

July 2007

# Greene County

Comprehensive  
Economic Development Plan  
*Executive Summary*

A Roadmap  
for  
Our Future



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# Acknowledgements

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# Acknowledgements *continued*

## Planning and Infrastructure Subcommittee *(continued)*

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**GREENEBUSINESS**

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*Sandy Mathes, Executive Director*



*Tracy McNally, Executive Director*



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**Empire State** Development



In today's economic climate, communities around the world are looking to create a competitive environment that offers an ideal quality of life. Contributing to a high quality of life is a region's ability to offer residents meaningful and stable employment, a safe environment for their children, access to recreation, cultural and entertainment venues, competitively priced housing with the likelihood of appreciation, and reasonable tax rates.

## Why the Greene County Legislature Prepared an Economic Development Plan



Municipal and economic development officials understand that a region's ability to create an attractive living environment is dependent on its ability to create and sustain a healthy economy that provides opportunities for personal income and a tax base that supports a desired level of public services. Across the globe, national, regional and local governments are competing to retain and attract that key ingredient so vital to their success. That ingredient is private enterprise. Healthy and growing businesses are needed to provide jobs that offer a salary that sustains a healthy family, and commercial tax revenues that support public services, infrastructure and quality schools that educate our children.

Communities that believe government should not play a role in building a foundation for supporting a quality living environment only need to reflect on American history. In most cases, healthy cities and regions were the result of a preceding public investment in ports, railroads, canals, highways, airports, space exploration, communication networks, or in recent decades, technology led research and development. Today, organized efforts by public and private leaders to develop a shared vision, followed by investments in water, sewer and telecommunications infrastructure, as well as workforce training, education, and partnerships between universities and the private sector, are driving private investment and business development. More than ever, communities are embarking on an economic development planning process that will allow them to identify investments that will address their weaknesses and capitalize on opportunities. As a result, it has become critical for each and every community to consider how it can maintain or even improve its standing among other places to live and conduct business.

# Planning Objectives

In short, the objective of the Greene County Economic Development Plan is to improve the quality of life for County residents. In the end, stakeholders agreed that the quality of life for residents would be improved through the implementation of a strategy that fosters and guides growth while balancing tax rates and the desire to preserve the environmental and community characteristics residents cherish. More specifically; County leaders wanted a plan that would:

- Determine the mix of commercial, industrial, residential and open space land use that would create a long-term stable tax base;
- Expand recreational opportunities and facilities to serve residents and their children;
- Develop programs that could better help existing businesses grow;
- Identify industries in which Greene County had a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses;
- Broaden and enhance programs that would support a tourism industry renaissance;
- Identify appropriate sites for future commercial and industrial development;
- Support telecommunication infrastructure investments necessary to support the needs of County businesses;
- Identify projects and programs that warrant federal, state and local investment that would lead to better employment opportunities, especially for young people;

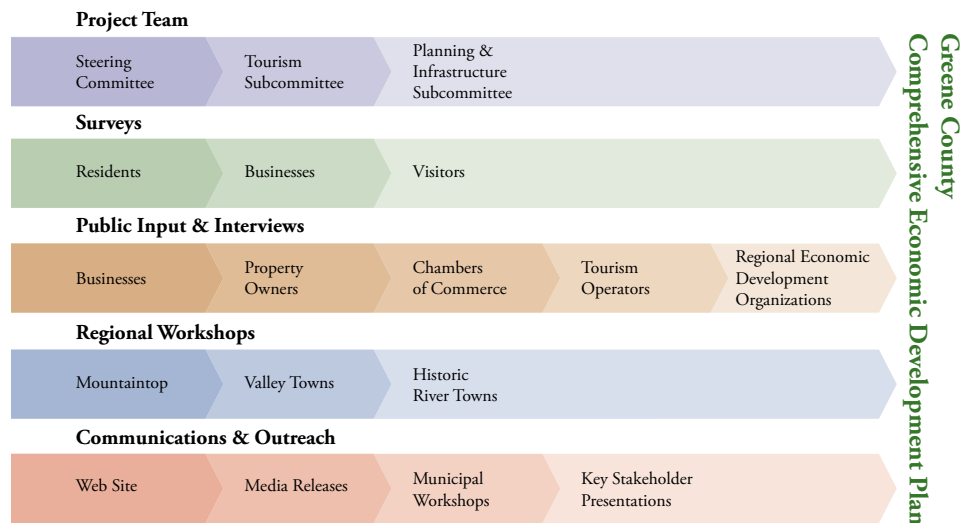
# Greene County's Planning Process

Recognizing the need to develop a long-term vision and plan for the County, the Greene County Legislature embarked on a 2-year Comprehensive Economic Development Planning process. The Greene County Department of Planning & Economic Development spearheaded creation of the plan with the support of its GreeneBusiness partners.



