

Concept Paper: Growing Boston's Convention and Tourism Industry by Making the City a Green Convention and Tourism Destination

By Daniel Ruben

Boston's convention and tourism industry is a very important component of the city's economy. A Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce report said that tourism is one of Boston's five top industries, accounting for 73,600 jobs in 2004.¹ The Boston Foundation's Boston Indicator's Report says that, "visitors to Boston generated a direct economic impact of \$4.22 billion in 2003."² According to the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, the visitor industry generates a total impact of nearly \$7 billion annually."³

The convention and visitor industry can grow further by differentiating Boston as an environmentally appealing, or "green" destination. A green destination is one that has both appealing natural attractions and environmentally-advanced convention and visitor services. Boston stands to gain from achieving and marketing this status, because many visitors base their plans around environmental considerations. This is evidenced by the growing number of convention planners who demand convention facilities and practices that minimize their environmental impact, and the burgeoning ecotourism industry.

Portland Oregon has taken the green meeting concept further than other American cities, and it has prospered significantly. Between May 2003 and December 2004, 14 environmental conferences met in Portland, requiring 38,072 hotel rooms, and bringing an estimated \$10.5 million dollars to the city.⁴ (See Addendum 1 and www.pova.org/meeting_planners/green_meetings/ for a list of green meetings that recently selected Portland, and to see their marketing approach, "We're Rolling out the Green Carpet.")

Robert Imperata, Executive Vice President of the Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau noted that Pittsburgh has marketed their convention center's environmental advantages since it opened in 2003, and have landed three conventions worth a total of \$7 to \$10 million. (See Addendum 1.)

Besides meeting professionals, tourists are also attracted to clean, beautiful cities and to businesses that protect the environment. A recent survey taken by the Travel Industry Association of America says that 83% of U.S. travelers are inclined to support green travel companies; and that business and leisure travelers are willing to spend 6.2% more for travel services and products provided by environmentally responsible companies.⁵

Boston is well positioned to become the east coast's green meeting and tourism destination, because we are strong in the two required areas: access to nature, beauty, and outdoor recreation; and environmentally-friendly facilities and services. Boston now has a cleaner environment, more advanced environmental practices, better access to nature, and more recreational opportunities than ever before in its modern history. Boston also has some environmentally-advanced hotels, a state-of-the-art new convention center, a clean and impressive mass transit system, and access to local and organic food.

¹ "2005 Leading Industries Report," Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

² "Thinking Globally/Acting Locally, A Regional Wake-Up Call, A Summary of the Boston Indicator's Report, 2002-2004," The Boston Foundation.

³ "2005 Leading Industries Report," Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

⁴ "City Positioned to Deliver Sustainable Meetings," The Business Journal, Portland, March 12, 2004.

⁵ "The Greening of Business Travel," Lohas Journal, May/June 2001.

By building on these achievements, the convention and tourism industry could boost its revenue, and in the process advance Boston's image as a progressive city and an environmental leader. In this paper, I describe how, with a modestly funded effort, visitor industry stakeholders could attract more meetings and visitors to Boston, boost the city's prestige, and improve our environment.

Besides access to nature, beauty and outdoor recreation, what is meant by a green convention and tourism destination?

Green convention and tourism customers value the following characteristics in facilities and services:

- facilities that reduce fossil use through energy efficiency, energy conservation, and use of renewable energy,
- transportation alternatives that are energy efficient and have low emissions,
- water use efficiency,
- solid waste reduction and recycling,
- healthy indoor air quality and minimization of toxic substances,
- local and organic food, and
- consumer education about the environment.

By demonstrating such environmentally responsible practices in the following areas, Boston would improve its position to attract environmentally-minded conventions and tourists.

