



# Environmental Justice and Real Estate

Perspectives from Leading Community-Based  
and Advocacy Organizations



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# About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting

the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2020 alone, more than 2,600 events were held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at [uli.org](https://uli.org). Follow ULI on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The ULI Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance is dedicated to creating healthy, resilient, and high-performance communities around the world. Through the work of its Greenprint, Building Healthy Places, and Urban Resilience

programs, the center provides leadership and support to real estate and land use professionals to invest in energy efficient, healthy, resilient, and sustainable buildings and communities. Learn more at [uli.org/sustainability](https://uli.org/sustainability).

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*To hear more from many of this resource's contributing members and partners, watch the ULI webinar "[Environmental Justice and Real Estate: Where To from Here?](#)," hosted by ULI's Responsible Property Investment Council in collaboration with ULI's Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance, the Fifth Avenue Committee, Catalyst Miami, and The Greenlining Institute.*

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“The intersection of racial, economic, and climate justice . . . often involves the built environment and land use.”

—Michelle de la Uz, executive director, Fifth Avenue Committee

CLIMATE JUSTICE RACE JUSTICE



## Introduction

The real estate sector, and society at large, are experiencing simultaneous crises of accelerating climate change and social inequality. Environmental justice lies squarely at the intersection of these overlapping problems.

Environmental justice has become a key policy lens to examine how low-income communities and communities of color have been disproportionately affected by real estate and land use decisions and environmental hazards. As action on climate change in the United States at the urban and national levels continues to accelerate in 2021, after decades of community organizing, greater numbers of real estate actors and policymakers are prioritizing centering equity in the transition to a more sustainable, resilient built environment.

ULI and the real estate industry have come to acknowledge the part they have played in exacerbating social and racial inequities, whether intentionally or not. ULI members have an important role to play in creating the next generation of

policies and practices on urban and environmental issues; an important starting point is to better understand what built-environment professionals can do to help address the effects of structural racism and community disinvestment through the perspective of environmental justice.

Action toward equity is not only the right thing to do—it is also increasingly expected from real estate. Community demand, investor interest, and local regulation on a variety of environmental, social, and governance topics are all on the rise, and companies that successfully integrate social and environmental concerns into their core business activities will likely come to lead the market on both performance and positive impact.



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“Real estate is probably one of the single greatest contributors to racial inequity in this country. . . . It is indeed a systemic problem.”

—Zelalem Adefris, Catalyst Miami, speaking at ULI’s “Environmental Justice and Real Estate: Where To from Here?” webinar

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According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice is the meaningful and fair treatment and involvement of all people in developing environmental policy, regardless of race, income, or background, and will be achieved when everyone enjoys equal access to decision-making and protection from environmental and health hazards. To understand these high-level goals in practice, it is helpful to turn to respected community-based and advocacy organizations with a depth of knowledge and expertise to illuminate the impact of injustice on peoples’ lives and address the ways in which racism has shaped the built environment.

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“Environmental justice . . . will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”

—U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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Organizing for the components of a healthy, sustainable community and equal access to high-quality environments is at the heart of the environmental justice movement.

Organizations in communities across the country are working to correct these inequities, and ULI members have much to gain from engaging with and supporting them. In practice, relationships between real estate and community-based and advocacy organizations have been mixed, resulting sometimes in strong partnerships for equitable development and other times in conflict when resident and developer objectives do not align.

In late 2020, ULI’s Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance invited leaders of several community-based and advocacy organizations to introduce their work and comment on how environmental justice pertains to the real estate and land use industry. We hope that these interviews, published initially online in *Urban Land*, help shed light on why environmental justice is an essential consideration in urban development and how ULI members can incorporate its principles into their everyday work.





# Real Estate/Community Partnerships for Environmental Justice

## A Member Perspective

Construction in downtown Brooklyn, New York, as seen from the Gowanus Canal. The canal is a major Superfund site, and the surrounding neighborhood is in the midst of a community conversation on rezoning, gentrification and future development, and environmental/climate justice issues.

### **James Lima**

President, James Lima Planning  
+ Development

Member, ULI Sustainable  
Development Product Council

Real estate practitioners can drive meaningful advances in equity by learning about, and partnering with, community-based organizations committed to change.

Policies of environmental injustice, which have disadvantaged low-income communities and communities of color for decades, have longstanding effects on individuals' lives today.

A recent study published in the journal *Climate* found that temperatures in formerly redlined neighborhoods are about 13 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than those in non-redlined neighborhoods. This indicates that communities of color are more exposed to the urban heat island effect—a phenomenon in which built surfaces absorb and reemit the sun's heat—and its pernicious impacts on health and quality of life.

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“Let’s all see to it that ULI and its programs continue to be enriched by deep engagement with the network of capable, community-based organizations across the country that have long been advocating for local needs.”

—James Lima, President, James Lima Planning + Development

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Research has also consistently shown that communities of color are exposed to substantially more polluted air and are more likely to be located near noxious power plants and other toxic sites. Moreover, lower-income and non-White individuals are less likely to have access to open space in their neighborhoods, according to “[Spatial Disparities in the Distribution of Parks and Green Spaces in the USA](#),” a paper published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>1</sup>

A ULI [technical assistance panel](#) (TAP) that I chaired in 2017, focused on the industrial neighborhood of Gowanus, Brooklyn, developed recommendations for how major proposed changes in land use policies, real estate strategies, and urban design

approaches could combat these environmental justice challenges. The TAP’s proposals, codeveloped with ULI’s community-based partner, the Fifth Avenue Committee (which also contributed an essay to this publication), helped inform a neighborhood rezoning proposal that would address the urban heat island effect, improving the health and quality of life of residents while facilitating new development. One TAP recommendation worth greater investigation nationally is to require that all environmental review procedures consider the potential community impacts from urban heat island conditions and offer mitigation as warranted. Why not apply such a policy nationally and attract necessary resources to burdened communities?

ULI initiatives challenge real estate and urban development practitioners to consider the role they can play in fulfilling a community's social, environmental, and economic needs, suggesting a way forward for ULI as it seeks to be more cognizant of its ability to lead positive change. ULI has always been an astute convener of professionals from all real estate disciplines; it is a smart decision for the Institute to engage in more robust dialogues and partnerships with community-based organizations that know their communities best and advocate for social and environmental justice within them. Collaborations of this sort are foundational to the creation of equitable economic opportunity, inclusive social and environmental infrastructure, and expanded affordable and accessible housing choices that meet local needs.

In my real estate and economic advisory firm's work across the country, we consistently see the economic, social, and environmental good that springs from such collaboration. In San Jose, for example, we are advising SPUR (San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association) on how some of the value created through park improvements and the real estate investments


they generate can be captured and reinvested to fund place management and other public realm improvements that will benefit underserved residential communities. These projects can also be enormous value creators for downtown developers, owners, and anchor businesses. In Pensacola, Florida, we made the policy argument to the local government that public investments in a waterfront redevelopment plan would provide a reasonable return on that investment and, equally important, would form an essential component of a broader equitable economic development strategy in a city that, like so many others, is taking meaningful steps to right the wrongs of past systemic racism.

Let's all see to it that ULI and its programs continue to be enriched by deep engagement with the network of capable, community-based organizations across the country that have long been advocating for local needs. The challenges ahead are as daunting as we have ever known. Surely the best way forward is through forging diverse partnerships and collaborations intent on addressing environmental justice and doing the ongoing work needed to transform cities and regions into more resilient—and more equitable—economies and communities.



Access to high-quality parks and green space is a frequent concern of environmental justice advocates.





“By recognizing and combining the community’s expertise with the ULI member’s expertise, the recommendations and actions coming out of the partnership advance climate, land use, and community goals simultaneously.”

—Michelle de la Uz, executive director, Fifth Avenue Committee



# A Brief Timeline of Environmental Justice

The environmental justice movement has a decades-long history that stretches back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The following timeline relates a selection of major events in this long legacy that drew attention to intertwined social and environmental inequities and laid important foundations for where the movement is today. By learning which issues, concerns, and events inspired the movement's evolution through time as communities have struggled for healthy places to live and work, real estate actors can be better positioned to make positive contributions to equity in the built environment today.

*This timeline is not comprehensive. Sources include timelines compiled by the Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise and Duke University, Groundwork USA, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the EPA.<sup>2</sup>*

## 1962

### United Farm Workers Union Fights for Healthier Conditions

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta found the United Farm Workers union to organize against exploitation and exposure to pesticides and other unsafe working conditions for Latinx and Asian migrant farmworkers in California, conducting weeks of labor and hunger strikes and eventually securing better pay and conditions.



Pesticide exposure affects farmworkers' health.

## 1964

### Passage of the U.S. Civil Rights Act

A main achievement of the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Act banned discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal assistance. This act would underpin many environmental justice lawsuits based on findings that communities of color faced disproportionate environmental harms, such as the concentration of nearby industrial/toxic facilities.