**GREENEBUSINESS**

Understanding the importance of community consensus in the implementation phase, the County process was designed to engage residents, business owners, municipal leaders and other stakeholders in a discussion of the County's current economic condition, problems that needed to be addressed, realistic opportunities for economic growth, development of a clear vision for a preferred future and goals and actions that would lead to its achievement.

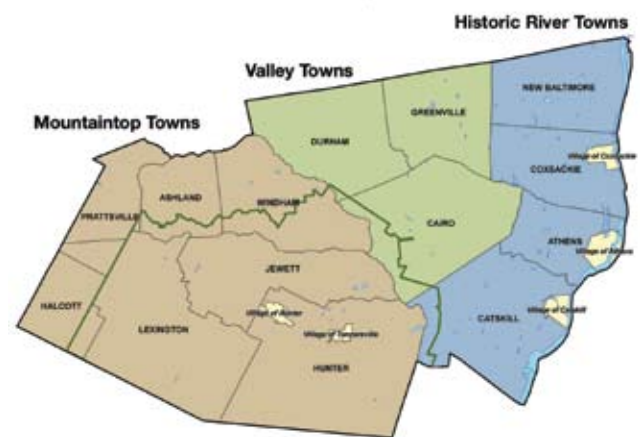


# Greene County's Planning Process

The planning process included an assessment of existing resources, data gathering and interpretation, stakeholder input, the development of strategies and finally a vision that illustrated the County's desired future.

The planning process began with the establishment of a Steering Committee and Tourism and Planning & Infrastructure Subcommittees. Committees were comprised of members representing the County Legislature, Town and Village government, local businesses, labor force, residents, and County Economic Development, Planning, Resource Management and Tourism officials. Steering and Subcommittee members reviewed findings, participated in numerous facilitated discussions, encouraged residents and business owners to participate in public sessions and provided important input to the County Legislature.

**Phase I:** The Resource Assessment began with the compilation and interpretation of economic and demographic data gathered from various state, federal and proprietary sources. Information included firms and employment by industry sector, historical and projected population by age, households, and income, as well as an inventory of commercial and industrial property, and telecommunication and transportation infrastructure. Also included in the Resource Assessment phase were resident, business owner, and visitor surveys.



In addition, public workshops were held in each of the County's three planning regions geographically defined as the Mountaintop, Valley, and Historic River Towns. Workshop participants identified regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats critical to understanding the barriers and prospect for growth, while stakeholder interviews were conducted to better understand business needs, barriers to expansion and the economic development objectives of state and regional organizations. Throughout the planning process, press releases were published to keep stakeholders informed of the findings and progress.

**Phase II:** Strategies delved into policies and approaches that the County could employ to harness its opportunities and address its shortcomings. Strategies were developed to capitalize on targeted industrial development, workforce preparedness, land use, tourism industry enhancement, business retention and expansion, telecommunications infrastructure investment and economic development organizational capacity necessary to ensure success.

**Phase III:** This phase developed a vision for the County's economic future, established goals and objectives in line with that vision and put forth a detailed road map of actions that would enable the County to achieve its vision.

