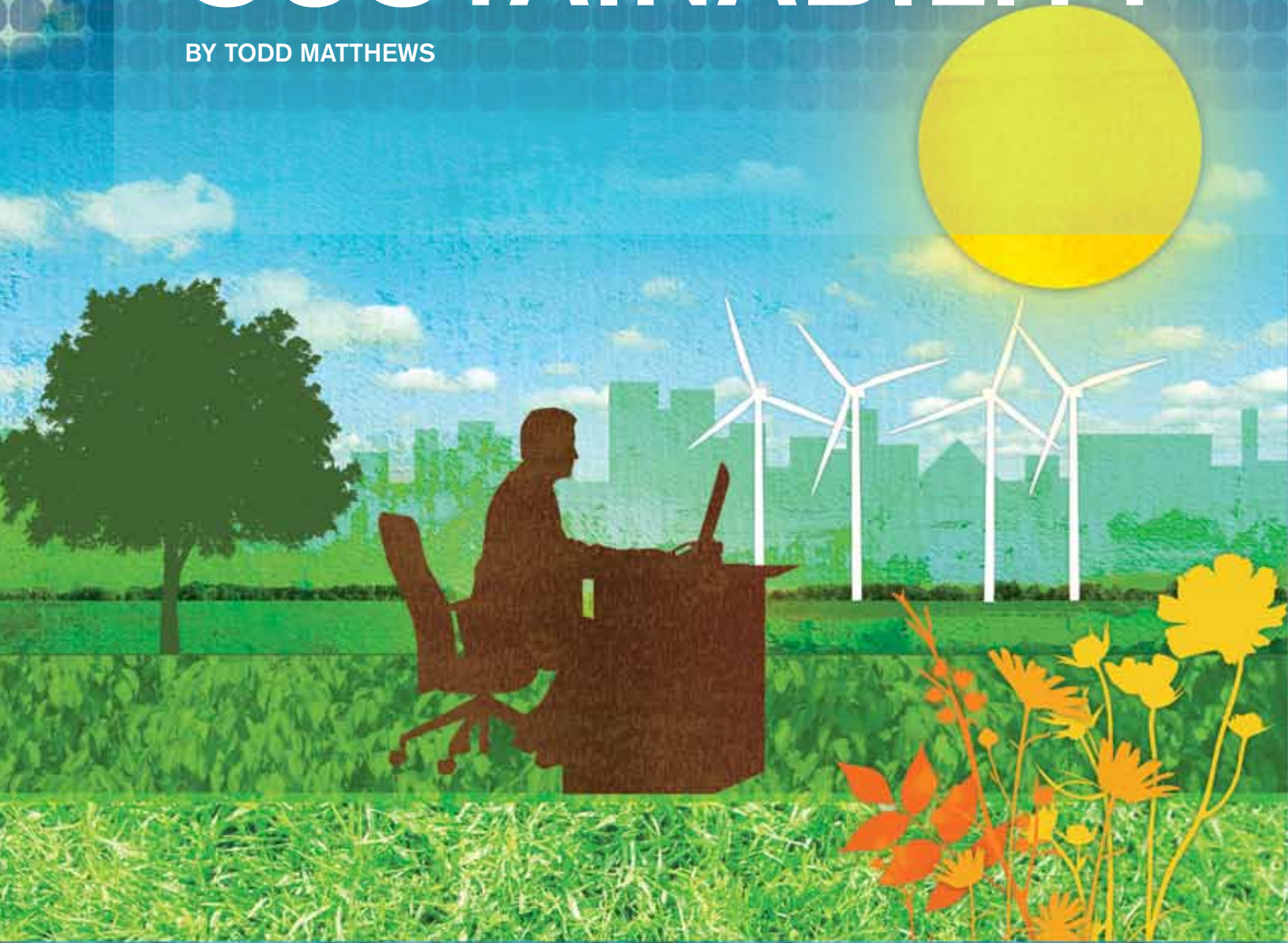


# BIZ CASE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

BY TODD MATTHEWS





## **EB**ALLIANCE

ENVIRONMENTAL BUSINESS ALLIANCE  
TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY

### **In a tough economy like ours, many business owners are focused on one thing: surviving the current situation.**

When customers have closed their wallets and cut back on their spending, it's easy to empathize with a business owner who has put aside a "big picture" goal, such as "going green," to address what seem like more pressing and basic goals – making payroll and keeping the doors open.

However, it doesn't have to be an either/or situation. The advocacy group known as the Environmental Business Alliance (EB Alliance) is a partnership between the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber, Citizens for a Healthy Bay, Go Local Tacoma, and the City of Tacoma that aims to help Pierce County businesses improve their environmental performance and increase their profitability. According to Kristi Lynett, the manager in the City of Tacoma's Office of Sustainability, EB Alliance is following-up the climate action plan created in 2008 by the City of Tacoma's "green ribbon task force."