## 1968

### Memphis Sanitation Strike Links Race, Labor, and Environmental Issues

Black sanitation employees in Memphis, Tennessee, went on strike to protest being forced to work in more dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, for lower pay, than White employees—a core concern of environmental justice. They were joined by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in one of his final campaigns before being assassinated. The strike united racial, labor, and environmental activists and laid the foundation for applying nonviolent civil disobedience techniques to this intersection that are still in use today.



Protests by striking sanitation employees are lined by National Guard troops.

## 1968

### Passage of the Fair Housing Act

Another signature legislative accomplishment of the Civil Rights Movement, the Fair Housing Act prohibited discrimination in the purchase, sale, rental, or financing of housing—private or public—based on race, skin color, sex, nationality, or religion (later expanded to include sexual orientation, disability, or family status).<sup>3</sup> The act formally legalized the formal practice of redlining, but illicit discrimination continues in various forms.

## 1971

### Council on Environmental Quality Recognizes Environmental Justice

The Council on Environmental Quality, a division of the Executive Office of the President, issued a report arguing that “low-income people of color were disproportionately exposed to significant environmental hazards.” As one of the federal government’s first acknowledgments of environmental justice concerns, this report helped set the stage for future related federal initiatives.

## 1982

### Warren County, North Carolina, PCB Landfill Protest Launches Wider Recognition

Members of the small, largely Black community of Warren County, North Carolina, mobilized six weeks of protests against the siting of a toxic waste landfill near their homes, attended and supported by the NAACP and other civil rights and religious organizations. Though the protests were unsuccessful at stopping the landfill, many point to this moment as a catalyst for a larger, nationwide environmental justice movement, leading to larger consensus and further research on the inequitable siting of polluted facilities in low-income communities and communities of color around the United States.



Rev. Ben Chavis raises his fist as fellow protesters are taken to jail at a Warren County PCB protest.

## 1991

### First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

This summit, emphasized by key environmental justice leaders as one of the more important moments in the movement’s history, brought over 1,000 Black, Indigenous, and other people of color delegates from every state and countries around the world. The event created *17 Principles of Environmental Justice*,<sup>4</sup> an essential framing document that unites the movement, and broadened environmental justice from an early focus on toxic waste to include wider issues in housing, transportation, and land use, connecting these to the historic and ongoing international legacies of colonialism and exploitation of the resources of people of color.

## 1983

### Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report on Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills

Based on his experience at the Warren County protests, Walter Fauntroy, District of Columbia Congressional Delegate and then-chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, directed the GAO to investigate whether communities of color were disproportionately exposed to the siting of nearby hazardous waste landfills. The resulting report found that three-quarters of hazardous landfill sites in eight southeastern states were located in predominantly low-income Black and Latinx communities.



Hazardous waste landfills can pose risks to nearby communities.

## 1994

### Bill Clinton Signs Executive Order 12898

The executive order directed federal agencies to address any disproportionate, adverse health or environmental impacts of their actions on low-income communities and communities of color. It also directed federal agencies to develop means of preventing discrimination by race, color, or national origin in any programs receiving federal funding related to health or the environment, building directly on the Civil Rights Act.

## 2005

### Hurricane Katrina’s Impact on Black New Orleanians

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the federal government was criticized by many for enacting an inadequate disaster response for Black residents, including slow response times, poor temporary housing, and less financial assistance for recovery. Additionally, historically Black neighborhoods faced some of the worst damage and had weaker flood protection infrastructure in place before the storm.<sup>5</sup> Many of the efforts to rebuild the city in years afterward sought to address these inequities, and some of the corresponding policy methods came to define the ideas that now underpin the concept of urban resilience.<sup>6</sup>



Flooding in New Orleans caused by Hurricane Katrina.

## 2014

### Flint Water Crisis—Polluted Water for Black Residents

Flint, Michigan—a majority-Black city near Detroit in which nearly 40 percent of residents live below the poverty line—experienced a public health emergency when the city, under a state-appointed emergency manager, switched its water supply to the Flint River to cut expenses without implementing corrosion inhibitors, exposing nearly 100,000 residents to lead poisoning. City and state officials failed to act on related resident complaints for months, and a federal state of emergency was declared after two years. *Lawsuits filed* claimed environmental racism influenced the state’s initial decision to switch to an untreated water supply and the reluctance to address contamination.<sup>7,8</sup>

## 2015

### Modern Redlining—Settlement with Hudson City Savings Bank

Hudson City Savings Bank agreed to a \$33 million settlement with the U.S. Justice Department after an investigation concluded that the bank was evading mortgage lending to Black and Latinx customers, purposefully not setting up branches in neighborhoods of color. The department called it the “largest residential mortgage redlining settlement in its history,” showing that, despite having been outlawed by the 1968 Fair Housing Act and 1977 Community Reinvestment Act, redlining continues into modern times.<sup>9</sup>

## 2016

### Standing Rock and Indigenous Environmental Justice

*Protests erupted* after the route of the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline, a project transporting crude oil, was determined to cross sacred land of the Standing Rock Sioux and a reservoir drawing from the Missouri River, endangering local and national access to clean water due to the likelihood of an oil spill. The Sioux claimed inadequate consultation was made before federal permits were granted, in violation of federal law and native treaties with the U.S. government, galvanizing international support for Indigenous environmental justice.<sup>10</sup>



Protesters at Standing Rock Reservation.

## 2017

### Hurricane Harvey’s Disproportionate Flooding of Black and Low-Income Neighborhoods

Dropping unprecedented levels of rainfall and affecting areas throughout Central America, the Caribbean, and southern North America, Hurricane Harvey caused \$125 billion in damage and displaced more than 30,000 people. Damage was especially intense in Houston, where later research has shown that flooding was concentrated in neighborhoods with higher proportions of Black and low-income residents.<sup>11</sup>



Flooding in Houston caused by Hurricane Harvey.

## 2018

### National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Links Steering and Environmental Justice

Steering, or the practice by real estate agents of directing potential buyers/renters to certain neighborhoods based on race or other demographic factors, is technically illegal under the Fair Housing Act. A *study of housing discrimination*<sup>12</sup> in 28 U.S. cities by the NBER, using data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s most recent Housing Discrimination Study (in which undercover testers investigate potential discrimination by real estate agents), found that after controlling for income and locational preference, people of color were significantly more likely to be steered toward *neighborhoods with higher rates of pollution*<sup>13</sup> and less economic opportunity. Formerly redlined neighborhoods today are *up to 12 degrees Fahrenheit* hotter in summer on average, increasing health risks from extreme heat (see page 38 for more on redlining).<sup>14</sup>

## 2021

### Biden Administration Prioritizes Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is formally recognized as a top priority for the Biden administration within federal planning to address climate change. *Executive Order 14008*, “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” includes pledges to identify and target federal investments to communities overburdened by environmental injustice, and to ensure that 40 percent of overall benefits of federal climate, housing, and transit investments flow to these same communities under the Justice40 Initiative.



President Joe Biden signed several climate-related executive orders during his first week in office.





# Economic and Climate Justice

## Meet Catalyst Miami

Workshops and training for future community organizers are a key component of Catalyst Miami's work on policy and advocacy.

### LOCATION

Miami-Dade County, Florida

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[catalystmiami.org](http://catalystmiami.org)

### TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

A nonprofit anti-poverty economic justice organization with a hybrid service model encompassing direct-service delivery and organizing

### MISSION

To identify and collectively solve issues adversely affecting low-wealth communities throughout Miami-Dade County



ZELALEM ADEFRIS

INTERVIEW WITH

**Zelalem Adefris**, vice president of policy and advocacy

### **What is your organization's area of focus, and how does it relate to the built environment and land use?**

Catalyst Miami (CM) envisions a just and equitable society in which all communities thrive. Since 1996, CM has helped thousands of Miami-Dade residents become financially secure and civically engaged through our dual service-delivery and organizing model. CM recognizes that health and wealth are part of an overall continuum—without well-being in those areas, the capacity of individuals and families to effect change through leadership, community involvement, and network participation is limited. But without leadership, involvement, and participation, Miami's communities will be unable to address the broader structural causes of poverty and inequity. CM also understands that all these factors—health, wealth, and civic participation—are necessary ingredients to achieve justice and equity.


Most of Miami-Dade County is built atop the Everglades, North America's largest subtropical wetland. The 42-year-long Seminole Wars, which started in 1816 as an attempt by the U.S. government to recapture runaway slaves who joined the Seminole Nation, resulted in opening up this land for exploitation and development. In the late 1800s, African Americans and Bahamian immigrants began building South Florida as we know it today. However, as Jim Crow set in, as well as its subsequent manifestations—redlining and discriminatory lending—Miami's Black populations were relegated to neighborhoods that have experienced continued disinvestment. The ownership of land and real estate is a dominant driver of wealth in Miami that, for generations, has been withheld from communities of color. Our work seeks to reverse this trend, expanding economic mobility to communities that have suffered generations of systemic racism and xenophobia.

