



**2026 Case Studies**

**District Sustainability Awards**

**&**

**Clean Energy DC Award**

Prepared by:  
Urban Sustainability Administration  
Department of Energy and Environment  
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Washington, DC 20002

## Letter from Director Richard Jackson



Congratulations to the 2026 District Sustainability Award winners! These annual awards recognize the individuals, businesses, and organizations that are making the District healthier, greener, and more livable for everyone. Kudos to the local leaders highlighted in the case studies below that go above and beyond to address current challenges and help the District meet its sustainability goals.

The Department of Energy and Environment has continued its partnership with Destination DC to honor the award winners at the annual Sustainability Summit. This event recognizes the important role the hospitality industry plays in elevating the District as a sustainability leader and attracting more tourists and business as a result. The event also underscores that local sustainability champions make the District not only an attractive place to live, but also a desirable place to work and visit.

Jump ahead to read the case studies of:

- Embassy Suites by Hilton Washington DC Convention Center
- To Go Green
- VMDO DC
- DC Greens
- Washington Area Community Investment Fund
- Erin Palmer
- American University (Clean Energy DC Winner)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Jackson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Jackson  
Director  
Department of Energy & Environment

# Embassy Suites by Hilton Washington DC Convention Center



**EMBASSY  
SUITES**  
by Hilton™

WASHINGTON DC  
CONVENTION CENTER

**Category:** Business

**Location:** 900 10th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

**Website:** <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/wascces-embassy-suites-washington-dc-convention-center/>

Embassy Suites by Hilton Washington DC Convention Center is a full-service, all-suite hotel in downtown Washington, DC, committed to delivering exceptional hospitality while advancing meaningful sustainability practices. Recognizing its significant environmental footprint, the hotel has invested more than \$800,000 in energy efficiency upgrades, including smart thermostats, motion-sensor technology, and modernized mechanical systems that reduce emissions and improve overall building performance.

The hotel's daily operations underscore its commitment to environmental practices through expanded soap recycling with their partnership with Clean the World, food waste reduction supported by an ORCA food digester, water-saving measures in guest suites, and the use of environmentally responsible cleaning products.

As a unionized hotel with a diverse staff, Embassy Suites provide stable careers, competitive wages, and comprehensive benefits that promote long-term economic stability particularly for individuals from historically marginalized communities. The hotel's leadership team partners closely with local workforce development organizations to recruit District residents, provide on-the-job training, and create clear paths to advancement into supervisory and managerial roles. By combining responsible operations, green-capital investments, and community partnership, Embassy Suites by Hilton Washington DC Convention Center contributes to a more sustainable and inclusive city.



# To Go Green



**Category:** Business

**Location:** Serving District of Columbia and Virginia Residents

**Website:** <https://togogreen.eco>

To Go Green is a reusable packaging platform helping District restaurants replace single-use takeout containers with durable, easy-to-return alternatives. Through trackable containers, flexible return options, and integration with delivery apps, the system allows customers to enjoy the convenience of takeout without the waste. Each container replaces more than a thousand disposables over its lifespan, reducing plastic pollution, litter, and landfill volume across the District.

Partnering with 13 District restaurants such as CHIKO, Teasm, and Mi Vida, To Go Green provides the reuse infrastructure that supports the Zero Waste DC Plan goal to shift from single-use toward reuse. Restaurants pay no upfront cost, and each reusable costs less per use than disposables, making sustainability both practical and affordable for small, often minority-owned businesses.

By reducing waste in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by litter and supporting equitable access through at home pick-up options, To Go Green advances a cleaner, healthier, and more inclusive circular economy for the District.



# VMDO DC



**Category:** Business

**Location:** 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 7000  
Washington, DC 20006

**Website:** <https://www.vmdo-dc.com/>

VMDO is a leading architecture firm with nearly five decades of experience designing high-performance educational and community spaces, and has become a driving force in advancing the District's sustainability goals. Since opening its DC office in 2018, the firm has delivered more than 531,000 square feet of net-zero energy projects in the DC metro region, helping move the city toward the targets set by the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Act. VMDO DC's work includes major milestones such as Stead Park Recreation Center, designed to be DC's first net-zero energy community center, Truesdell Elementary School's innovative mass-timber modernization, and George Washington University's LEED Platinum Thurston Hall renovation.

As a signatory of the American Institute of Architects 2030 Commitment to make all new buildings and renovations carbon neutral by 2030, VMDO DC rigorously tracks energy performance, prioritizes healthy materials, and champions adaptive reuse to reduce carbon impacts. Their projects pair technical excellence with deep community engagement, ensuring that sustainable buildings also strengthen equity, education, and neighborhood wellbeing.

A local Certified Business Enterprise entity, VMDO DC's work demonstrates how thoughtful, data-driven architecture can shape a greener, healthier, and more inclusive future for the District.