"I think a lot of the impetus for the Alliance was the City of Tacoma's climate action plan, which emphasizes business sustainability as one aspect of reducing our carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions," says Lynett. "That's how we got started talking about business sustainability."

For a business owner, the benefits of the Alliance begin when they pledge to (a) use a carbon calculator to determine their business' current greenhouse gas emissions; (b) work to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions; (c) work to improve its performance in water conservation, recycling, and stormwater pollution prevention; and (d) periodically inform EB Alliance of its progress so the Alliance can celebrate accomplishments with the entire community.

Advantages? Sometimes "Some businesses might be more inclined to have strong values about being sustainable and

being sustainable and being friendly to environment," says Patricia Lecy-Davis, President of Go Local Tacoma, a group that supports local independent business owners. "Some businesses will want to learn how to save money and create a larger bottom line. Even other businesses might be in it for the exposure and marketing that comes with being showcased in the EB Alliance."

The pledge might seem like a big commitment for a typical business owner, but it's done with the help and expertise of the Alliance, which has as its bedrock three major components.

First, the Alliance will educate businesses on the simple and effective ways they can reduce their impact on the environment. Alliance partners will help businesses who want to: collaborate reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by completing a carbon calculator that easily estimates a business' carbon footprint based on basic usage data, such as the energy use in their building or how their employees commute to and from work. The Alliance also helps businesses who wish to participate in a free and confidential on-site assessment by Alliance partner Citizens for a Healthy Bay (CHB).

"Through our Businesses for an Environmentally Sustainable Tacoma (BEST) program, we conduct free, confidential on-site environmental assessments to help local companies learn about cost-saving, sustainable business practices in areas such as energy conservation, water conservation, recycling and waste reduction, stormwater pollution prevention and employee commute reduction," says CHB Executive Director Bill Anderson.

"CHB staff members visit participating businesses to learn about their practices in each of these areas. We then provide the business with written recommendations describing opportunities for improvement. If the business decides to implement some or all of our recommendations, we provide free technical assistance to help them each step of the way."

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The second component involves the EB Alliance creating events and educational seminars that put business owners in touch with local experts in the area of sustainable business practices.

The last component is promoting and marketing businesses that choose to participate in the Alliance and reduce their environmental impact. “We use our Web site and our quarterly *Tidings* newsletter to encourage businesses to join the Alliance and to promote the actions of participating businesses as they work to improve their environmental performance,” says Anderson. “Businesses that have participated in the BEST program have benefited through reduced garbage, water and energy bills, community recognition for their environmental efforts and improved employee morale.”

Businesses will also be promoted on EB Alliance's Web site and resource partners' websites. “We want to recognize your business

when you show progress,” adds Lynett. “If you are showing improvement, we are going to promote you. It's not only saving money through resource and utility bill reduction. It's also bringing in more customers because we are marketing you as someone who is benefitting the local community.”

In the end, EB Alliance could help the average Pierce County business owner achieve what seems like a daunting task in this recession – increasing their profitability while improving the environment. ←

*If you would like to get involved with the Environmental Business Alliance, please visit [eb-alliance.org](http://eb-alliance.org) or email Kristin Lynett at [Kristin.Lynett@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:Kristin.Lynett@cityoftacoma.org) for more information.*

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Another example, could be: the City plans to design a new office building and they're interviewing architects. You might hear these kinds of questions: What is your experience with life cycle cost analysis of alternative HVAC systems? Can you quantify the potential energy savings from the use of an air-barrier envelope design? What is the experience of your proposed team members using third-party building certification programs?

And then, the City begins the interviewing process of contractors to build it. Here are questions that could be presented to potential firms: How have you managed the LEED certification process to assist with achieving the desired certification level? How does LEED compare with Green Globes or BuiltGreen for sustainability? What are the qualifications of your proposed commissioning team?

If you currently do business with the City – your environmental actions will be subject to consideration in the best interests of the greater good. Price of services or product

may no longer be the determining factor to firm selection - there are now many other considerations.

You can find more details on these all of these actions at <http://www.cityoftacoma.org> (look for the link under “Public Works” then “Global Warming”).

Over the coming months the Chamber and your local government will be developing means of outreach to help our local businesses understand and adopt green practices as well – watch for these announcements as they become available. And don't be afraid to ask questions of both the Chamber and the Council – that is part of why they exist. ←

<sup>1,2</sup>(Kristi Lynett, Sustainability Manager, City of Tacoma's April 2011 “Tacoma-environews” bulletin).