### **How do you define environmental justice in your work?**

Environmental injustice is the fact that communities of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, often leading to adverse health outcomes. Environmental justice is the movement to eliminate these environmental hazards, particularly in those communities that have been disproportionately affected. We see this manifest in Miami through historical examples such as highways being built through communities of color, to recent years during which a Black residential neighborhood became one of the county's official dump sites after Hurricane Irma in 2017.

In our work, we extend this definition to include climate justice. Climate injustice is the fact that the communities that have done the least to contribute to our climate crisis are now feeling the most serious impacts. Climate justice is the movement to ensure that our climate solutions are inclusive of economic and social justice, as well as accessible to communities around the globe.





“The ownership of land and real estate is a dominant driver of wealth in Miami that, for generations, has been withheld from communities of color. Our work seeks to reverse this trend, expanding economic mobility to communities that have suffered generations of systemic racism and xenophobia.”

—Zelalem Adefris, vice president of policy and advocacy, Catalyst Miami





Highways built through communities of color displace residents and increase nearby air pollution.

**What do you hope to see from the real estate sector, especially given current increased awareness of racial and environmental justice?**

Miami is a hot real estate market. There is so much construction that it inspired Solange Knowles to write “Cranes in the Sky,” securing her a Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance in 2017. Unfortunately, most of these developments are built for a luxury market, leaving Miami-Dade with a deficit of over 120,000 affordable housing units. This vulnerability has only worsened with COVID-19, as thousands of households now face eviction due to financial hardship. As a result of decades of discrimination, Miami’s Black communities have been historically pushed away from coastal properties and toward the interior of the county, which happens to be some of the

highest-elevation land in the region. Now, due to rampant development and gentrification, these communities are being pushed out again. This leads to a phenomenon called climate gentrification, in which communities are now being bought out of those inland neighborhoods and are, in some cases, displaced to lower-lying coastal land that is more susceptible to flooding and sea-level rise.

We hope to see more community ownership and decision-making when it comes to real estate and development. We need innovative ownership and development models such as community land trusts, land banks, and community benefits agreements that ensure that what is built meets the needs of our existing residents—not just foreign investors or those seeking vacation homes.



# Climate Gentrification

Climate gentrification refers to the redevelopment of neighborhoods that are less susceptible to climate hazards, such as flooding, and the corresponding displacement of longtime, often low-income residents of color, due to rising property values. This pattern was first [documented in Miami](#) by researchers who demonstrated property values rising fastest in higher-elevation neighborhoods from 1971 to 2017.<sup>15</sup> However, climate gentrification can also be exacerbated when higher-risk, low-income neighborhoods receive new investments in protective infrastructure with benefits like new parks that make them more attractive to wealthier households, or when resilient luxury development moves into those areas and builds only high-end, market-rate units.



Miami is experiencing climate gentrification as higher-elevation neighborhoods become more desirable for real estate development.

As climate risks become more apparent by presenting more immediate harms and damages, current residents with the financial ability to move (and wealthier incoming residents deciding where to live) will likely be increasingly influenced to choose safer, less exposed neighborhoods, and may even move because of climate impacts themselves. This is already occurring, according to [research conducted by Redfin](#) in 2021, which found that the impacts of climate change are both driving people to move and determining where they move to.<sup>16</sup> “As Americans leave places that are frequently on fire or at risk of going underwater, the destinations that don’t face those risks will become increasingly competitive and expensive for homebuyers,” said Redfin chief economist Daryl Fairweather. This study focused on households able to make a proactive decision to relocate, specifically survey respondents planning to move in the next 12 months.

Displacing low-income communities to more vulnerable places perpetuates racially discriminatory land use and development practices. To ensure climate resilience benefits everyone, real estate actors and policymakers can:

- Connect with city- and neighborhood-scale planning efforts and advocate for, identify funding sources for, and implement anti-displacement measures and measures to create new affordable housing in locations which are less susceptible to future climate impacts;
- Study the potential neighborhood effects of developments, whether on physical climate risks (e.g., examine whether resilience features worsen flood risks near the property, or whether increased density without mitigation measures will contribute to extreme heat) or on equity indicators (e.g., conduct a [racial equity impact assessment](#)<sup>17</sup>), and work to ensure positive impact; and
- Collaborate with local organizations for community engagement efforts to ensure resilience measures in developments are culturally inclusive, from the design phase through operation.

**Catalyst has done significant work advancing housing justice in the face of climate change. What does this look like in a city as vulnerable to climate impacts as Miami, and what is the role for the real estate sector?**

CM has collectively worked with over 200 community residents and stakeholders to collaboratively define 12 demands to address Miami’s housing and climate crises. These demands range from vacancy taxes to requiring that new developments undergo analyses of sea-level rise, greenhouse gas emissions, and displacement of current residents. In 2019, we launched our HEAL [Housing, Equity, Advocacy, and Leadership] program, which educates residents on the history, language, and advocacy solutions necessary to influence local planning and development. We also play a role in facilitating community voice in government-led planning initiatives for land use and development.

In an ideal world, the real estate sector as a whole would prioritize sustainable development, community decision-making, and keeping communities in place. However, the reality is that the real estate sector is incentivized by the bottom line. We need our elected officials to institute policies that ensure that the real estate sector plays its part in preserving our community and, quite literally, saving our homes.

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**“In an ideal world, the real estate sector as a whole would prioritize sustainable development, community decision-making, and keeping communities in place.”**

—Zelalem Adefris, vice president of policy and advocacy, Catalyst Miami

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**What methods do you use to engage community members about climate change in a time when there are so many other urgent issues?**

Our signature CLEAR [Community Leadership on the Environment, Advocacy, and Resilience] program educates residents on the local impacts of climate change and potential solutions, and builds their efficacy as advocates. The goal of CLEAR is to create a mass of neighborhood leaders who can:

1. Effectively advocate for policies that strengthen the resilience of underserved communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change;
2. Bring perspective to seats of decision-making to ensure that underserved segments of the community are heard and respected;
3. Expose how systemic barriers that create and maintain conditions of poverty also enable climate vulnerability, and to challenge these systems; and
4. Educate their community on basic climate science, vulnerability, and resilience.

The CLEAR program boasts 250 graduates since its inception in fall 2016. The keys to the program’s success are relevance and accessibility. We explain the relationship between climate change and other pressing community concerns. In addition, we break down barriers that prevent participation by offering a concurrent youth program, dinner prior to each session, interpretation, transportation to assist those without access to cars, and technology such as tablets to participate virtually.

Last, we ensure that our facilitators are relatable messengers. We believe in creating a compassionate environment where people can recognize their own expertise and harness their power as advocates. For more information on CLEAR, visit [www.catalystmiami.org/clear](http://www.catalystmiami.org/clear).



FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE/PAULA VLODKOWSKY

# Community Development and Grassroots Organizing

## Meet the Fifth Avenue Committee

Environmental organizer Karen Blondel, with the Fifth Avenue Committee and the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice, speaks at the organizations' press conference with Council Member Brad Lander (right) to announce their demands for a socially and environmentally just rezoning process for the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York.

### LOCATION

Brooklyn, New York

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[fifthave.org](http://fifthave.org)

### TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Nonprofit comprehensive community development organization and NeighborWorks America member founded in 1978

### MISSION

To advance economic and social justice by building vibrant, diverse communities where residents have genuine opportunities to achieve their goals as well as the power to shape the community's future





INTERVIEW WITH

**Michelle de la Uz, executive director**

### **What is your organization's area of focus, and how does it relate to the built environment and land use?**

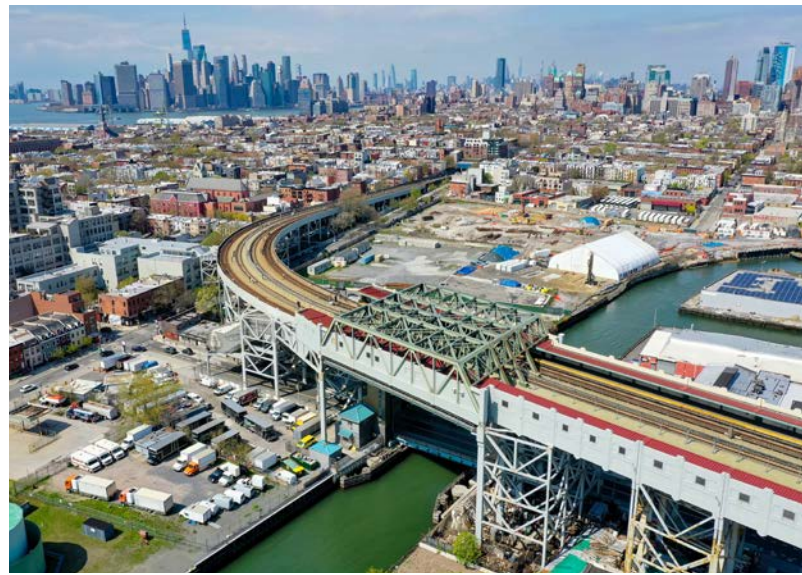
Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) is a nationally recognized community development corporation that works to transform the lives of more than 5,500 low- and moderate-income New Yorkers annually so that we can all live and work with dignity and respect while making our community more equitable, sustainable, inclusive, and just. To achieve our mission, FAC develops and manages affordable housing and community facilities, creates economic opportunities and ensures access to economic stability, organizes residents and workers, offers student-centered adult education, and combats displacement caused by gentrification.

