

# Foundation Communities

## Austin, Texas



## Sustainability Assessments and Master Planning



In September, 2008 we conducted an SSC Green Audit at Foundation Communities, surveying their employees, calculating their carbon footprint, and suggesting the most strategic and cost-effective way to go green.

Foundation Communities is a nonprofit organization that creates high-quality affordable housing and empowers low-income families and individuals with programs that educate, support, and improve financial standing. It focuses on four core areas that serve as the foundation upon which families can build their success: opening doors to homes, ending homelessness, learning to succeed, and saving for the future.

In addition to greening their own operations, Foundation Communities was interested in communicating their green commitment to their external stakeholders and helping their clients become greener as well, particularly for the associated cost-saving benefits.

Since 2003, Foundation Communities has implemented numerous green building elements into all of its new construction

and renovation projects, as well as in the organization's administrative offices. Foundation Communities owns 11 properties in Austin and three properties in Dallas. Foundation Communities is one of the largest private producers of solar energy in central Texas.

There is a certain portion and capacity of wind coming from Western Texas into the city grid, and the wind power enters a general pool of electricity. However, Foundation Communities has a contract from Austin Energy to make sure that energy is 100 percent renewable at all properties.

All properties range from 100 units to 200 units, with the accounts paid by Foundations Communities running on 100 percent renewable energy (either solar or wind) through Austin Energy.

Solar energy is currently installed on five properties, with roof-mounted water heating and photovoltaic systems (solar electric panels and solar thermal panels).

### Motivation

Renewable energy is chosen for long-term owners, and the long-range investments make smart financial sense. Austin Energy has a rebate program set up for any kind of commercial use, and depending on the project, two-thirds to three-fourths of the end cost is covered, which is viable in the long-term. Residential, single-family house rebates are also available, with comprehensive rebates from Austin Energy.



### Client

Foundation Communities

### Industry

Non-profit, Affordable Housing

### Contact

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### Date

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Choosing renewable energy also aligns with Foundation Communities' mission of commitment to building and managing affordable housing with strong roots in sustainable practices. Green building practices improve the health of their residents, the durability of their buildings, and the well-being of the environment. Energy and water efficient design elements enable residents to reduce their utility bills as well.

### Costs

For solar energy, Foundation Communities pays the initial cost, with a payback period of 10 to 15 years. After this period, Foundation Communities gets energy for free.

For wind energy, there is a slight premium over "traditional" electricity rates, but Foundation Communities was able to lock in a steady rate, so they won't be affected by any future increases in price later on.

### Green Benefits

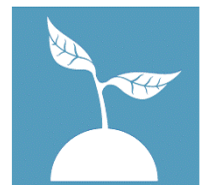
By using green power, the organization avoids the nearly 50 tons of carbon emissions a year that would normally be associated with its administrative offices electricity and natural gas.

### Other Benefits

Besides bragging rights, as a non-profit, those interested in donating to Foundation Communities in fundraising efforts are usually more inclined to do so if environmentally sound practices are implemented.

### Next on the Agenda

Looking at older properties to take on a new green perspective, since when the properties were built renewable energy was not at the top of the list. More insulation, low flow toilets and other green building components are being installed in older units.



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