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The Delacorte Theater, Central Park. Image: Courtesy of PJ Rountree and Tri-Lox.

New York Embodied Carbon Working Group (NYECWG) Releases Statewide Roadmap for Low-Carbon Building Design

New action plan positions architects and design professionals at the forefront of reducing embodied carbon in New York's built environment.

NEW YORK, NY, July 28, 2026—Architects and design leaders across New York today unveiled the first statewide action plan that positions embodied carbon reduction as the next frontier of climate-responsive design. Developed by over 35 experts representing architecture, engineering, construction, manufacturing, government, industry associations, and academia, the **New York Embodied Carbon Action Plan**



demonstrates how design decisions made before construction begins can dramatically reduce emissions while strengthening New York's economy.

For decades, sustainable design has focused primarily on reducing the energy buildings consume once they are occupied. As operational emissions decline through policies such as the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) and Local Law 97 (LL97), attention is increasingly shifting toward embodied carbon—the emissions associated with manufacturing, transporting, installing, maintaining, and ultimately disposing of building materials. Because these emissions are largely determined before construction begins, architects and design professionals are uniquely positioned to reduce a building's climate impact from the earliest stages of design.

Recognizing the outsized influence of early design decisions—from whether to renovate or replace a building to what materials can be reused or specified—the **New York Embodied Carbon Working Group (NYECWG)** spent more than a year developing a comprehensive framework for reducing embodied carbon across the state. The Action Plan combines policy recommendations with practical implementation strategies, economic analysis, and 22 real-world case studies that demonstrate how thoughtful design can reduce emissions while supporting resilient communities, expanding local manufacturing, and strengthening regional supply chains.

Rather than presenting abstract policy concepts, the report illustrates how embodied carbon reduction is already happening across New York through projects that embrace adaptive reuse, material circularity, and innovative collaboration.

At the **Delacorte Theater** in Central Park, reclaimed New York City water tower wood was transformed into the renovated theater's new exterior, creating a distinctive architectural expression rooted in the city's history while diverting valuable materials from the waste stream and supporting a local manufacturing ecosystem.

At **70 Mulberry** in Chinatown, adaptive reuse preserves a historic civic landmark while restoring an essential neighborhood gathering place. Through early collaboration between designers and builders, the project demonstrates how preservation, community investment, and embodied carbon reduction can reinforce one another rather than compete.

Meanwhile, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's **Lincoln Tunnel Deconstruction Pilot** is proving that demolition materials can become valuable resources instead of landfill waste. By carefully salvaging and recirculating historic



masonry, the project is testing new approaches to circular construction that can inform future infrastructure projects throughout the region.

Collectively, these projects demonstrate that reducing embodied carbon is fundamentally a design challenge—one that rewards creativity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and thoughtful stewardship of existing buildings and materials.

Beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Action Plan outlines a pathway toward building a predictable market for low-carbon construction materials, expanding regional manufacturing capacity, strengthening domestic supply chains, and supporting New York's growing green economy. The recommendations provide an actionable framework built by practitioners for practitioners, drawing directly from the experiences of architects, engineers, manufacturers, contractors, owners, and public agencies working to reduce the environmental impact of the built environment.

New York possesses the technical expertise, market demand, academic leadership, and design talent needed to become a national leader in low-carbon construction and circular material systems. By treating existing buildings and materials as valuable resources—and by investing in innovative design, adaptive reuse, and local manufacturing—the state can reduce emissions while creating jobs, supporting resilient communities, and maximizing the value of its public investments.

[Read the full report here.](#)

“Reducing embodied carbon is not just a climate strategy—it’s a cost-effective economic development strategy. Embodied carbon policies not only accelerate progress toward achieving New York’s climate goals but also stimulate innovation, build resilient local supply chains, and deliver economic and workforce benefits across the state,” said **Jesse Lazar, Assoc. AIA, AIA New York and the Center for Architecture**. “Architects and design professionals play a uniquely pivotal role in shaping our built environment, deciding what materials are used and how buildings are adapted and reused. This vision for New York will bolster our green economy, bring jobs, innovation, and growth statewide with strategic, ambitious, and achievable policy solutions.”

“Reducing the carbon emissions caused by construction of buildings and other structures is a critical and underappreciated part of the work we need to do as we create a greener, healthier, and more sustainable world,” said **New York State Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair of the Senate Housing Committee**. “This action plan provides a clear, workable roadmap to meet this challenge without slowing down production of the housing and infrastructure that New Yorkers urgently need. I am proud to have



worked so closely with AIA New York on several of the key initiatives outlined in the plan, and to have introduced legislation to advance them.”

“Climate policy should improve people's lives while reducing emissions. That's exactly what embodied carbon strategies can do. By building smarter, reusing what we already have, and supporting low-carbon materials manufactured here in New York, we can cut greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen local economies, and make better use of taxpayer dollars,” said **New York State Assemblymember Dr. Anna Kelles, District 125**. “I commend the New York Embodied Carbon Working Group for developing a thoughtful, industry-driven roadmap that will help move New York toward a more resilient and sustainable built environment.”

“The New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC) proudly serves all New Yorkers in delivering critical infrastructure and public building projects in every neighborhood of all five boroughs. Over the past 30 years, DDC has completed over 5,000 projects with a portfolio value of \$34 billion, and the need for upgraded infrastructure and public buildings across the city only continues to grow,” said **Paul Ochoa, Commissioner, New York City Department of Design and Construction**. “DDC partners with a world-class community of AEC professionals and follows best practices in advancing urgent design performance outcomes. DDC is committed to strategic design solutions that repurpose our existing building stock and materials to reduce embodied carbon emissions, and to leverage innovative solutions that prioritize circularity wherever possible. We thank the New York Embodied Carbon Working Group for putting forth the New York Embodied Carbon Action Plan, providing greater agency to all stakeholders who are dedicated to building a more sustainable and resilient New York.”

“As a participant in the development of the New York State Embodied Carbon Action Plan, the MTA is pleased to see the results of this collaborative effort. The MTA is proud to be a leader in reducing the carbon footprint of our construction materials, specifically in our use of concrete, and always happy to lead by example in sustainable practices. All parties involved should be congratulated for their dedication to reducing emissions in New York State, and ultimately around the world,” said **Thomas Abdallah, P.E., LEED AP, ENV SP, Vice President and Chief Environmental Engineer, MTA Construction and Development**.



About AIA New York

Established in 1857, AIA New York is the oldest and largest chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), serving as the collective voice of nearly 5,000 licensed architects, allied professionals, students, and design enthusiasts in New York City.

The Center for Architecture, inaugurated in 2003 as the AIA's first-ever cultural institution, engages local and international audiences with the value, impact, and wonder of architecture. Together, we advance the value and practice of architecture to promote just and sustainable communities.

Both AIA New York and the Center for Architecture advocate for the importance of design in enhancing urban life, offering programming that fosters engagement among architects, professionals, and the public. We prioritize values such as civic engagement, equity, environmental sustainability, resiliency, technological innovation, and inspiring design.