Many of our grassroots organizing campaigns focus on the intersection of racial, economic, and climate justice, which often involves the built environment and land use. A current example is

FAC's work in regard to the city of New York's proposal to rezone the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn. Gowanus is home to New York City's first U.S. EPA Superfund site, and there are many brownfield sites within a stone's throw of three deteriorated public housing developments that are home to more than 4,000 low- and moderate-income New Yorkers, most of whom are people of color.

### **How do you define environmental justice in your work?**

Environmental justice is the fair and equal treatment of all people and all communities. Certain communities—often poor and working-class communities of color—have been targeted to receive or live with environmental pollution whereas others have received environmental benefits. FAC recognizes that climate change affects low- and moderate-income communities of color disproportionately and that, in our society, there are intersections among environment, health, race, and power. We focus not only on the degradation of nature but also on the degradation of communities and barriers to economic self-sufficiency and the ability to build wealth for families.



In neighborhoods undergoing rapid redevelopment like Gowanus, Brooklyn, real estate and communities can partner to create environmental amenities while avoiding displacement of long-term residents.

# Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing

Community organizing is at the core of the environmental justice movement and other movements for social change. The following principles, known as the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, were developed in 1996 by a group of environmental justice advocates at a meeting hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice on issues related to globalization and trade. These principles lay out common goals for individuals and organizations interested in working toward equity.



Collaboration and coalition building underpin the environmental justice movement. Following similar principles can help real estate form effective partnerships with community actors.

## 1. Be Inclusive

“If we hope to achieve just societies that include all people in decision-making and assure that all people have an equitable share of the wealth and the work of this world, then we must work to build that kind of inclusiveness into our own movement in order to develop alternative policies and institutions.”

## 2. Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing

“To succeed, it is important to reach out into new constituencies and to reach within all levels of leadership and membership base of the organizations that are already involved in our networks.”

## 3. Let People Speak for Themselves

“We must be sure that relevant voices of people directly affected are heard.”

## 4. Work Together in Solidarity and Mutuality

“Groups working on similar issues with compatible visions should consciously act in solidarity, mutuality and support each other’s work.”

## 5. Build Just Relationships among Ourselves

“We need to treat each other with justice and respect, both on an individual and an organizational level, in this country and across borders.”

## 6. Commitment to Self-Transformation

“As we change societies, we must change from operating on the mode of individualism to community-centeredness.”

Full text of the Jemez Principles can be found at <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf>.

These were highlighted as guiding concepts by the Fifth Avenue Committee during the webinar “[Environmental Justice and Real Estate: Where To from Here?](#),” hosted by ULI’s Responsible Property Investment Council in collaboration with ULI’s Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance, the Fifth Avenue Committee, Catalyst Miami, and The Greenlining Institute.

**How would you describe your experiences working with the real estate sector, and what do you hope to see in the future, especially given the current increased awareness of racial and environmental justice?**

FAC has many experiences working with the real estate sector, both as partners to advance specific projects or policies that promote inclusion, sustainability, and resilience in New York City—and as opponents to the real estate sector when it acts irresponsibly or without consideration and accountability to the local community, especially regarding local low- and moderate-income communities of color.

Because COVID-19 and the renewed fight for racial justice have made it painfully obvious, FAC hopes that the real estate sector fully acknowledges that we are all interconnected and that only by truly taking care of each other can we truly take care of ourselves and our society as a whole.

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**“We focus not only on the degradation of nature, but also on the degradation of communities and barriers to economic self-sufficiency and the ability to build wealth for families.”**

—Michelle de la Uz, executive director

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**How did you begin working with community members on climate justice issues? And how has your work changed given the many urgent community needs in the pandemic?**

FAC began working with community members on climate justice issues first through an economic justice lens when we launched Ecomat, a nontoxic green dry-cleaning business in the late 1990s. The social-purpose business had a double bottom line: to provide a green, nontoxic, nonpolluting alternative to dry cleaning while also providing family-supporting jobs for individuals with barriers to employment such as histories of incarceration or homelessness. FAC’s climate justice work is a natural outgrowth of serving the people and communities of south Brooklyn. FAC serves many coastal communities; our office is one block from New York City’s first U.S. EPA Superfund site—the Gowanus Canal—and we work in communities with a concentration of brownfield sites, waste transfer stations, and elevated highways immediately adjacent to homes. As an owner and manager of affordable housing and a community-based organization in Brooklyn, FAC has been on the front lines serving thousands of families during many climate events, including Superstorm Sandy and various heat waves and electrical outages.

FAC’s work serving over 5,500 low- and moderate-income New Yorkers annually is more essential than ever because of the pandemic. COVID-19 has laid bare the systemic inequalities that have existed in our society for generations. FAC is focused both on immediate emergency needs that exist for families who have been directly affected by COVID and have lost jobs and income as well as ensuring a just recovery for all from this global pandemic.



# Environmental Justice and Housing

Environmental justice and climate justice have key intersections with housing equity. Many low-income neighborhoods, or neighborhoods that are predominantly home to Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, experience poor housing conditions that worsen health disparities in comparison to wealthier, whiter areas. Whether because of decreased access to maintenance capital or landlord neglect, these homes—which are often also older buildings—may have heightened indoor exposure to toxins like lead-based paint, mold, asbestos, or allergen triggers and disease vectors through pests that can exacerbate asthma and other respiratory illness. Additionally, residents of housing in gentrifying areas may experience pressure to leave by property owners who might block access to heat or hot water in an attempt to make units available for higher-income tenants.

These homes are not only hazardous to their occupants' health—they are often also less resilient to climate risks such as storms or extreme temperatures, and homeowners may be unable to afford solutions that could offer increased protection unless they can access additional financing assistance.

Ensuring marginalized communities can live in dignified, healthy, resilient housing is thus a major environmental justice issue. Organizations like [Enterprise Green Communities](#) can help provide resources and toolkits to address the problem in both new construction and existing housing stock through retrofits.



Healthy, sustainable, affordable housing is a core area of environmental justice that real estate can support.



**Tell us about your partnership with ULI New York and your work on urban heat island effects in the context of a local rezoning. Do you think a partnership like that could work in other communities?**

FAC and the community coalition we helped found, the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ), have partnered with ULI New York as part of our efforts to advance economic, environmental, and racial justice as part of the Gowanus area-wide rezoning. ULI helped organize a fantastic technical assistance panel focused on urban heat island effects in the neighborhood and made specific recommendations that could be applied to the neighborhood rezoning. The recommendations in the report published in January 2018, *A Vision for a Greener, Healthier, Cooler Gowanus: Strategies to Mitigate Urban Heat Island Effect*, have been incorporated into the GNCJ's platform, demands, and priorities and inform our coalition's advocacy and organizing efforts.

The partnership grew from there, with the Urban Land Institute's New York district council and Urban Resilience program collaborating with the New York Institute of Technology and the Urban Climate Change Research Network, FAC, and local community leaders and stakeholders to conduct an Urban Design Climate Workshop in Gowanus, which sharpened our advocacy to create New York City's first eco-district.

The partnership that FAC has with ULI can absolutely work in other communities. The key ingredients are engaged and knowledgeable local residents and stakeholders who are willing and able to share their lived experience and expertise with the professional experts that ULI brings. By recognizing and combining the community's expertise with the ULI members' expertise, the recommendations and actions coming out of the partnership advance climate, land use, and community goals simultaneously.



Creating opportunities for dialogue between community members and real estate decision-makers can ensure that a broader range of perspectives and expertise is incorporated into development.



# Equitable Renewable Energy

## Meet the Initiative for Energy Justice

INITIATIVE FOR ENERGY JUSTICE

Initiative for Energy Justice cofounder and codirector Shalanda Baker speaks at an energy justice policy and strategy workshop.

### LOCATION

Boston, Massachusetts

### TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Research and technical assistance

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[iejusa.org](http://iejusa.org)

### MISSION

The Initiative for Energy Justice aims to (1) contribute to a bottom-up movement of energy justice, originating in frontline communities, by arming movement and base-building organizations in the environmental, racial, and economic justice spaces with well-supported policy research and workable transactional models for operationalizing a just transition to renewable energy; and (2) provide city and state policymakers with concrete energy policy frameworks and best practice tools that foreground equity in the transition to renewable energy, drawing on the best available data collected from frontline advocates, existing energy policies, and frameworks designed by our team.





#### INTERVIEW WITH

**Shalanda H. Baker**, professor of law, public policy, and urban affairs, Northeastern University; cofounder and codirector, Initiative for Energy Justice. Baker is the author of the forthcoming book [\*Revolutionary Power: An Activist's Guide to the Energy Transition\*](#) (Island Press).

