equity. To get to those things we need to take those first interests seriously, show a way to better satisfy them through cooperation than competition, and bolt agreement on that into our program architecture. That's another way to describe our design problem.

Before offering our solution to that problem in the next section, let's end this section by noting the limits of that solution.

However clever, no design is "strategy proof." There will always be an opportunity, not just a temptation, to defect from cooperative agreements. More than good program architecture is thus needed to realize the promise of emerald cities. Some shared moral sense, and solidarity with those of like sense, is also needed. And those things cannot be designed (the answer to the title of this section — *Solidarity by Design?* — is "nope, can't be done"). They rely on the uniquely human instinct for both freedom and justice, for building a society fit to live in. They require that we actually act with some of the courage of our convictions, that we be willing to bet on the decency of other people, and put ourselves at risk of that bet being wrong. Such a bet is not necessarily irrational, and design can certainly help reduce its risks. But in the end it isn't even comprehensible without a prior decision to try to live democratically, to govern ourselves with

others on equal and mutually respectful terms. And that decision is not a strategic calculation of benefit. It is a choice.

PROGRAM ARCHITECTURE

The happy fact that emerald cities would bring vast and widely shared benefit has a downside: the many ways their birth could go disastrously wrong, and the number of people whose misstep or calculated action could produce that tragedy. It is almost as easy to get overwhelmed with the difficulties of midwifery as it is to get excited about the possible result: wet, bloody, beautiful, voracious, and inquisitive.

Almost, but not quite. The essential things needed to give this particular baby a good start in life are in fact few. We need some job standards and community access to those jobs. We need transparency and equal opportunity in labor markets — that is, public knowledge of the skills needed for different jobs, and opportunity for all, irrespective of income, to acquire them. We need to repair, at least to the point of their being able to grasp this opportunity, the damage done to individuals within underserved communities. We need money to do the new energy work itself. We need to be smart about doing it. Let's consider these elements in turn, and what their provision might require of different parties.

Labor & Community: Standards and Access

The most important relationship to manage is that between labor and community. If labor and community are united, almost any good can happen. If they are divided, very little useful will be.

By “labor” we here principally, but not only, mean the building and construction trades that are key to much energy efficiency and clean generation work. By “community” we mean (collectively and we hope neither offensively or incoherently) both individual members of underserved and heavily of-color low- and moderate-income communities; their religious, civic, and elected political leaderships; and the locally- and nationally-based advocacy and service organizations that operate within them. The respective first interests of labor and community have already been stated. Labor wants job standards and new members; community wants respect, power in decisions that directly affect it, and real opportunity to acquire income and wealth.

In principle, the terms of a deal between these two groups are simple. In return for community support, labor could guarantee community access to good jobs and even provide (through its vast and vastly underutilized network of training centers and programs) much of the training needed to do them. In return for such access, community could guarantee support of labor standards and the unions that help ensure them. Both sides would clearly benefit from such a deal. With its terms upheld, they could co-author any number of useful projects together and comprise the core of a powerful and capable democratic public.

But as we all know, this obvious deal has never been widely concluded and sustained in America. This is chiefly because of racism and the exceptionally voluntarist and decentralized character of the American labor movement, helped along by exceptional American employer

hostility to labor's existence — itself owing chiefly not to labor's strength here, but its weakness. With exceptions in particular sectors during particular periods, unions in the U.S. have not generally succeeded in “taking wages out of competition” between employers, with the result that unionized employers face more challenging cost structures than non-union ones. For a period after World War II, high union density in at least some sectors of the economy, helped along by supportive public policy, kept this anti-union animus in check. But over the past generation, American business has again gone on the offensive against unions. Helped along by a broad “right turn” in American public policy (often coauthored by labor's “friends” in government), anti-union employers have relentlessly expanded their market share, eviscerating old strongholds of union density. The building and construction trades were in fact a particular target of attack — the focus of the earliest employer efforts, in the early 1970s, to secure what the National Association of Manufacturers at the time called “a union free environment.” Since then, the share of construction workers who are union members has been reduced almost three-quarters, dropping from 40 to 13 percent.

The failure to close the deal between labor and community, and the real and imagined defections on both sides responsible for that failure, lead to skepticism (amounting to suspicion) from both sides of any proposal to try again. We make the proposal anyway because we think that today's situation is different than the past.