Greene County's vision statement is designed to answer the question, "Where do we want to be in the next ten to twenty years?" It serves as the overall foundation for the economic development plan. Greene County's vision for economic development is presented below:

*Today, Greene County is a community in transition. From the economic challenges of the last few decades, the County is entering the twenty-first century with a unique array of opportunities, capitalizing on its scenic beauty, low cost of living, and access to transportation routes; its historic and economic ties to the Capital Region, the Catskill Mountains, and the Hudson Valley; its proximity to the New York City metropolitan area; and the dreams and desires of its inhabitants. The description below presents a vision of Greene County ten or twenty years into the future:*

## Greene County's Future

*"Where do we want to be in the next ten to twenty years?"*

*The Greene County economy is characterized as balanced, healthy, and diverse. It encompasses large and small companies, tradition and innovation, locally-owned and new to the area. The County has established a balanced portfolio of businesses critical to future economic growth. Quality employment opportunities are available in a range of strategic and targeted industries, including technology and other knowledge-based sectors; an increasing proportion of residents are able to work locally due to growth in the number of higher-paying jobs and professions. Greene County has a thriving small business sector, and a culture of entrepreneurship that has existed from its earliest days.*

*Greene County has been successful in achieving what some refer to as "the delicate balance," fostering the right kind of economic development while preserving the county's unique quality of life and sense of place through model land use regulations and sound development principles. Development is directed primarily to existing village centers and major transportation corridors, allowing economic growth to occur without sacrificing Greene County's natural beauty and rural small town character. The County has created appropriate "shovel-ready" sites with Empire Zone designation for new and expanding businesses to occupy, while setting aside adjacent land for environmental, habitat, and open space protection.*

*Recognizing the importance of a skilled and educated workforce, Greene County works closely with local educators and the business community to ensure that educational opportunities for children, youth, and adults are all first-rate. Local school districts encourage students to explore career choices in high school, facilitating their ability to participate in an increasingly diverse service and knowledge-based economy. Columbia-Greene Community College and Questar III have access to state-of-the-art equipment, and maintain effective programs that address ongoing skills training needs and prepare individuals for jobs in identified strategic and targeted industries, working in partnership with County economic development officials to implement the County's adopted Economic Development Plan.*

*Tourism is a significant contributor to the Greene County economy and remains its core identity and sense of place. Stimulated by private investment in regional tourism destination facilities, resorts and attractions, newly renovated lodging facilities, historic and cultural sites, and the development of retail and dining amenities, tourism has become a year-round industry, generating substantial jobs and revenue for the County. Agriculture and forestry are also important to the local economy, producing a variety of quality products for local and regional markets, while serving as the basis for value-added processing and the development of small scale niche businesses.*

*Greene County's population comprises a mix of families that have resided here for generations and those who have relocated here because of its affordable housing stock, rural environment and ideal location; the owners of seasonal homes who have decided to live and work here year-round; and recent college graduates who have returned to the County to enter the workforce or start a business. Building on Greene County's cultural heritage, artists, performers and writers have become a major force in the local economy.*



*Towns and villages in Greene County are vibrant, attractive places in which to live and work. While each community is unique, each offers a diverse range of housing options, abundant opportunities for both indoor and outdoor recreation, and access to health care, shopping, and other amenities. Municipalities, residents and businesses take pride in making the County an attractive place to live and invest. Vacant structures in historic Main Street areas have been renovated and redeveloped into distinctive residential and commercial properties. Municipalities are served by reliable telecommunications infrastructure, facilitating work-from-home options as well as technology-related economic growth.*

*Greene County leaders recognize that the Historic River Towns, Valley Towns, and Mountaintop Towns each have their own assets and opportunities for economic development. Decision-making about land use and appropriate locations for development will continue to rest with local communities; partnerships between municipalities and the County, however, remain essential for planning and economic development.*



# Pertinent Issues and a Plan of Action

The vision, survey responses, data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and regional workshop findings provided the information and direction needed for the project team to craft goals and a plan of action. As the information was assessed, a number of conclusions or themes began to emerge. Each of these themes would eventually support the development of a series of goals and actions. The following summarizes the significant project findings and illustrates the subsequent goals and actions of the Greene County Economic Development Plan:

## 1. Business Development and Target Industry Attraction

Like many rural upstate counties, Greene County has a significant portion of its workforce employed in the public sector. In fact, government is the largest employer in Greene County, accounting for 30% of all jobs. Most of these jobs are in local government and in the state prison in Coxsackie.