(Baker recently moved into a new role as deputy director for energy justice in the U.S. Department of Energy.)

### What is your organization's area of focus, and how does it relate to the built environment and land use?

The initiative's team is made up of codirectors Shalanda H. Baker and Subin DeVar, communications team lead Melissa Sonntag, and interdisciplinary student researchers ranging from the undergraduate level to the law student and PhD levels. In our work on the ground, we noticed that structural inequality and racial equity were not a consistent part of the energy policymaking process. We formed the Initiative for Energy Justice in 2018 to address the need to infuse equity into society's transition away from fossil fuels and to ensure that this transition does not replicate the inequality already baked into the energy system.

The shape of our energy system links directly to the built environment. One of our cofounders, Professor Baker, a professor of law, public policy, and urban affairs, sits on the Massachusetts Energy Facilities Siting Board, which makes decisions about whether an energy facility can and should be located in a certain community. Justice requires that certain communities not disproportionately

bear the burden of energy facility siting. For example, historically, Black and Brown communities have borne the burdens of fossil fuel generation. Our work addresses these concerns, too, since clean energy facilities can be concentrated in environmentally sensitive locations or in communities already burdened by environmental hazards.



Fossil fuel-based energy creates a higher pollution burden on Black and other communities of color, accentuating the need for real estate to transition to renewables.



## How do you define environmental justice in your work?

We've written a guide, the *Energy Justice Workbook*, to discuss the links among energy justice, climate justice, and environmental justice. These concepts are tied together by decades of research and scholarship, as well as community advocacy. In our workbook, we rely on the careful work of environmental justice scholars and advocates in the field, and we define environmental justice as having two key components: procedural justice and substantive, or distributive, justice. Procedural justice requires that communities have a meaningful voice in environmental decision-making, whereas distributive justice requires the equitable distribution of the burdens and benefits of environmental decisions. Environmental justice, as we define it, requires the recognition and remediation of the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on communities of color and low-income communities.

## How would you describe your experiences working with the real estate sector? What do you hope to see in the future from the real estate sector, especially given increased awareness of racial and environmental justice concerns?

Real property and the rules associated with it form an important backdrop to the work of energy justice. For example, residents of many low-income homes experience extreme energy burdens (high energy costs) because their homes are inefficient or need upgrades to maximize energy efficiency. Low-income homeowners can sometimes access local or state programs to offset the cost of efficiency upgrades to create long-term savings. For renters, however, the situation is more

complicated. There is a split incentive: landlords lack the incentive to pay for efficiency upgrades because they do not live in the home and their tenants, not they, would be the primary beneficiaries. The split incentive problem reappears in the context of rooftop solar investments that could drastically reduce a renter's energy burden. We would love to see more innovation on the part of policymakers to mitigate the split incentive problem facing property owners.

## How do you approach those who may be skeptical about the need for energy justice?

Unfortunately, skepticism is more common than not. Up until COVID-19, many policymakers and mainstream climate advocates had been slow to make the connection between broader racial inequality and economic injustice and the need for just energy policy. Many prominent climate change stakeholders have expressed concern that including equity in energy and climate policy conversations upfront will unnecessarily delay progress and possibly derail any chance to avert catastrophic climate change. Before COVID-19, we argued that our fates with respect to climate are inextricably linked and that we have an unprecedented opportunity to right the wrongs baked into the fossil fuel-based energy system. The pandemic has revealed the raft of issues facing communities of color in this country, but we still have a long way to go.



“Environmental justice, as we define it, requires the recognition and remediation of the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on communities of color and low-income communities.”

—Shalanda H. Baker, cofounder and former codirector, Initiative for Energy Justice; current deputy director for energy justice in the U.S. Department of Energy

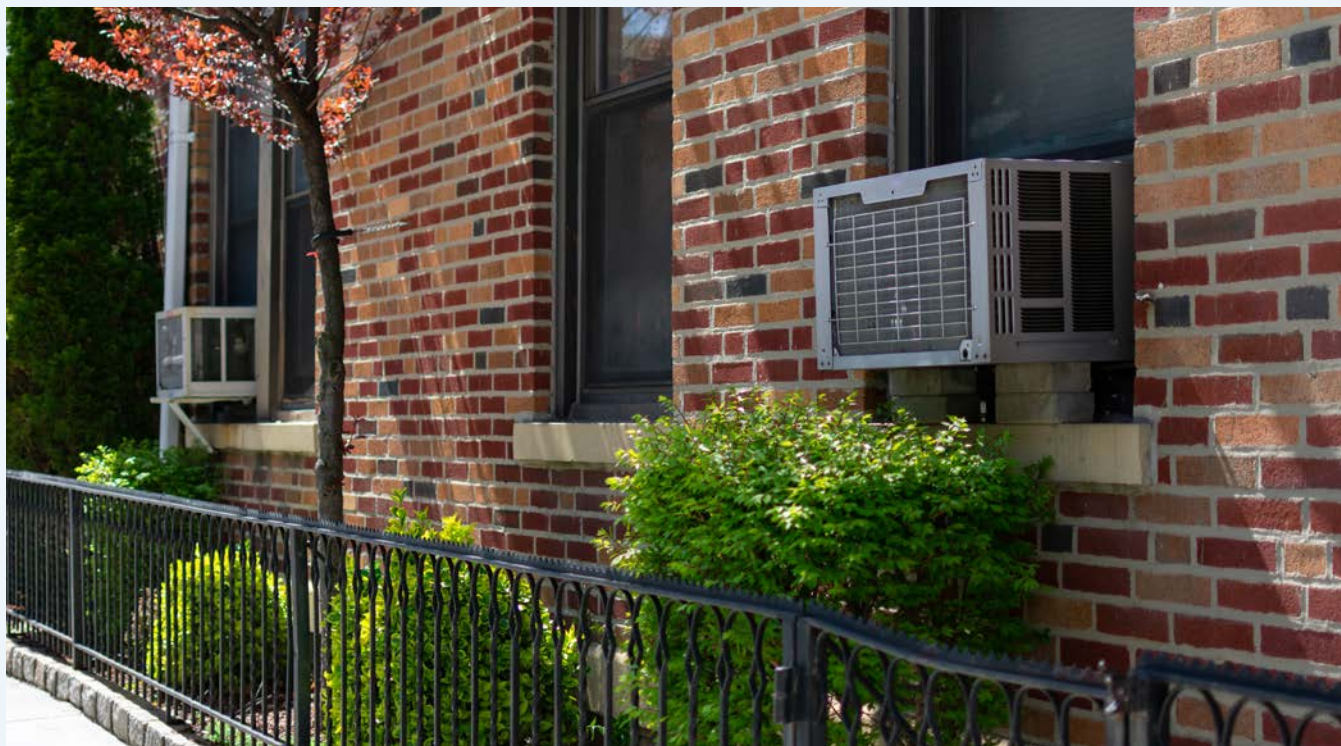
# Energy Burdens for Low-Income Households

Energy burdens, or high energy costs in proportion to household income, disproportionately affect low-income and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous/Native American households. According to [research](#) by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE), Black households spend 43 percent more of their income on energy costs than White households, while Native American households spend 45 percent more and Hispanic households 20 percent more. Some households spend nearly 20 percent of their income on energy, drastically affecting their finances. Additionally, the same research shows high energy burdens are associated with outcomes like greater risk of respiratory disease, increased stress, and reduced economic mobility.<sup>18</sup>

In 2020, job and income losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated energy burdens and put many households at risk of utility shutoffs,

precisely when working or learning from home required steady energy supplies more than ever. High energy bills and inefficient homes with old equipment or poor insulation can force an impossible choice between keeping the light and heat on or affording necessities like food and medicine.

Although it would reduce energy bills in the long term, upgrading homes to become more efficient or installing on-site renewable energy requires upfront investment that many low-income homeowners cannot afford and renters cannot implement on their own. Local or state governments and utilities often offer programs to weatherize, retrofit, or otherwise improve efficiency at low or no cost to residents and owners, and private financing programs like PACE [Property Assessed Clean Energy] can help close the gap; however, these programs should be paired with comprehensive outreach to eligible households to ensure their needs are being met.



High energy costs can limit low-income households' climate resilience; for example, extreme heat makes unaffordable air conditioning a significant health hazard for many.





Rather than facilitating the siting of dirty projects, the industry can help create pathways for local, small-scale energy projects, such as community solar, in communities that bear the burden of pollution, waste, and other environmental hazards.

### **What uptake have you seen from policymakers in focusing on equity in new climate or energy policies, and how can the real estate sector help accelerate that process?**

New York State's [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act \(CLCPA\)](#) is one of the most ambitious and promising pieces of legislation out there. The CLCPA was drafted in collaboration with frontline community groups (a form of procedural justice, referenced above) and includes a range of provisions concerning equity and ensuring that traditionally excluded communities benefit (a form of substantive, or distributive, justice) from New York state's ambitious transition away from fossil fuels.