- **Convention Centers** (The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, World Trade Center, Hynes Convention Center, and Bayside Expo Center): Adopt more environmentally sound practices and publicize their environmental programs on their websites and in their literature. (See Addendum 2. Also, view www.oregoncc.org/sustainability/greenreport.pdf and moscone.com/community/sustain.html for two examples.)
- **Lodging Facilities:** Become recognized as environmentally-preferred lodging facilities. There are several options for demonstrating a facility's merits:
 - certification programs: the EPA's Energy Star program: energystar.gov/index.cfm?; LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for Existing Buildings: www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=221&; Green Seal: greenseal.org/standards/lodgingproperties.htm, Audubon Green Leaf Program: terrachoice.com/Home/Clients/Hotels, and Green Globe 21: greenglobe21.com.
 - setting and meeting standards (California's Green Lodging Program: ciwmb.ca.gov/epp/greenlodging/hotels/default.htm; Florida's Green Lodging Certification Program: dep.state.fl.us/waste/categories/recycling/GreenLodging/, Vermont's Green Hotels Initiative: vtgreenhotels.org/, and Ceres Green Hotel Initiative, ceres.org/pub/docs/Ceres_GHI_BPS_survey.pdf).
 - describing each facilities' environmental achievements ([bostonfinancial.hyatt.com/property/specialoffers/newspromotions_detail.jhtml?id=6; fairmont.com/FA/en/CDA/Home/PressRoom/CDPressRoomInfo/0,1100,code%25255Ftype%253DENVR%2526brand%25255Fcode%253DFA%2526brand%25255Fseq%253D1000011,00.html](http://bostonfinancial.hyatt.com/property/specialoffers/newspromotions_detail.jhtml?id=6;fairmont.com/FA/en/CDA/Home/PressRoom/CDPressRoomInfo/0,1100,code%25255Ftype%253DENVR%2526brand%25255Fcode%253DFA%2526brand%25255Fseq%253D1000011,00.html); lenoxhotel.com/about/environment.htm).
- **Transportation:** Publicize Boston as a destination where visitors do not need cars. Demonstrate how visitors can get to their destinations by mass transit or walking. Offer hybrid vehicle rental options and access to tours that use low emission vehicles.
- **Restaurants and Caterers:** Restaurants can become environmentally-preferred through certification (see dinegreen.com) or by setting and meeting their own standards (see San Diego Natural Pages, which lists restaurants that are certified green, and those offering organic and vegetarian food, greenguidenaturalpages.com/directory.html#Restaurants). Caterers that offer local and organic food could be highlighted, too.

- **Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau:** Communicate how the Boston area is a green destination. Help environmentally-minded visitors select green facilities and services. Market Boston's advances to organizations requiring green conventions.
- **Other:** Cruise ships, bus tour operators, visitor offices (greenglobe21.com) and golf courses (auduboninternational.org/programs/acss/CACS%20List%20by%20State.pdf) could also distinguish themselves by becoming certified or establishing and meeting their own standards. Event planners could demonstrate their ability to meet green guidelines.

What are the advantages of enhancing Greater Boston's status as a green convention and tourism destination?

Distinguishing Boston as a green convention and tourism destination can boost Boston's economy, strengthen its image, improve its environment, and benefit the community.

a. economic impact

By greening Boston's convention industry, convention marketers will have a much stronger appeal to organizations that demand environmentally sustainable business practices. Addendum 1 lists a few of the organizations that require environmental best practices at their conventions and meetings.

Since the average "attendee to a high-end convention or trade show spends more than \$300 a day,"⁶ such business is very lucrative. Each three day convention of slightly more than 1,000 people brings in \$1 million into the city's economy. A convention the size of the U.S. Green Building Council Conference would earn more than \$9 million.

Some convention centers already tout their environmental attributes, including Portland's Oregon Convention Center (www.oregoncc.org/sustainability/greenreport.pdf), Pittsburgh's David L. Lawrence Convention Center (pittsburghcc.com/html/index.htm), and San Francisco's Moscone Center (moscone.com/community/sustain.html). By greening our own convention centers, and the services that support convention-goers, Boston could be positioned to compete successfully with these facilities.

The costs for implementing environmentally-friendly practices at convention centers may be offset by reduced utility and waste hauling bills. Seattle's Washington State Convention and Trade Centre's energy efficient lighting initiative saves almost \$200,000 per year.⁷ San Francisco's Moscone Center cut hauling costs by \$500,000 per year since implementing a recycling and donation program in 1998.⁸

In addition to convention business, Boston could derive greater economic benefits from ecotourism. The worldwide growth of ecotourism demonstrates that many tourists are drawn to attractive destinations and green facilities. Ecotourism is growing at a rate of 4-10% per year; and 85% of visitors familiar with the term "ecotourism" believed it could take place in a city (greentourism.ca/pr_spons2003-04.php).⁹ A 2003 U.S. study estimates that 17 million travelers consider environmental factors first when deciding which travel companies to patronize.¹⁰ A separate study found that more than 80% of U.S. travelers believe that it is important for hotels take steps to preserve the environment, and 14% ask hotels they are using if they have an environmental policy.¹¹

⁶ "Unconventional Wisdom", Boston Magazine, March 2003.

