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Mayor Menino and the city of Boston, the host of Green Build, take steps toward a greener city

October 15, 2008 - Green Buildings

We are proud to be hosting the 2008 Green Build conference. We feel we are the perfect hosts for this conference because here in Boston we are committed to making our city one of the greenest in the country.

Let me tell you how. The city of Boston has been nationally recognized as a leader in environmental and energy policy. Almost two years ago, Boston was the first major city in the nation to require all large private construction projects to adhere to the US Green Building Council's LEED standards and is the largest municipal purchaser of wind power in N.E. For these efforts, Boston was recently named the 3rd Greenest City in North America by Popular Science Magazine.

Because we know that buildings account for almost three quarters of Boston's greenhouse gas emissions, we are looking at all the ways we can make our new and existing buildings greener and more efficient. The city applied for and received a \$2 million grant from the Mass. Technology Collaborative to green our affordable housing pipeline. With those funds, we revised our design guidelines to include green, healthy, energy efficient, and renewable energy standards. City-funded projects must meet Energy Star and LEED Silver standards, and must also be built solar ready. To date, the city has funded six projects totaling over 135 kilowatts of solar energy capacity on over 200 units of affordable housing. The residents of these units will reap the benefits of lower energy costs and better indoor air quality.

In September, SustainLane.com, ranked Boston 6th in the nation for sustainability, moving us up one spot from last year. Their study cited the city's executive order from April 2007, calling for the city's first community-wide greenhouse gas inventory and a 10% increase in recycling by 2012. The study also took into consideration two other policies that we just enacted - that all taxicabs go hybrid by 2015, and a mandate to assess all city buildings for alternative energy potential. The new standards for hybrid vehicles will be phased in as current vehicles reach their mandatory retirement age of six years. Hybrid taxis will reduce carbon emissions from the taxi fleet by 50% and will save taxi drivers \$1,000 a month in fuel costs. We anticipate that within two years more than 50% of the fleet will be hybrid.

Of course, getting people out of cars altogether is even greener. So we're also taking steps to make Boston a bike-friendly city. I hired a former Olympic cyclist as my new "bike czar." We're installing more bike racks and expanding the city's network of bike trails. And we've amended our street design guidelines so future roadways will make room for bikes. In September, I hosted Hub on Wheels, an annual citywide charity bike ride that included 4,000 people who rode 10, 30, or even 50 miles that day.

In Boston we know that partnerships are the key to success. That's why we've taken steps to educate our citizens and let them know how they can be a part of making our city greener. The city's office of environment and energy uses its webpage to offer residents an "Energy Tip of the Day." The page also asks people to take our Climate Action Pledge, 10 simple steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Only with business, government, and residents working together will we achieve our ultimate goal of reducing emissions 80% by 2050.

The future of cities is sustainability. In Boston, we are taking the necessary steps to ensure the future of our city, not just for this generation, but for the ones to follow. Taking care of the environment is and always will be a main tenet for Boston's success. Sustainability means a cleaner and healthier environment, one that will keep residents and attract businesses to help boost our economy in uncertain times. From the Grow Boston Greener campaign to Lights Out Boston, the city has worked diligently to bring a higher environmental standard for Boston. We continue to demonstrate that we can grow our city and our economy in a way that is healthy for the environment.

Thomas Menino is the mayor of Boston.

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