Real estate issues are implicated in the siting of energy facilities as well as the background rules that structure the incentives related to energy issues. In terms of next steps, the real estate sector could play an active role in advancing racial justice by first ensuring that stakeholders “do no harm” and their developments do not *increase* environmental burdens in communities of color.

For example, rather than facilitating the siting of dirty projects, the industry can help create pathways for local, small-scale energy projects, such as community solar, in communities that bear the burden of pollution, waste, and other environmental hazards. These tend to be low-income communities, communities of color, and rural communities. Advocates, policymakers, and scholars often refer to these as “environmental justice” communities.

Second, on the energy side, real estate stakeholders can work to lobby policymakers to create policies that eliminate the split incentive problem for investments in energy efficiency upgrades. Finally, the industry can work with lawmakers and policymakers to create opportunities for clean energy investments in and by low-income communities.

To obtain a copy of the *Energy Justice Workbook*, visit <https://iejusa.org/workbook/>.



THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE

# Empowerment and Climate Investment

## Meet The Greenlining Institute

Creating a clean energy workforce (inclusive of former fossil fuel workers) during the transition to a carbon-free economy is a critical element of climate justice.

### LOCATION

Oakland, California

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[greenlining.org](https://greenlining.org)

### TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

The Greenlining Institute works to build a just economy by acting as an incubator of new policy ideas, a bridge builder between diverse partners, and an advocate to build momentum for transformative change.

### MISSION

The Greenlining Institute envisions a future where communities of color can build wealth, live in healthy places filled with economic opportunity, and are ready to meet the challenges posed by climate change.





SONRISA COOPER

INTERVIEW WITH

**Sonrisa Cooper**, transformative communities program manager

**What is your organization's area of focus, and how does it relate to the built environment and land use?**

The Greenlining Institute wants to build a community-centered economic system that is cooperative, regenerative, democratic, nonexploitative, and inclusive. Our vision for the world is a future where people of color thrive and race is never a barrier to opportunity.

At Greenlining, equity and justice are at the core of our work. We advocate for low-income people of color by directing climate investment dollars to the most affected communities, developing equitable climate adaptation and resilience strategies, expanding access to clean transportation and mobility options that lift people out of poverty, and creating a new economy built to support people, the planet, and prosperity.

**How do you define environmental justice in your work?**

We define climate justice as ensuring that the people and communities who are least culpable in the warming of the planet, and most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, do not suffer disproportionately as a result of historical injustice and disinvestment. Low-income communities of color are at the front lines of climate change, in that they experience the effects of the climate crisis first and worst. Climate justice requires leaders to acknowledge that frontline communities are experts in creating solutions to protect and preserve our air, water, land, and communities, despite these communities' historical exclusion from decision-making and from public resources and services. Climate justice also requires leaders to provide public resources and services to frontline communities to engage and assist them in developing technologies, policies, professions, services, and projects for addressing the causes and impacts of climate change and healing from historical injustices.

We define equity as a continuous practice of transforming behaviors, institutions, and systems that disproportionately harm people of color. Equity means increasing access to power, redistributing and providing additional resources, and eliminating barriers to opportunity in order to empower low-income communities of color to thrive and reach their full potential. Our vision goes beyond saving the planet; we are working toward a resilient new economic system that repairs past injustices and in which all people can thrive.





“Climate justice requires leaders to acknowledge that frontline communities are experts in creating solutions to protect and preserve our air, water, land, and communities, despite these communities’ historical exclusion from decision-making and from public resources and services.”

—Sonrisa Cooper, transformative communities program manager,  
Greenlining Institute





In addition to experiencing frequently higher climate risk, communities historically and currently impacted by discriminatory policies and practices were also hit harder by the health and economic effects of COVID-19. Mutual aid efforts to distribute resources and assistance are key to social resilience, and real estate can help by creating supportive community spaces or resilience hubs in new developments.

### **What do you hope to see from the real estate sector, especially given current increased awareness of racial and environmental justice?**

There is so much potential in the real estate sector to bring racial justice into the field. The sector needs to understand and acknowledge the legacy of racism in the built environment; planning and zoning decisions made decades ago are responsible for many of the racial disparities in our world today, and ignoring that fact will just reinforce those disparities. Many of the same communities that were redlined in the 1930s were demolished for urban renewal in the 1970s, destroyed by the foreclosure crisis in the 2000s, and are currently facing the worst impacts of COVID-19 and climate change.

I am a planner, and I am constantly asking myself what more I can do to bring a racial justice lens to my work: How can I listen to the community better? What can planners and developers do to make sure that people are not displaced? How can we repair past harms done to communities of color? The real estate sector needs to proactively take an approach to investment and development that prioritizes the needs of low-income communities of color if we want to level the playing field.

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### **Compounding Risks for Communities of Color**

*“Communities of color don’t face individual risks; they face compounding threats that have multiplier effects with each other. . . . These issues don’t stem from individual policy decisions; they all stem from the exact same root cause, which is structural racism.”*

—Sonrisa Cooper, The Greenlining Institute, speaking at the “Environmental Justice and Real Estate: Where To from Here?” webinar

The concept of compounding risk refers to the cascading effects of multiple stresses exacerbating one another’s severity within impacted communities: for example, formerly redlined communities of color that now experience a confluence of industrial land uses and lack of green space, reducing air quality, now show some of the highest health impacts from COVID-19.

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# Equitable Access to Parks and Green Space

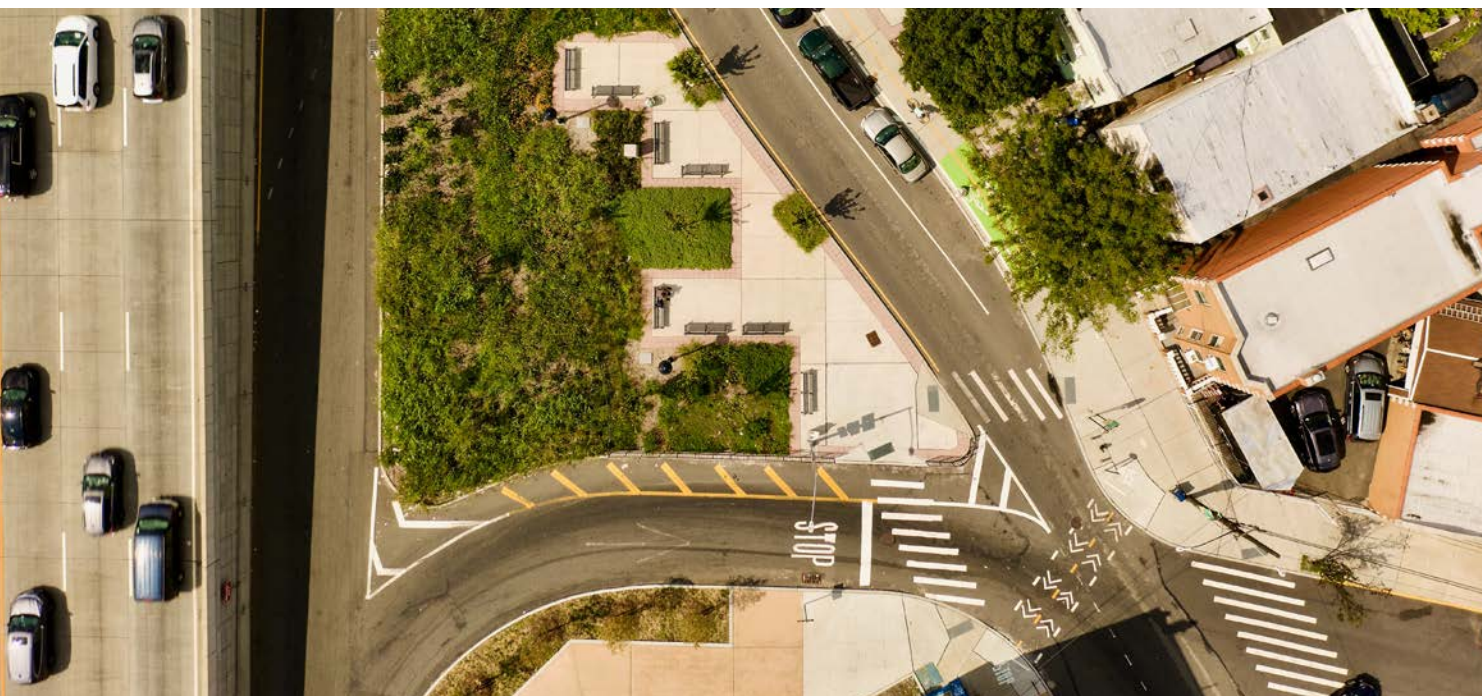
Parks are critical components of infrastructure in communities. Parks improve health outcomes by serving as spaces for both play and relaxation, and they help build resilience to extreme heat and flooding by cooling the air and absorbing stormwater. As the COVID-19 pandemic changed how the world was living and many indoor gathering places closed, people across the world turned to local parks and green spaces for recreation, stress relief, and distanced gatherings. However, research shows that despite the importance and benefits of parks, one in three Americans—more than 100 million people—do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home.