⁷ "Green Centers Enjoy Eco-Benefits," Meetings and Conventions, March 2004.

⁸ "Taking on Waste," Association Meetings, March 1, 2004.

⁹ Green Tourism Association, Toronto Canada website.

¹⁰ "Geotourism: The New Trend in Travel," Travel Industry Association of America, and National Geographic Traveler, October 8, 2003.

¹¹ "Green is Good for Hotel Business", Travelbiz, August 29, 2002.

Toronto has a Green Tourism Association (greentourism.ca/home.php) comprised of public and private members to take advantage of the ecotourism trend. The Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Pittsburgh Green Building Association, and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council are developing a similar program aimed at both tourism and convention business.

Boston can gain a competitive advantage by promoting our environmental advantages, too. As a city in a beautiful location and region, surrounded by outdoor attractions and recreational opportunities, it makes business sense for Boston's tourism industry to complement these features by offering services that benefit the environment. Green facilities and services would also position Boston better to attract the growing number of European visitors, many of whom expect the same kind of environmental sensitivity that they enjoy at home.

An increase in conventions and tourism would boost employment and revenue in many sectors of our economy, including lodging, food, transportation, event planning, and recreation. Businesses in the environmental industry, such as composting, energy efficiency, recycling, renewable energy, and local and organic farming would also benefit. An increase in convention and tourism business would bolster city and state tax revenue, too.

Would this initiative have an adverse impact on Boston hospitality businesses that do not take part in it? No, because it would bring in business that otherwise would not come to Boston. When these visitors are here, they will spend money on a variety of products and services, including those that are not green. For example, many of these visitors will eat some of their meals in restaurants that are not green certified. The eleven states with green hotel associations have clearly decided that publicizing their green hospitality services would have a positive impact on the visitor industry, and are not concerned that it would harm non-participating businesses.

b. prestige

By advancing environmental best practices in Boston's convention and tourism industry, and projecting our natural attractions and environmental achievements to visitors and residents alike, Boston would enhance its image as a beautiful and progressive city that is desirable not only to visit, but also to live.

The Boston 2004 Indicators Report declares that, "Boston can become America's "greenest" city—and benefit both economically and environmentally from this process."¹² A green reputation would also give Boston an advantage when competing with other cities for top professionals who may be discouraged by Boston's high cost of living, and help Boston attract the world's best students to our colleges and universities.

c. environment

The changes necessary to make Boston a green destination would benefit the environment in obvious ways: reduced air pollutants and greenhouse gases, less waste sent to incinerators and landfills, and less exposure to toxins. There would be other, less obvious environmental benefits, too. A green convention and tourism initiative would educate visitors and industry employees about environmental best practices that they could use in their homes and communities. Also, an increase in purchasing from Massachusetts farms would help sustain local farms and preserve valuable open space.

d. community

Green conventions and tourism benefits communities in other ways, too. Examples include the donation of un-served food to soup kitchens and the donation of leftover goods to schools or charities.

¹² , "Thinking Globally/Acting Locally, A Regional Wake-Up Call, A Summary of the Boston Indicator's Report, 2002-2004," The Boston Foundation.

A San Francisco non-profit, Under One Roof, raises more than \$125,000 annually from goods recovered from the Moscone Convention Center. The Hilton San Francisco donates leftover convention supplies such as binders and tote bags to local schools.¹³

Boston already has a foundation for a green convention and tourism industry.

During the last several decades, Boston has made impressive strides in creating an attractive environment and recreational opportunities for visitors to enjoy. Foremost is the cleanup of our waterways: Boston Harbor, the Charles River and the Muddy River. Beaches are now swim-able, the Boston Harbor Islands National Park was created, and the 43 mile Boston HarborWalk is mostly complete. Whale watching, sailing, and canoeing are now popular activities. The New England Aquarium has established itself as a premier institution that extols the benefits of a healthy aquatic ecosystem to a broad audience. The Charles River Skatepark promises to be a recreational attraction, too.

Land use has also improved. New parks such as the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston Nature Center, and Nashua Street Park add to Boston’s heritage of open space that includes the Boston Commons & Public Gardens, the Emerald Necklace, and Franklin Park. Throughout the city, vacant lots have been cleaned up and trees have been planted.

The city and region have taken important steps to reduce air pollution, too. The entire MBTA bus fleet will soon be comprised of low emission vehicles. Stricter state regulations on the most polluting power plants promise cleaner air.