For its part, most of labor's current leadership and membership came of age after the civil rights revolution. They are ashamed of labor's racist past, and anxious to get beyond it. Labor is also keenly aware of its need for community political support to reverse its declining market share, and its need to replenish its aging and still overwhelming white membership with far more people of color. It recognizes the enormous number of jobs — in energy transmission and distribution, buildings, and transportation — that would be created by a serious effort to green our built environment. It sees this as an opportunity to grow its membership and power. If possible, it would like to do both with, not excluding, community.

For its part, community recognizes that there are fewer good jobs available today in either manufacturing or public employment (community's surest past route to the middle class), and fewer good jobs in general, at least for those without substantial schooling or dumb luck, that are not unionized. This is clearly the case in construction, where job quality — which we'll take to be some vector of compensation, opportunities for advancement, and voice — depends almost entirely on union status. Community very much wants to get in on the ground floor of the building the clean energy economy, where it also hopes to find more opportunity than in the dirty one. In construction, which has some of the best non-college jobs around, the path to opportunity runs through the building trades. So community too is looking for a deal.

Of course, more openness to a deal by no means guarantees its closing. Labor might be tempted, upon passage of a massive recovery package of investments in areas of traditional union strength, to judge walk away from one, judging that it no longer needs community support. Or, in the absence of that investment, and with uncertainty about future trends in a depressed construction market (the building trades have hundreds of thousands of members “on the bench” now, i.e., without work) it might decide it cannot now afford the risk of opening its apprenticeship ranks. And even if national building and construction trades unions were fully

committed to a deal, they might fail to bring along their locals, who hold most power in our heavily decentralized labor movement. Community might decide, given uncertainty about labor's ability to capture new construction demand, or doubts about its sincerity, or ability to deliver its local leadership, to choose non-union green job opportunities and non-union training for them. Even worse, it might take labor's training and then go into competition with it, starting non- or anti-union firms of its own. None of these outcomes would be pretty.

Recognizing both side's justified skepticism about the other, the new deal that we propose would first have labor and community join forces to massively increase demand for new energy work in cities (as against construction underwriting more sprawl). This is already happening, though it could be improved. Then, more immediately, they should jointly insist on the regulation of new energy projects by *master agreements* guaranteeing both *job standards and inclusive access*, and jointly accept a clear *division of labor* — on the project work itself, the recruitment and training of people for that work, and the targeting, recruitment, and education of the communities where that work is done doing — in what's required to make those projects emerald.

A master agreement on job standards and job access can be achieved through a city-wide or ideally metro-wide “community workforce agreement” (CWA), by which all employers and all unions on any construction work covered by it would be bound. Here the CWA might start by covering all new energy work touched by any public dollar. It would contain, among other things, enforceable terms on (graduated) local source hiring, a clear specification of the skills required for covered jobs, required apprenticeship utilization rates for contractors, and explicit assumption by union-employer partnerships for providing all needed vocational training in apprenticed trades. A good starting model for this is the agreement recently negotiated in Los Angeles between that city's Community Redevelopment Agency and the LA Building Trades and Construction Council.³ Along with working jointly to achieve such agreements, labor and community would also jointly monitor their enforcement.

The division of labor between labor and community that we propose is this. Labor should take lead, as just indicated in the terms of the proposed city-wide or metro-wide CWA, in providing vocational training for apprenticed trades. It would also take lead in doing the actual work on emerald projects. We recommend a rebuttable presumption of union labor being used on all such projects, defeated only by employer demonstration of a lack of union interest in or capacity for the work. Community would lead on all matters around community engagement in and education on emerald city projects. It would take lead in: providing the “job readiness” training often needed for community members; recruiting community members for (a vastly enlarged pool of) apprenticeship positions or (where qualified) more senior jobs; designing and delivering the social supports community members may need during periods of training. This deal would ensure more than enough work for both labor and community, while getting community the respect and access that it wants and getting labor the enforced job standards and control of relevant training that it wants.

Government can help cement this deal and division of labor in many ways. This would start with conditioning all public money or tax expenditures offered in support of it on respect for its terms.

³ This agreement and a useful study of it are available as items 16-17 at www.cows.org/hreec/.

Less formally, but all-important, government needs to make its own support for those terms clear to relevant business interests (utility companies, energy service companies [ESCOs], landlords and developers, wholesale and retail firms, etc.) and training providers (e.g., community colleges). While disorganized labor markets are just that, with little real ability to get the enforcement and monitoring of the access and quality standards we want to see respected here, there are things that can be done within them. Some sort of CWA along the lines described would still be recommended. And even where, for lack of current labor presence or capacity, work under it was eventually non-union — i.e., where unions showed no interest in or capacity for doing it — government should use all means at its disposal (e.g., Davis-Bacon, Walsh-Healey, OSHA, Title VII, general GSA procurement rules, labor standards unique to particular substantive statutes) to enforce prevailing wage, health and safety, civil rights, and use “best value” contracting standards throughout.