# DC Greens



**Category:** Organization

**Location:** 853 New Jersey Ave SE, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20003

**Website:** <https://dcgreens.org/>

DC Greens is a District-based nonprofit with a mission to advance health equity by building a just and resilient food system in Washington, DC. Its flagship site, The Well at Oxon Run in Ward 8, is a community farm and wellness space that brings residents together through urban farming, fresh food distribution, and hands-on education to promote sustainability and community health.

The Well's community farm grows fresh produce using regenerative practices such as drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and cover cropping. The farm's community composting cooperative diverts organic waste from landfills and produces hundreds of pounds of organic compost each season, returning nutrients to the soil and creating a closed-loop system that supports sustainable agriculture. The farm also serves as a neighborhood food hub, distributing fresh produce through community harvest events and food distribution programs that increase access to healthy food for Ward 8 residents.

DC Greens' sustainability work is grounded in community leadership. Through its Community Leadership Initiative, residents with lived expertise become ambassadors who help shape programs and advocacy, strengthen local capacity, and support the growth of a neighborhood-based green workforce. With a lean staff and strong community partnerships, DC Greens demonstrates how local food production, health equity, and sustainability can work together to strengthen communities and build long-term resilience.



# Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF)



**Category:** Organization

**Location:** 2012 Rhode Island Avenue NE  
Washington, DC 20018

**Website:** <https://wacif.org/>

The Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF) expands economic opportunity in the DC region by investing financial, social, and knowledge capital in low- and moderate-income entrepreneurs. Through lending, technical assistance, and community-centered economic development, WACIF helps underinvested small businesses build stability, wealth, and long-term resilience.

WACIF is advancing a more sustainable and equitable DC through its Sustainable DC Project, launched in 2025 to help local entrepreneurs adopt greener practices and participate in the region's growing green economy. The initiative includes the Green Growth Fund, a flexible loan product with a 15% grant component that supports energy efficiency upgrades, waste reduction strategies, and the launch or expansion of green sector businesses. Paired with one-on-one advisory services, workshops, and sustainability assessments, the program equips low-to-moderate income entrepreneurs with the tools to reduce emissions, lower operating costs, and access new climate-aligned markets.

By centering underinvested neighborhoods and communities of color, WACIF ensures the benefits of the green transition – such as new revenue streams, certifications, and wealth-building opportunities – flow directly to those historically excluded from capital access and environmental investment.



# Erin Palmer



**Category:** Individual

**Location:** Takoma, DC

**Website:** <https://www.springcleanupweek.com/>

Erin Palmer is a former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (2019–2024) who has a sustained commitment to environmental stewardship. For more than seven years, she has advanced community-led sustainability through hands-on cleanups, stormwater management, intergenerational community-building, and local advocacy.

Palmer regularly organizes Adopt-a-Block cleanups and leads Spring Cleanup Week: an event during spring break for community members of all ages to engage in service through cleanups while learning about watershed health. In 2025 alone, she helped organize 31 neighborhood cleanups across Takoma, removing more than 3,000 pounds of litter.

Palmer also works to ensure equitable access to environmental resources and decision-making. As a commissioner, she helped neighbors secure two Community Stormwater Solutions grants to address block-level flooding and co-organized an Earth Day Fair connecting residents with dozens of District agencies and community groups. She continues this work by participating in school and neighborhood events where she shares cleanup resources and listens to community needs.

By designing cleanups as joyful, intergenerational, low-barrier spaces, she creates opportunities for young people to earn service hours, build relationships with adults, and feel ownership of their neighborhood. Neighbors regularly take what they learn and launch their own stewardship projects. Through consistent, visible leadership, Palmer has helped make sustainability a shared civic habit. Her service has created cleaner streets, stronger community ties, and a lasting culture of environmental care.



# American University



AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**Category:** Clean Energy DC

**Location:** 4400 Massachusetts Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20016

**Website:** <https://www.american.edu/>

American University (AU) stands out as a District sustainability leader through the groundbreaking Alan and Amy Meltzer Center for Athletic Performance, the university's most advanced high performance building to date. Opened in 2026, the 89,077 square foot facility is AU's first building designed to achieve LEED Platinum and International Living Future Institute's Zero Energy Certification. It eliminates all on site fossil fuel use through a fully electrified system powered by 85 geothermal wells and a 779,631 kWh solar array with 1,334 panels that is expected to generate more electricity than the building consumes each year. This combination of efficiency, renewable energy, and electrification directly supports the Clean Energy DC Plan and establishes a model for net zero energy construction in complex athletic and wellness facilities.

The Meltzer Center also reflects AU's commitment to equity, health, and community benefit. The building includes all-gender restrooms, artwork that represents the diversity of the AU community, and an outdoor wellness court that is open for use to the public. Materials were selected for environmental quality benefits and the landscaping chosen expands AU's Level II Arboretum with native plants, pollinator gardens, and green roofs.

Through this project, AU demonstrates how innovative design, community-centered planning, and climate leadership can work together to advance a more sustainable and inclusive future for the District.



