

The big green apple

Environmentally-sound homes for the poor are a model for everyone else

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BOILER rooms are often dirty and steamy, but this one is pristine and cool. Fox Point is a spanking new 47-unit residential building in the South Bronx, one of the city's poorest pockets. Two-thirds of its residents are formerly homeless people, whose rent is paid by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The rest are low-income families. The boiler room houses a microturbine system, which generates energy for electricity and heat. It reuses heat that would otherwise be lost to the atmosphere, reducing carbon emissions while also cutting costs.

Fox Point is operated by Palladia, a non-profit group that specialises in providing housing and services to needy people. Palladia received financial support and technical expertise from Enterprise Community Partners, which helps build affordable housing by providing financing to community and housing developers.

Enterprise believes "green" and "affordable" are one and the same. It has created a national framework for healthy, efficient, environmentally clever and affordable homes which it calls the Green Communities Criteria. These criteria include water conservation, energy efficiency and the use of environmentally-friendly building materials. The criteria are aligned with LEED, a green rating system. Meeting the criteria increases housing construction costs by 2%, which is rapidly paid back by lower running costs. Even

the positioning of a window to optimise daylight can help save energy.

Michael Bloomberg, New York's mayor, plans to create 165,000 affordable and sustainable housing units to house 500,000 New Yorkers. Almost 80% of New York City's greenhouse-gas emissions come from buildings, and 40% of those are caused by housing. So he recently announced that the city's Department of Housing and Preservation and Development (HPD), which is responsible for developing and maintaining the city's stock of affordable housing, will require all its new projects to adhere to Enterprise's green criteria. Similar measures have been adopted by other cities, such as Cleveland and Denver, but New York's HPD is the largest municipal developer of affordable housing in the country.

These sound ideas are spreading. On March 18th, Tom Menino, the mayor, announced that Boston's Housing Authority will receive \$63m for energy-efficiency improvements, the largest public-housing energy efficiency project in America's history. In Chicago, Lathrop Homes, one of the earliest public-housing developments in the city, is about to get its own green makeover; it aims to be the country's first public-housing development to get the full LEED certification. That should be good news both for the city and its poor.