In particular, park size and access are not equitably distributed across cities; parks in Black and Brown neighborhoods are fewer, smaller, and serve more people than parks in majority-White neighborhoods. When parks are available, many suffer from inadequate maintenance, uninspiring facilities, and a lack of activities or equipment that residents desire. These inequities in park investment and quality are rooted in a long history of intentional discrimination and segregation; therefore, creating more equitable park systems will require intentional practices toward racial justice, including understanding how park quality varies across a system and prioritizing city investment in parks in neighborhoods that have been historically underserved.



Real estate actors can enhance park equity by supporting high-quality park space in developments within underserved communities.





Formerly redlined neighborhoods are often hotter than non-redlined neighborhoods, in part because they have less green space, fewer trees, and more paved surfaces.

### What connections do you see among current movements for racial justice and climate change or environmental issues?

Racial justice and climate change are deeply intertwined. Decades of structural racism have put communities of color on the front lines of climate change. Thanks to the long history of disinvestment in communities of color, formerly redlined neighborhoods [suffer the worst and costliest flood damage](#),<sup>19</sup> are more likely to have [poor air quality due to pollution from oil refineries](#),<sup>20</sup> and can [be as much as 20 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than wealthier neighborhoods](#)<sup>21</sup> because of lack of tree cover. Perhaps this is why Black and Latino communities recognize the seriousness of the climate crisis; [a 2019 poll by the Yale Program on Climate Communication showed that 69 percent of Latinos and 57 percent of Black people were concerned with climate change](#),<sup>22</sup> compared with just 49 percent of White people. The environmental racism of the climate crisis is yet another way that our society continues to devalue communities of color.

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Black households making between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year experience the same level of air pollution as White households making \$10,000 or less, showing the dominance of race as a factor in environmental injustice.<sup>23</sup>

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If you look at a redlining map and compare it with a current map of air quality, heat exposure, wildfire risk, or flood zones, you will see that the formerly redlined neighborhoods are the same ones that are the most vulnerable to climate change and pollution. Solutions to environmental issues need to be led by the people who are most affected by climate change, so we need to make sure that our policies are being shaped and implemented by people of color.

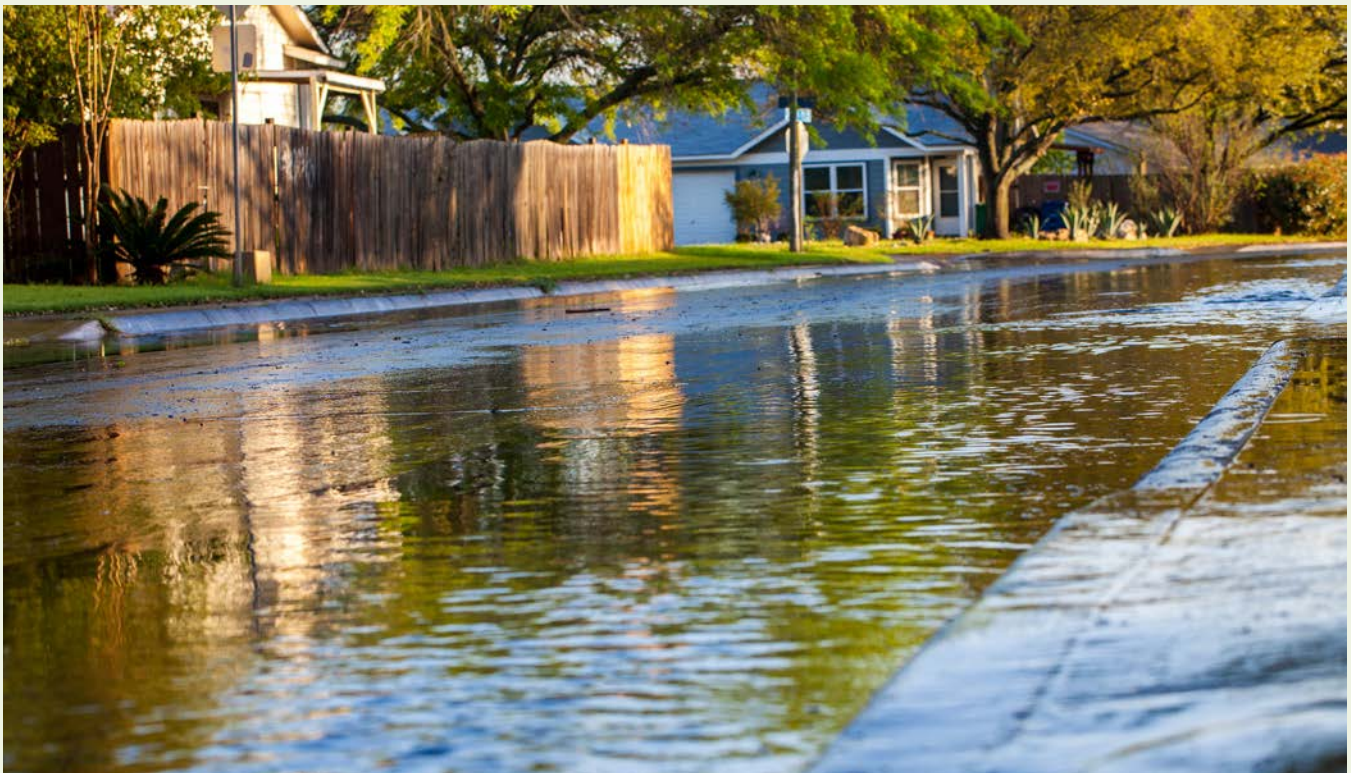
# Climate Legacies of Redlining

Redlining, technically legal throughout the United States until the Fair Housing Act of 1968, was a racist lending practice [developed by the federal government with local banks and real estate actors](#),<sup>24</sup> which ranked and mapped urban communities as safe or unsafe for investment depending on their racial composition, favoring wealthy, White areas (mapped as green or blue) and denying housing loans to Black and other communities of color (mapped as red). [Research by Redfin](#) indicates that Black homeowners today are five times more likely to own a home in a formerly redlined area than in a greenlined area, and that households in formerly redlined neighborhoods have gained an average of \$212,000 less in personal wealth from property value increases than owners in greenlined neighborhoods in the past 40 years.<sup>25</sup>

This systematic shutdown of access to capital has had wide-ranging social and environmental impact. For example, areas once redlined now


consistently [have lower levels of tree canopy cover](#) and green space and higher amounts of heat-trapping paved surfaces, potentially because of being historically developed with smaller lots and residents having less political influence over public investments in trees and parks and fewer economic resources to green their own properties.<sup>26</sup> [Research has shown](#) that these factors combine to make formerly redlined neighborhoods up to 15 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than affluent White neighborhoods, drastically increasing health risks from extreme heat, which climate change will continue to exacerbate.<sup>27</sup>

[Redfin](#) has also found some \$107 billion worth of homes at high risk of flooding in formerly redlined areas, compared with \$85 billion worth of homes in greenlined areas, because redlined neighborhoods historically were sited in less desirable low-lying areas or denied the same degree of public flood protection infrastructure.<sup>28</sup>



Formerly redlined neighborhoods have more property value at risk of flooding than do greenlined neighborhoods.





“In particular, we need race-conscious solutions that target investment to formerly redlined communities that have suffered the longest from historical discrimination and disinvestment.”

—Sonrisa Cooper, transformative communities program manager,  
Greenlining Institute



**What is the role of private investment in addressing energy and environmental equity, and how can that process achieve greater impact?**

Private investment definitely has a role to play in addressing equity, but it will take a willingness from the sector to shift power. One way to do this is by making sure that private actors are held to a set of equity standards around how they do business. Without guardrails in place, such as a strong value-capture approach or regulation over equity policies, private investment in environmental projects can trigger gentrification and displacement or exacerbate existing inequities in low-income communities of color. The private sector can contribute by prioritizing projects that provide co-benefits by addressing multiple issues and sectors at once—for example, a transit-oriented project developed in partnership with a health care provider and a workforce development agency. Other ways the private sector can address equity are by making sure that the main benefits of a project go directly to the most-affected people instead of trickling down from the top and by pushing for community voices to be part of decision-making.

On a broader, more systemic level, we need to change the way that we think about risk in private investment. For decades or even centuries, communities of color have been forced to bear the social and environmental costs of extraction and exorbitant profit. Projects that implicitly pass these costs onto communities can reinforce past injustices and worsen current disparities. Private investors need to fully account for the externalities upfront and refuse to pass the costs on to communities if they want to be serious about environmental justice.

**What approach do you think we should be taking to COVID-19 and the economic recovery?**

Similar to climate change, we need to orient our disaster response toward long-term community resilience. Immediate relief is important, but we also need to be working in parallel toward a future that addresses the root causes of racial disparities. We need to set standards for community investment strategies as we bounce back from crisis; in particular, we need race-conscious solutions that target investment to formerly redlined communities that have suffered the longest from historical discrimination and disinvestment.