Existing and planned business activities in Greene County, along with its location between the lower Hudson Valley and Albany Capital District offers future opportunity for reducing the County's reliance on the public sector for employment. A number of private industry sectors with expansion and attraction potential were identified. These industry sectors included:

- Traditional Manufacturing: Food processing, printing, plastics and rubber
- Advanced Manufacturing: Fabricated metals, medical devices and electronics
- Emerging Technologies: Nanotechnology, energy production and biotechnology
- Technical/Professional Services: Back office and financial services

Access to highway travel corridors such as I-87 and I-90, the availability of industrial property and its proximity to major metropolitan markets including Albany, Boston and New York City, now make Greene County a competitive location for distribution operations and traditional manufacturing.

Longer term, the continued rapid growth of the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering of the University at Albany (CNSE) and its growing list of electronic and bioscience corporate partners, will pose opportunities for Greene County to capitalize on emerging technology sectors. CNSE's rapidly growing NanoTech complex has already attracted over 250 global corporate partners. Significant investment by Sematech and International Sematech, along with the anticipated arrival of companies such as AMD will surely increase demand for commercial and other advanced research and development space.

However, to ensure its future economic success, Greene County will need to offer a well trained and skilled labor force. To achieve this objective, it will be imperative that County leaders encourage the current and future workforce to explore and pursue advanced education in the fields of business, science, information technology and engineering. Support will require access to the skills training necessary to meet the needs of existing and new businesses.

To manage its growth and build a foundation for a healthy economy and financial future, Greene County should encourage a balanced portfolio of companies representing various industry sectors. These sectors include traditional manufacturing and distribution facilities, while looking to the horizon for those new technology segments that will offer advancement and job opportunities for residents.

However, leaders recognize that Greene County has a diverse geography and population base that offers both challenges and opportunities for economic development. While a policy of industrial development is appropriate for the River Towns and portions of the Valley Towns with its flat topography, workforce and I-90 access, a strategy of preservation, smaller scale business recruitment and tourism development is more suitable for the Valley and Mountain regions.

Today, job creation in rural economies is primarily driven by small businesses. These businesses are vital to offering needed products and services to residents. Greene County is no exception and has been implementing a successful small business technical assistance and loan program for over ten years. Continued support for its Main Street building program and other small business programs is also vital to creating a diverse and stable economy, particularly in the Valley and Mountain regions.

## Goal 1:

*Expand the quantity and quality of employment opportunities through the development of a balanced, diverse, and year-round economy.*

*Objectives include:*

- Retaining existing businesses through regular outreach and assistance;
- Recruiting businesses in the target industries; attracting businesses identified in Greene County's Empire Zone Development Plan to the County's existing and future industrial parks;
- Continuing to support entrepreneurship and small business growth;
- Supporting collaborative regional economic development efforts;
- Supporting agriculture as an important industry.

The tourism sector remains a critical part of the Greene County economy with its businesses providing roughly 10% of all County jobs. However, the industry has been deteriorating since the 1950's as air travel and newer offerings have been better able to meet the changing demands of travelers. Today, Vermont, Colorado and Utah have become preferred destinations for those looking for a mountain vacation experience. These destinations offer resorts with the modern amenities, activities, dining and shopping desired.

## 2. Tourism



Yet the County's greatest tourism industry advantage is its proximity to the NY/NJ metropolitan area. Inducing private investment in existing and new tourism destinations and facilities will be vital to the revitalization of the Greene County tourism industry. Over the years, the County has seen the closure of numerous travel destinations, the most recent of which was the Catskill Game Farm. While the County now offers financing incentives to lodging and other business owners willing to invest and upgrade their facilities, additional tax and financing incentives will be necessary to foster private investment in new venues that will attract today's traveler.



### Goal 2:

*Generate long-term revenue growth in the tourism industry as a strategy for economic development. Objectives include:*

- Development of new destination venues, such as the recently announced IDA Multi-Use Destination Retail Park in New Baltimore;
- Promoting Greene County as a four season vacation destination by cultivating arts and history attractions, mid-week meetings and conferences, and also with special events and trip packages;
- Supporting efforts to adapt attractions and accommodations to the expectations of the travel market;
- Using the Internet more effectively in marketing;
- Developing retail amenities and services for tourists;
- Creating more awareness of the County to overseas travelers;
- Establishing ways to evaluate and measure the tourism industry's contribution to the local economy.