Training & Transparency

Even with labor taking lead in providing vocational training for apprenticed trades, and community taking lead in job-readiness training, a huge amount of other education and training will obviously need to be done for emerald cities. To be clear here, we think a vastly greater education and training effort should be made in the U.S. than is now made. For the population that most concerns us here, the poor and working class, we think that training should be provided quite differently than it is now. We also think that skills involved in what are sometimes called “green jobs” are not that different from the skills involved in grey ones. What makes a job “green” — i.e., devoted to increasing the productivity or restoration of natural capital, or otherwise mitigating or adapting to mankind’s catastrophic disruption of climate — is principally what those skills are used for.⁴ We do not see the need for more training coming principally from new skills (though there are some) required for the new energy economy, but from a more general need to upgrade our economy to the high road. But we also see no reason not to take current interest in green jobs as an occasion for improving our training system. Call this “constructive opportunism” (as opposed to the destructive kind that has otherwise occupied us).

Here the clarity and fairness of our imagined CWA would be applied to the whole local labor market. That would among other things mean: (a) mapping the area labor market by skills, jobs, and careers, and providing the public with a clear way of seeing the skills needed for different jobs and career pathways; (b) modularizing training (breaking it into chunks), with each module delivering a certain competency or set of competencies, different jobs or careers described by different clusters of such modules, and movement from any particular module to any other possible through a series of incremental moves; (c) making training demand-driven (that is, tied to real labor market demand), with its supply informed by high quality and continuously revised information on labor market conditions; (d) offering training in any way needed to maximize access (e.g., on-line, at night, on weekends, at distance, in field settings as well as classrooms); (e) certifying skills through testing, with such demonstration indifferent to the source or means of skill acquisition (i.e., if someone with no formal training can pass the test, more power to

⁴ Note that this task is almost never exhaustive of all tasks in a given job. For this reason, we think the best way to think of “green jobs” is as FTEs (full time equivalents) devoted to these tasks, distributed over a much larger number of actual jobs.

them); (f) aligning certified skills with employer-recognized skills standards, at least implicitly tied to compensation; (g) removing income as a barrier to training through need-based scholarships or individual loans (a distant second, though progressive loans with payback proportionate, on a cohort basis, to share of future earnings, are worth exploring); (h) providing wrap-around social services to further maximize access. Such a system — all the different parts of which have been demonstrated somewhere in the U.S., but nowhere all at once — would give those in emerald cities knowledge of the skills they need to succeed, income-indifferent access to them, and some assurance of payoff. This would make labor market mobility much more clearly a function of ability and effort, not race or class or gender — hardly an equal opportunity paradise, but a lot closer to one that what we have at present. It would also be a far more efficient use of training dollars than we currently make. Doing this work implies an enormous and important job for our community colleges and other non-union training providers.

Capital

We imagine that capital for emerald cities projects would come from both public and private sources. A good deal of both are needed.

On money, we propose that no public money be spent without clear standards on performance, and the measurement and verification of results, along the lines suggested at the outset. In the interest of government accountability, we also suggest that all projects purporting to develop marketable value actually pay for themselves. In the interest of scale, we suggest that government make substantial direct investments, on these terms, in such “low hanging fruit” as building energy efficiency. Government should also apply emerald screens (requiring progress on energy efficiency or restorative use of nature) on all public spending on transportation, water, sewer, waste treatment, and energy infrastructure, as well as on all forms of housing assistance. It should also raise energy efficiency standards and recycling and reuse requirements on construction and all other materials-intensive projects. To facilitate the development of the markets that would naturally follow from such action, and ensure accountability in public expenditures, the government should also develop and widely publicized performance measures relevant to pricing in them (as we’ve done with great success for Energy Star appliances); certify employers in different shades of “emerald” and widely publicize these ratings, for that individual consumers and government and private purchasing offices have some confidence in what they’re buying. While all this should really be done nationally, good-sized cities have enough scale to permit their trial and refinement.

To maximize effect of the public dollar, however, opportunities to leverage public money with private capital, conforming to the same labor standards and performance standards here described, should also be aggressively pursued. That first means using government regulatory power to remove unnecessary constraints on community ability to capture and aggregate the value flowing from their work, and second means shifting more public spending away from direct purchases of labor or materials toward credit enhancement (risk reduction for private investors). Both can be done in a myriad of ways, and within prudential bounds we think deliberate experiment with different models should be encouraged, evaluated, and benchmarked on results.