COVID-19 will go away eventually, but the economic impacts of the pandemic will reverberate for decades. A recent study titled “[Longer-Run Economic Consequences of Pandemics](#)” put forth by economists at the University of California, Davis, found that the economic effects of a pandemic will typically linger for about 40 years after the last victim dies.<sup>29</sup> The history of redlining reminds us that in the past, economic recovery efforts have left communities of color by the wayside. This time, we have an opportunity to change the course for climate change, the racial wealth gap, and other issues facing communities of color. This is our chance to rewrite the rules of our economy so that community resilience comes first.



# Next Directions

## Steps for Real Estate to Act on Environmental Justice

How can the real estate industry center environmental justice in the development process?

### Taidgh McClory

Director of Social Impact & Inclusion,  
MP Boston

Founder, T.H. McClory LLC

Member, ULI Responsible Property  
Investment Council

The Urban Land Institute’s driving vision and mission to “shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide” is predicated on a belief that the decisions, actions, and policies of the 45,000 global ULI members made today will affect tomorrow. Unfortunately, transformative impact is not always positive. As

we have learned from the community organization perspectives presented in this resource and the Responsible Property Investment Council webinar “Environmental Justice and Real Estate: Where To from Here?,” the topic of environmental justice is complex. The public and private real estate sectors have played a major role in determining which communities experience greater environmental, climate, and health risk, as evidenced by the past decisions, actions, and policies that led to the disparate impacts of redlining, industrial pollution, and infrastructure decline in communities of color. Acknowledging these negative impacts at the intersection of the real estate industry and environmental justice is a key first step for real estate leaders to build solutions that shape a future of positive impact.



Real estate, land use, and design practitioners across ULI's global network can become part of comprehensive solutions on environmental justice by prioritizing equity in their work and actively seeking to understand, incorporate, and empower the perspectives of people affected by built-environment decisions. Each of the community organizations featured here is deeply involved in shaping the future of their communities and has provided insightful knowledge and potential solutions for collaborating with the real estate sector on issues of environmental justice.

### **Recognize that we are all interconnected—our problems and our solutions:**

*"Due to COVID-19 and the renewed fight for racial justice . . . , FAC hopes that the real estate sector fully acknowledges that we are all interconnected and that only by truly taking care of each other can we truly take care of ourselves and our society as a whole."*

—Michelle de la Uz  
Fifth Avenue Committee

### **Leverage innovative community ownership models to create equitable development:**

*"We hope to see more community ownership and decision-making when it comes to real estate and development. We need innovative ownership and development models such as community land trusts, land banks, and community benefits agreements that ensure that what is built meets the needs of our existing community—not just investors."*

—Zelalem Adefris  
Catalyst Miami

### **Understand and acknowledge the legacy of past decisions, actions, policies:**

*"The real estate sector needs to understand and acknowledge the legacy of racism in the built environment; planning and zoning decisions made decades ago are responsible for many of the racial disparities in our world today, and ignoring that fact will just reinforce those disparities. . . . The real estate sector needs to proactively take an approach to investment and development that prioritizes the needs of low-income communities of color if we want to level the playing field."*

—Sonrisa Cooper  
The Greenlining Institute

### **Embed an equity-mindset that assesses impact and reduces the cluster of environmental burden:**

*"The real estate sector could play an active role in advancing racial justice by first ensuring that stakeholders 'do no harm' and their developments do not increase environmental burdens in communities of color. For example, rather than facilitating the siting of dirty projects, the industry can help create pathways for local, small-scale energy projects, such as community solar, in communities that bear the burden of pollution, waste, and other environmental hazards. These tend to be low-income communities, communities of color, and rural communities. Advocates, policymakers, and scholars often refer to these as 'environmental justice' communities."*

—Shalanda Baker  
Initiative for Energy Justice

### **Equitable development as a place-based approach for underserved communities**

The Greenlining Institute has highlighted a set of standards for equitable, community-based investment and development in its resource, [The Greenlined Economy Guidebook](#). These standards aim to create a model for investment that addresses the root causes of poverty and inequality, covering projects in housing and real estate to infrastructure, transportation, or parks.

## Equitable Community Investment Standards

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Emphasize race-conscious solutions</b></p> <p>Race-conscious policies like redlining and urban renewal got us to this point, and race-neutral approaches can't fix the underlying inequities. Investment needs to target and prioritize the most impacted communities.</p>   | <p><b>Prioritize multisector approaches</b></p> <p>Programs may be siloed, but problems are not. We need to prioritize approaches that address multiple issues and sectors at once.</p>   | <p><b>Deliver intentional benefits</b></p> <p>Benefits cannot trickle down to communities; they need to go directly to the people in the most impactful ways, while avoiding increasing or creating new burdens.</p>   |
| <p><b>Build community capacity</b></p> <p>Long-term disinvestment and discriminatory policies can erode a community's capacity for leadership, organizing, or political capital. Acknowledging the ways that structural racism has impacted the capacity of communities of color to undertake community development projects is a key part of improving investments.</p> | <p><b>Be community-driven at every stage</b></p> <p>Lifting up community-led ideas and sharing decision-making power is an important element of truly community-centered investment. Community members and organizations should be part of every phase of the project or policy, from goal-setting to analysis.</p> | <p><b>Establish paths toward wealth-building</b></p> <p>We need community ownership of assets and opportunities to continue building wealth. In a Greenlined Economy, as many people as possible should be able to participate in wealth building, which will include a broader set of pathways beyond homeownership with lower barriers to entry.</p> |

**Source:** The Greenlined Economy Guidebook, *The Greenlining Institute*.

Community organizations are deeply involved in shaping the future of our neighborhoods and have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share in forming a more equitable path forward together. Community partnerships are key. Increasing interest and know-how on cooperative development among private- and public-sector players is essential to ensuring that climate and environmental justice solutions benefit everyone equitably. To execute ULI's driving vision, we must continue to challenge our collective ULI

membership and industry to ensure that we are shaping the future of the built environment by creating *positive* transformative impact. Executing this vision will be an exciting challenge that requires a collaborative effort by private-sector stakeholders and government actors working together to partner with community-based organizations to make sure that the process of urban development has a positive impact on all communities worldwide.



# Learn More about Environmental Justice

The following resources may be helpful in developing greater familiarity with the concepts of environmental justice and how to support frontline communities locally and beyond.

[American Planning Association's KnowledgeBase resources on Equity](#)

[American Planning Association's KnowledgeBase resources on the Built Environment and Health](#)

[EPA Resources on Environmental Justice](#)

[Equitable Development and Environmental Justice, U.S. EPA](#)

[The \*Guardian's\* yearlong series on environmental justice, \*Our Unequal Earth\*](#)

[Greenlining Institute's \*Greenlined Economy Guidebook\*](#)

[NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, Resources, and list of key organizations](#)

[Principles of Environmental Justice, from the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit](#)

## ULI RESOURCES AND RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

[A Vision for a Greener, Healthier, Cooler Gowanus: Strategies to Mitigate the Urban Heat Island Effect \(ULI New York Technical Assistance report\)](#)

[Change for Good: Lessons from ULI's District Council Task Forces for Health and Social Equity \(ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative research report\)](#)

[Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program](#)

[Health and Social Equity in Real Estate: State of the Market and Health and Social Equity in Real Estate: Examples from the Field \(ULI Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance research reports\)](#)

[Healthy Housing for All: How Affordable Housing Is Leading the Way \(ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative research report\)](#)

[Parks and Boulevard System—Kansas City, Missouri: Providing a More Equitable Approach to Investing in Parks and Recreation \(ULI Advisory Services panel report\)](#)

[Scorched: Extreme Heat and Real Estate \(ULI Urban Resilience research report\)](#)

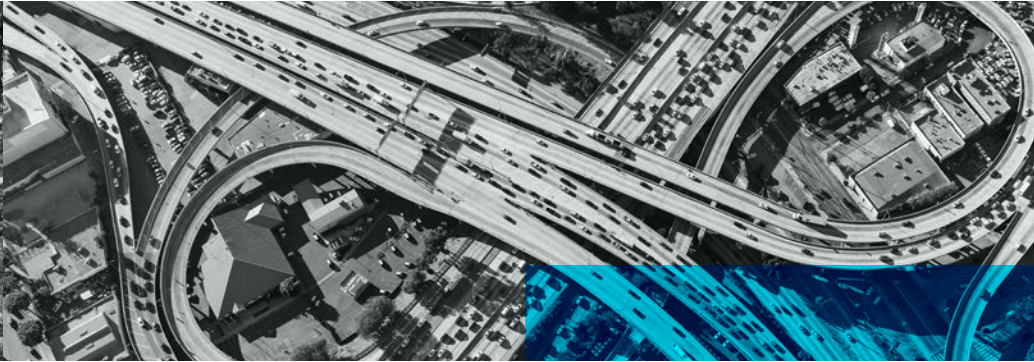
[ULI's Reading List on Real Estate and Social Equity](#)

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