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## In South Boston, The Greenest Of 'Green' Buildings

By [David Boeri](#)

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BOSTON - February 27, 2009 - This week, in his first budget, President Obama boosted spending on conservation and renewable energy. As a result, officials in Massachusetts are hoping to get more money for green projects.

Boston, for instance, has been lobbying hard for funding. It's the first major city to rewrite its zoning laws to incorporate "green" building standards.

WBUR's David Boeri takes us along to a building in South Boston that's a prime example.

It's four stories tall, made of steel and glass, and located on the site of an old livery stable and coach house when energy came from horses. The Epi Center in the Fort Point Arts District is a stunning accomplishment in green building.

MARK KELLY: This is one of the few platinum buildings in the country.

That's Mark Kelly, energy engineer and green visionary, who was brought in by the architect to make the building as green as possible. And the result is that Epi Center has been rated as LEED Platinum -- that's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Platinum -- the highest possible grade. One of only two in Boston.

KELLY: That's right, one of only 50 in the country. So this is the cat's meow. That's right. If you were a cat this would be your meow.

And that makes this building very interesting, especially now that the federal government is making green a big part of its stimulus package. The only other LEED Platinum Building in Boston is Genzyme's, built at more than \$400 a square foot, while the Epi Center was built for \$95 a square foot. Since 2004, it's been home to Artists for Humanity.

SUSAN RODGERSON: We run an after-hours program for students in fine arts and commercial arts services.

The non-profit has been around for almost 20 years. Its executive director Susan Rodgers says when their idea of a grungy old loft failed, they set out to build something new.

RODGERSON: The principles we wanted to employ are probably the simplest things. How do you build an affordable green building? Well you make it as simple as you can. And you base it on principles people were using a hundred years ago. Natural light. Super insulation. Natural ventilation.

Big windows allow plenty of diffuse light with true color, artists' light. And the interior walls are made of clear acrylic. Even in winter time, little electrical lighting is needed.

RODGERSON: Hey Drew can you open the roof please!

Then there's the roof.

RODGERSON: We have an ocean view from here.

Here, being under the second largest array of photo-voltaic cells in Boston. Forty-two kilowatts, Kelly says.

KELLY: Over a year's time this might produce 80 to 90 percent of the electricity.

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RODGERSON: And most of that produced during summer months and we bank it in the grid and withdraw in the winter.

[Fans, ventilation]

Hear that sound?

That's the ventilation system and the fans that drive it. They are an essential component of a design that saved a couple hundred thousand dollars in construction costs and far more in operating costs by eliminating an air conditioning system altogether.

KELLY/RODGERSON: There are two big fans on the roof?to cool the building at night. It's like a cooling tower. Empty elevator shaft with mega fans on the roof draws all the hot daytime air in the summer and brings in the cool nighttime air.

Which then cools the concrete. The overall result of Kelly's engineering is that the Epi Center is saving 79 percent of the energy costs of a conventional building. His work is groundbreaking. And yet Kelly says the most important solution to global warming and dependence upon fossil fuels, says Kelly, is going to come not from new green construction but from work on existing buildings.

KELLY: All those buildings have to be retrofitted. That's where all the energy is going. It's over one third of the energy we goes. Goes to building. that's the place buildings.

Homes and commercial buildings together account for 70 percent of all electricity and 30 percent of all energy use in the country. The solutions are simple, just as the ideas implemented at the Epi Center: Lots of insulation, tight construction, and maximizing natural light and ventilation.

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