To facilitate self-organizing on the finance, cities should be permitted to establish special tax districts for energy efficiency and clean generation; state utility boards should require all utilities to offer on-bill cost recovery of the capital for such programs; the FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) should order or encourage the development of forward-capacity markets (in which avoided energy, or negawatts, are rewarded at the same rate as megawatts); the nation should push forward with other markets in efficiency and carbon trading. These things will variously enable communities to borrow for this work, or get more value for it. To push more private capital toward these projects, however, we also think that some sort of good-sized (\$20B seems good for starters) public fund for default insurance and securitization services should be established. And foundations, union pension funds, and the private financial sector itself (particularly, recent recipients of the astounding amount of TARP [Troubled Asset Relief Program] largesse) should be strongly encouraged to help with financing. Given the recent financial meltdown, there are large numbers of potential investors, many with independent impulses or interests in being green, that are looking for a way to get a stable return on their investment. Energy efficiency is one of the most stable imaginable generators of such return, and these opportunities should be fully exploited.

The general spirit and organizing principle of all these suggestions is simple. We want to organize a large amount of both public and private capital to do this work, and get it applied quickly, but with job quality, equal opportunity, and both government and business performance standards applied throughout. We thus want to discipline the private market while using it, to get to scale without abandoning our high-road principles. As elsewhere too, we want to realize all available economies of scale and scope in doing this work, to reduce its costs and increase its net, for the communities that do it.

Business

Performance expectations of business in emerald cities would be higher than average expectations of business today. This will engender resistance from some quarters. Specifically, low-road firms that compete chiefly on prices and cost reduction (usually beginning with the cost of labor or taxes), and provide lousy jobs, will not like this. But high-road firms that compete chiefly on their value-added (improvements in product performance or distinctiveness, for which customers are willing to pay a premium, combined with reduction in waste), and quality jobs, or even firms wanting to get on that high road, we regard as allies in this effort. What is their interest? Their local low-road competitors will substantially vanish, with their functions take up by high-road firms with cost structures like their own (and thus not a source of competitive advantage). As they set themselves to the real task of business, which is dreaming up new ways to make money by producing and continuously improving useful products and services, they will also have better local assets to draw on. They will have a much better regional education and training system more directed to their needs, and a better equipped regional pool of talent; they will have a more efficient government and public infrastructure, with lower transportation and energy and other costs; and they will have more abundant supply of other public goods attractive to their best (and therefore more mobile) employees. For any business wanting to make money in an urban setting, emerald cities will be far better places to work than non-emerald ones.

Is this prospect of a clear alliance with progressive business merely fanciful, another triumph of

hope over experience? We obviously don't think so. There are two reasons for our optimism. One goes to what we know business needs from government, the other to what we know society needs from business.

On the first, if there is anything that can be said with certainty about the long history of capitalism it is that business can make money under almost any set of clear rules. Also, while any individual business will resist higher public performance standards on itself, it never does on its competitors. Apart from the fundamental antagonism of any autonomous capital to direction from anybody, including the public, what business dislikes most about government then is not its cost, or even regulation, *per se*, but uncertainty about those rules, government inefficiency in investments to advance them, and the time business itself needs to spend in verifying its own compliance with them. Emerald cities would offer all business a new deal on business-government relations. "We are going to set exceptional performance expectations of you, and maybe even raise them over time. But we promise you a comparably exceptional set of public goods and services that will enable you to meet and exceed those expectations, and (helped along by our disciplined non-government organizations) least-cost means of monitoring your progress in meeting them. We also genuinely welcome any suggestions you have on their improvement, and will act much more quickly on good ones. If you fail to meet these expectations, sorry, but you'll be out of business. If you do meet them, however, all evidence is that you'll become even wealthier than you are now." We honestly cannot imagine any well-managed firm in the world, especially one currently paying its employees decent compensation, which would not welcome a credible version of that offer.

On the second, what we need from business, we need to recognize some truths. In a world in which most workers are paid a fraction of U.S. wages (and will take at least a generation to get to our levels), more sweating of labor is not a viable competitive strategy; we need a value-based competitive strategy. In a world in which we're running out of climate much faster than we're running out of fossil fuels, we need to get serious about climate; we need to reduce waste.⁵ And in a world in which the old employer-based American welfare state is dead, and its administration a tremendous drag on national competitiveness even as it leaves many Americans unprotected, the U.S. needs a higher social wage and productive infrastructure on which all citizens and firms can draw (e.g., education and training, health insurance, efficient energy, communications, and transportation systems). In brief, this society needs to get on the high road, and enable business to compete successfully on its terms.