### 3. Land Use & Regional Planning



Unfortunately, many communities are experiencing rapid development demand prior to the preparation of adequate land use plans and zoning regulations. This lack of planning has led to a loss of community character, environmental issues and unsound public financial conditions. Residents have clearly indicated the desire to maintain the County's rural, mountain and historic character. As the County proceeds, it is imperative that the concepts of smart growth, with emphasis on protecting environmentally sensitive property, preserving open space and maintaining community and historic character are at the forefront of any planning and development effort.



#### Goal 3:

*Preserve and enhance the physical and environmental characteristics that make Greene County a distinct and identifiable place, while providing for the needs of existing and prospective residents.*

*Objectives include:*

- Encouraging more densely settled development within existing hamlets;
- Developing model planning tools for municipalities;
- Identifying and implementing regulatory policies to achieve desired community development as defined by each municipality;
- Identifying incentives to promote investment in established communities and designated growth areas;
- Promoting policies to improve the general appearance of the County and prevent blight;
- Supporting the revitalization of downtowns and Main Street areas;
- Continuing to balance economic growth with preservation of the community's natural environment, quality of life, and rural character;
- Assisting municipalities in adopting local comprehensive plans.

## 4. Workforce

Analysis of employment data, business survey and interviews with private employers revealed a number of workforce issues that must be addressed. These revelations include:

- The existence of a misalignment between the targeted industries identified for attraction and current available workforce training programs;
- A high rate of residents (42%), employed in higher paid professions, commuting to surrounding counties for employment;
- A limited number of employment opportunities for those with two- and four-year degrees;
- The skill, labor quality and attitude of Greene County's workforce was rated by employers as poor;
- The quantity of available labor makes it difficult for employers to fill openings. Ski facilities and some resorts, however, have been able to utilize seasonal labor from South America, Australia, and New Zealand to address this labor shortage issue.



### Goal 4:

*Develop a skilled and educated workforce that will meet the needs of existing businesses and emerging industries in Greene County. Objectives include:*

- Maintaining/creating programs to address the training and education needs of Greene County businesses and residents;
- Continuing to enhance the roles of Columbia-Greene Community College, the Workforce Investment Office, Questar III/BOCES, local school districts, and other educational institutions in preparing students for today's knowledge-based economy and developing a competitive labor force;
- Addressing gaps in education and training to respond to the needs of target industries;
- Highlighting the positive aspects of Greene County's workforce and educational system;
- Facilitating the development of business consortia to jointly access training resources;
- Identifying and pursuing new funding sources that support the educational and training needs of existing and emerging businesses in Greene County.

Perhaps the single greatest concern voiced by residents through the planning process was their desire for a healthy balance of economic development and community preservation. It was also clear that County officials understand the environmental constraints associated with development, especially

## 5. Quality of Life



the need for habitat and wetlands protection and storm water management mitigation.

In addition, residents and County leaders alike recognize the need for improving the quality of life for residents by offering improved public recreation facilities, cultural and entertainment venues and trail systems.



### Goal 5:

*Improve the quality of life in Greene County by upgrading and expanding community services, facilities, and amenities. Objectives include:*

- Supporting efforts to improve the quality, availability and accessibility of health care services;
- Supporting efforts to improve the quality of school districts and better promote their successes to be competitive in the Capital Region;
- Supporting efforts to develop recreational and community facilities;
- Supporting efforts to increase shopping and dining options in appropriate areas in the designated hamlets and municipalities;
- Promoting the development of an array of housing options (affordable, special needs and senior, starter homes, and workforce housing) to meet the varied needs of residents and workers with respect to age, income level, tenure, and affordability;
- Improving the condition and supply of housing to respond to the needs of a demographically and economically diverse market;
- Developing catalytic projects, such as new health care centers, sports complexes, art and cultural centers, and a hotel training school or culinary institute, that will enhance quality of life and spur economic growth in Greene County.

Tremendous success has been achieved by the Greene County Legislature, the Greene County IDA and Greene County Planning and Economic Development in the identification, planning, funding and development of shovel ready business parks. This effort has yielded initial success in the attraction of new Save-A-Lot distribution and Serta Mattress manufacturing facilities.

