

MILANO THE NEW SCHOOL FOR MANAGEMENT AND URBAN POLICY

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to confirm that the New School Solar Decathlon project, named the Empowerhouse Collaborative, meets the criteria set forth in AASHE's STARS Reporting Framework for Innovation credits.

Established in 2002, the Solar Decathlon is a biennial event overseen by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), in which university teams compete to design and build the most attractive and energy-efficient solar-powered house. An international competition, this year's finalists include entries from Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, and China. The 20 finalists will be displayed on the National Mall for ten days in Fall 2011; the 2009 competition exhibit drew some 300,000 house visits.

Conducted over a 2 ½ year period, Empowerhouse is a partnership between the university's design school (Parsons) and its public policy and management school (Milano), with the Stevens Institute of Technology Engineering School, as well as Habitat for Humanity of Washington, D.C., the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the District Department of the Environment (DDOE), and Washington, D.C. Ward 7 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC), as well as other community-based organizations, to promote the concept of affordable AND sustainable housing.

One strength that distinguishes the Empowerhouse team is its focus on immediate, real-world impact. Its house will consist of two symbiotic modules that will unite to form a functioning solar duplex. Each module will be sustainable on its own, but they will achieve peak energy efficiency when they are joined together. The team will assemble Module One in DC's Ward 7 community, and will display Module Two on the National Mall for the Solar Decathlon. When the competition is over, the team will move Module Two to Ward 7 and connect it to Module One. The resulting duplex will comfortably accommodate two families in need.

Already, the project has provided Habitat for Humanity of Washington, D.C. a new, more sustainable building model that it plans to promote to other Habitat chapters, while also expanding greatly its own efforts to achieve sustainability. The Empowerhouse design incorporates "Passive House" principles—an international building standard that requires 90% less energy for heating and cooling compared to ordinary houses.

The Empowerhouse project has demonstrated the capacity of The New School as a university to foster collaboration among key stakeholders. The DHDC and DDOE have attested that the project brought together these agencies in unique ways, and bridged to the community, to foster joint approaches to achieve affordable sustainability solutions. Officials of the U.S. Department of Energy have meanwhile engaged The New School in discussions with the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency to explore opportunities for collaboration based on the New School's interdisciplinary approach to sustainability. The DOE is interested, among other accomplishments, in the work of two finance classes in demonstrating innovative financing models for sustainable housing—work that Habitat commissioned as a client to advance its own innovations.

Dozens of courses across the institution feature Solar Decathlon components, and students have played the critical role in leading and learning from the project. In May 2011, they organized a symposium that included nine presentations by groups of students from all three schools (including engineering, architecture, product design, finance, public policy) to reflect on the innovative learning approaches of the project. In part, this symposium was supported by a grant from the university's Innovations in Education Fund, to examine and develop such curricular and pedagogical innovations.

The Empowerhouse Solar Decathlon project has set a new standard for innovative education in sustainability at the university, which students and faculty intended to continue to demonstrate and enact well beyond the timeline and confines of the DOE competition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Clinton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Clinton, PhD
Associate Professor
of Environmental Policy & Sustainability Management