If these propositions are not universally accepted now, they will be shortly. Emerald cities — governed by a *de facto* coalition of labor, community, and high-road business — would simply be a bit ahead of the rest of the nation in getting their politics up to speed with them. That coalition, defined by its opposition to the low-road policies and practices now hurting its individual members (not just the society and planet) and its support for the institutions needed for a more productive, sustainable, and worker-friendly capitalism, would obviously accord high-road business a major leadership role. That respects its contribution.

⁵ It helps here that energy costs are generally regressive, so reducing them will also be good for workers. More generally, reducing fixed costs of any kind (e.g., in energy and transportation) is equivalent, for worker disposable income, of raising compensation.

Technical Assistance

Almost all the parties important to the success of emerald cities — local governments, business, labor, and community — will need technical assistance in doing their part of the work. We suggest a nationally funded center (or series of regional centers) — amply advertised, and with capacities in energy efficiency, distributed renewable generation, building and materials science, real estate valuation, finance, community and landuse planning, economic and workforce development, and marketing — to permit these parties low-to-no cost access to remote and in-field national expertise. Tools for shared use and cost savings among cities (e.g., model finance tools, CWAs, consistent measurement standards and protocols, joint purchasing agreements on materials) should be developed out of this center and distributed for free. The center should operate in cooperation with but independent of the different federal or other government entities supporting the work. It should be “open source” in the development of its product and services, evidence based in its recommendations, peer reviewed in whatever independent research it does, but unapologetically value-driven (green, equitable, democratic).

We favor such effectively free technical assistance on grounds of both principle and prudence. The principle is that knowledge should be a public good, available to all who want it, irrespective of their income. The prudence is that the social value of knowledge comes in its use, which grows with wider application and experiment and refinement by community of practitioners that learn and share results. There are so many obvious mistakes to be avoided in this work, and so much to be gained from not making them, that we should do everything possible to remove ignorance as their defense. There is also much that we know already, and could share more easily and invite collective intelligence in improving, that there is every reason to get that knowledge out, and those learning routines established. Be assured, the money saved or made through such a technical assistance and learning infrastructure, will be millions of times greater than the cost of building it.

CONCLUSION & A BRIEF PLEA

We think this basic set of rules and institutional commitments would do several good things. In most general terms, it would provide a working basis for unity between the working class and poor, the core of any democratic public, and for an alliance between them and progressive business — giving all these groups an important and respected leadership role. More particularly, it would (1) enable scaled strategic projects to seize the climate and wealth opportunities of a new energy economy, while ensuring that the monetary benefits of that were more equally shared; (2) achieve something closer to real equal opportunity within area labor markets, while rationalizing the delivery of training; (3) increase the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of government; (4) immensely scale up our effort on climate, in part through all of the above and in part through enlistment of greater private capital in that effort.

Of course there are many more details that need to be provided, but the basic program architecture of emerald cities, at least as we see them, should by now be clear. We welcome any and all friendly (meaning, also departing from an interest in shared prosperity, sustainability, and efficient democratic government) criticisms and suggestions for improvement on this statement

of their purpose and structure. Just send to us at indicated addresses.

The plea is this. This New Year's Eve, 2008 — contemplating the vast citizen mobilization over the past year; Barack Obama's election to the Presidency; the urgency of the climate crisis; the new respect for the promise of cities; the partial recent discrediting of the soulless religion of market fundamentalism; the new tone in labor and community; the passionate desire of so many to do something good for the country; the fantastic pace of scientific discovery and invention; and of course, and very soon, the impending departure of Bush-Cheney and the most destructive national government in our nation's long history — we feel enormously hopeful about our country. We think we're standing at the edge, almost within reach, of something of great if essentially still unknown potential good. Greening America's major population centers for greater equity and democracy, not just climate mitigation, could be a fantastically useful national project, a large part of that good.

Please, let's not mess it up. There will inevitably be opposition to this project, efforts to scale it back and water it down, attempts to divide those now jointly committed to it. Let's agree to not let that happen. Our window of opportunity here may be quite narrow. Most of key decisions in getting a national effort on emerald cities going will be made in the next few weeks and months. Let us resolve to enter that period with our wits about us; as brothers and sisters and sinners all; with mutual respect and accountability; and as high a level of clarity on our essential aims, and solidarity in achieving them, as we can possibly muster.

Let's for once not sweat the details, but resolve to get the basics right. Let's keep our eyes on the prize, and act together. This time, truly, the whole world is watching.