## 6. Infrastructure and Public Facilities



Recognizing the need to ensure a healthy commercial tax base, the County must continue to plan for the designation and development of additional industrial space. However, topography and environmental features limit the amount of developable space available in the River Towns Region.

Although a significant amount of property has been identified for future development, it is important that additional property ideal for commercial and industrial be identified now to ensure the County can meet the needs of businesses for years to come.



### Goal 6:

*Develop a steady supply of commercial and industrial land, sites and buildings that support the needs of existing and emerging businesses in Greene County. Objectives include:*

- Continuing to pursue “shovel-ready” status for the Hudson Valley Business Park, the future Athens Industrial Park, and the future Catskill Industrial Park;
- Identifying additional sites throughout the County appropriate for future business and industrial park development. These new sites should consider location (i.e. Mountain Top vs. River Towns), market expectations, soils, topography, access to utilities, highway access, zoning, revenue benefits and other criteria;
- Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable flexible space for small and start-up businesses; and encouraging adequate infrastructure to support business expansion and new development opportunities.

The retention, expansion and attraction of most businesses, and high-tech producer services firms in particular, are now dependent on infrastructure for data processing, distribution, and transmission. In rural areas, where this infrastructure is not readily available, businesses and residents struggle with the need for reliable and effective services.

The corridor between Albany and New York City, known as “Tech Valley,” is faced with the opportunity and challenge of competing as a premium location for technology-based businesses.

## 7. Telecommunications



While Greene County has the strategic advantage of being located south of the Capital District and north of New York City, as a rural county, telecommunications infrastructure will need to be enhanced for the next waves of technological growth and change.

Telecommunications needs are not currently being met in parts of the County. Providers do not serve several municipalities, and even some communities that are served have sporadic and unreliable service. Improve-

ments in the telecommunications system in Greene County would promote economic growth by fostering an increased base of business-to-business sales, as well as that of business-to-consumer sales. Residents, businesses, educational institutions, health care providers, and municipal governments would also greatly benefit from enhanced telecommunications availability.

### Goal 7:

*Support the creation of reliable, high-quality telecommunications infrastructure that meets the needs of existing and emerging industries in Greene County, ensures connectivity, and allows all communities throughout the County to participate in economic development.*

#### *Objectives include:*

- Encouraging current telecom providers to fill connectivity gaps and improve service to all areas of the County, especially the mountaintop region, Jefferson Heights, Leeds, Palenville, and Tannersville;
- Extending wireless Internet technology to existing business parks, densely settled areas and Main Street areas, as well as mountaintop and valley communities that are currently underserved;
- Continuing to build partnerships with telecommunications providers and the State of New York;
- Identifying funding sources to help expand telecommunications infrastructure and extend service to currently underserved areas.



## Implementation - The Road Ahead



Through its economic development planning process, Greene County has analyzed industry data, surveyed residents, interviewed business owners, inventoried its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and obtained considerable feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders. The result is a comprehensive road map of actions adopted by the Greene County Legislature as a plan for achieving the community's desired future. Residents, business owners and public officials together have developed this vision and strategy through consensus. While there will always be other divergent views and ideas, the Plan represents the ideals and values Greene County citizens, businesses and public leaders share.

Too often, however, even the best laid economic development plans sit idle as community leaders are unable to transition from discussion of where to go, to the management and implementation of what must be accomplished. While the planning process required communication and facilitation, implementation requires leadership, perseverance and focus on accomplishing objectives. It is vital to Greene County's success that the Greene County Legislature, GreeneBusiness Partners and other organizations and leaders recognize their role as not only Plan champions, but as Plan managers that will ensure that assignments are delegated and responsibility is shared.

To achieve this, County leaders need to understand the implications of each decision and new policy on the Plan's objectives. Whether it is the allocation of financial resources, decisions about land use, tax incentive policy, marketing message or the management of personnel, leaders should consider how the outcome of their decision works to achieve the County's new vision.

While this Executive Summary briefly illustrates the road that lies ahead for Greene County leaders, specific details and direction are more fully presented in the full Plan document. To ensure that public and private leaders use this Plan as a basis for decision making, we strongly recommend that policy makers, residents and other business leaders learn more by logging on to [www.greeneeconomicdevelopment.com](http://www.greeneeconomicdevelopment.com)