The city’s mass transit system moves downtown visitors efficiently, allowing many of them to be car-free. Another attraction is that Boston is among America’s most walk-able cities. As noted in Boston Unbound, “the fun of being in Boston is its pedestrian vitality. People don’t just drive through the city: they walk its streets, and not just 8 to 5, but around the clock.”¹⁴

Greater Boston has an abundance of field trip opportunities to help attract green conventions. We could offer visits to wind turbines, New England’s largest solar array in Brockton, state of the art high performance buildings, innovative recycling and composting facilities, and a trip to Deer Island to tell the story of the Boston Harbor cleanup.

How can Boston achieve a green convention and tourism industry?

I will hold individual meetings with key stakeholders to solicit their input into this initiative and determine whether there is sufficient support for it to proceed. If the interest level is high, I will convene a facilitated meeting of the stakeholders, including industry, foundation, and government representatives. The goal of the meeting would be to establish a vision, mission, a structure for this initiative, and a plan for funding it.

Project Coordination

A steering committee of stakeholders would guide the initiative. As coordinator, I would attract and organize interested parties, identify environmentally preferred services and facilitate environmental improvement among participating organizations, and help market Boston as a green convention and tourism destination. For specifics, see the “Scope of Work” section in Addendum 3.

As Executive Director of the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Conventions, I guided a diverse organization of more than 100 volunteer professionals to bring environmental best practices to

¹³ “Taking on Waste,” Association Meetings, March 1, 2004.

¹⁴ “Boston Unbound,” Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, commissioned by The Boston Foundation and the Greater Boston’s Community Foundation, May 2004.

the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions. CERC was awarded the international Environmentally Responsible Meeting Award in Frankfurt, Germany; the U.S. EPA Environmental Quality Award in both the New England Region and Region 2, which includes New York; and the Advocate of the Year award from the Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance. The case study of CERC's work, written for the U.S. EPA, is available upon request.

I have 24 years of experience as an administrator and project manager. I served as Health Center Administrator for Harvard Community Health Plan's Swansea Health Center, as a project manager for Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, and Program Manager for WasteCap of Massachusetts. As a volunteer, I am the Vice President of Newton's Green Decade Coalition, a board member of the Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance, and have coached participants in more than 20 Household EcoTeams to live environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

Conclusion

Boston is well positioned to be the east coast green convention and tourism destination. By doing so, we could attract the growing and lucrative market for green meetings—as Portland and Pittsburgh have done. We would also boost the number of leisure visitors coming to Boston, and accrue the many other benefits that come to cities perceived to be clean, beautiful, and environmentally advanced.

Let's begin the process, so we can reap these rewards.

Addendum 1: Green Conventions and Meetings

A. The following green meetings and conventions have recently chosen Portland as their host city (www.pova.com/meeting_planners/green_meetings/).

American Solar Energy Society
Ecological Society of America
Environmental Bankers Association
Environmental Protection Agency - POCOC
Environmental Protection Agency – Brownfields
Green Roofs Conference
Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Program
LGC - Smart Growth Conference
National Association of Environmental Professionals
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
The Nature Conservancy River Network
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Society for Cultural Anthropology
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry
Sustainable Northwest
U.S. Green Building Council

B. The following green meetings and conventions have recently chosen Pittsburgh as their host city.

American Wind Energy Association
International Air and Waste Management Association
U.S. Green Building Council

C. The list below includes green meetings held in other cities. Most of these meetings are annual.

Olympics, 2002, 2004 and 2006 (Salt Lake City, Athens, Torino)
World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg)
U.S. Green Building Council Conference and Expo, 2005 (Atlanta, 10,000 visitors; see www.greenbuilddexpo.org/Attendee/greening.asp for the environmental initiatives undertaken by the Georgia World Congress Center to support this conference)
Eleventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Montreal (10,000 visitors anticipated)
Bioneers (San Rafael, California, 3000 visitors)
Affordable Comfort (Indianapolis, 1500 visitors)
Autodesk (Orlando, 1500 visitors)
Forest Leadership Forum (Atlanta, 1300 visitors)
EnvironDesign (Seattle, 1200 visitors, isdesignet.com/ED/ED9/greening_ed9.html)
National Recycling Coalition Annual Conference and Expo (San Francisco, 650 visitors),
American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services (Orlando, 600 visitors)
Interface Inc. sales meeting (Marco Island, 220 attendees)
Sierra Club's 2005 National Convention & Expo (San Francisco, sierrasummit2005.org/about/index.html).