



BE-Ex with RMI and ULI launch knowledge platform “Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings”

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Manhattan, NY Building Energy Exchange (BE-Ex) in partnership with RMI (formerly Rocky Mountain Institute) and Urban Land Institute (ULI), have launched the “Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings”, a knowledge-sharing platform hosting a growing collection of resources – including case studies, technical guides, best practices, and educational materials – dedicated to supporting building owners, operators, and their design and engineering teams in creating cost-effective, long-term decarbonization strategies for large buildings.

The platform reinvents and expands the Empire Building Playbook, a resource published in April of 2022, which presented case studies detailing the process by which Empire State Realty Trust, Hines, the Durst Organization, and Vornado Realty Trust developed their long-term carbon reduction roadmaps.

The continued sharing of partner lessons-learned through this new platform will create pathways for others to replicate successes and develop high-quality, low-carbon buildings of the future.

A joint initiative between the Empire Building Challenge (EBC), New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and leading NY commercial real estate companies demonstrating replicable approaches for low-carbon retrofits in large commercial buildings, this new platform offers building professionals guidance and insights from EBC project teams to inform the development of effective decarbonization roadmaps for their own properties.

“NYSERDA was honored to work with Building Energy Exchange, Rocky Mountain Institute, Urban Land Institute, Empire State Realty Trust, and some of the state’s leading real estate owners to develop and launch the Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings, our prime decarbonization resource for building owners. By providing clear guidance on how to build a team, evaluate solutions from a real estate and technical viewpoint, and deploy resource-efficient strategies in both commercial and multifamily buildings, building owners can support a scalable approach to building decarbonization, while supporting governor Hochul’s commitment to achieve two million climate-friendly homes by 2030,” said Susanne DesRoches, vice president, clean and resilient buildings, NYSERDA.

Elijah Hutchinson, executive director, NYC mayor’s office of climate & environmental justice, said “This new tool comes at a critical time for commercial and multifamily building owners and managers as they prepare to comply with Local Law 97. Its resources and case studies provide exemplary guidance on effective and rational approaches to large building decarbonization.”

“We applaud the Building Energy Exchange and their partners for coordinating the launch of this platform and expect to see it quickly utilized by our membership, which includes many of the foremost leaders in the real estate industry. Collaborative design and engineering strategies that can be deployed at scale are key to making retrofits cost-effective and impactful,” said Zachary Steinberg, senior vice president of policy, Real Estate Board of New York.

“It has been part of our DNA to lead the way in energy efficiency retrofits in the existing built environment since 2007 and to share all our work product for free with the industry. We are happy both to maintain our leadership position and be in the company of so many great companies who follow our path,” said Dana Robbins Schneider, senior vice president, director of energy, sustainability and ESG, Empire State Realty Trust.

Jonathan Flaherty, managing director, global head of sustainability and building technologies, Tishman Speyer said “This new platform will empower developers at all levels of real estate to achieve net-zero operations and portfolios through a more compelling, scalable, and strategic decarbonization approach that we saw great success with in our 520 Madison Ave. project.”

“Building sustainable affordable housing is critical for the future of New York City, and L+M is proud to be at the forefront of implementing cost-effective strategies and technologies in our developments to decarbonize our properties. This new platform will help evolve the affordable housing industry to a new standard of low-carbon building by providing developers and owners with additional innovative, cost-effective, and equitable solutions for developing quality affordable housing,” said Laura Spencer Humphrey, Senior Director of Energy + Sustainability, L+M Development Partners.

Benjamin Rodney, PE, Vice President, Construction, Hines said “Hines, Trinity Church Wall Street and Norges Bank are excited to see this new platform feature exemplary carbon reduction and energy efficient strategies at properties throughout the state, including Hudson Square Portfolio’s 345 Hudson Street. The Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings will provide an effective and achievable roadmap for sustainable practices and strategic decarbonization throughout our portfolio and beyond.”

The Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings is supported by NYSERDA and produced and maintained by BE-Ex, RMI, and ULI. Educating building professionals on the Strategic Decarbonization approach—a framework emerging from EBC that merges integrative engineering into asset management—to deliver more effective decarbonization, the platform currently hosts over 50 unique how-to, assessment, financial, engineering, tenant, and federal incentive resources and 10 real-world case studies from EBC partners. The platform will also encourage industry professionals to connect, collaborate, and contribute to decarbonizing large buildings over time through its open submission call for new resources and case studies.

Richard Yancey, FAIA, LEED AP, Executive Director, Building Energy Exchange, said “For over two years, BE-Ex has supported EBC through our educational programs and resources, sharing the amazing stories from the EBC partners and their ground-breaking projects. We’re thrilled to be

launching this new knowledge platform, which not only explains a ground-breaking approach to viable building decarbonization, but also provides building owners, managers, and solution providers with blueprints for strategic decarbonization through real world case studies, details from these projects, and trustworthy tools and resources.”

“The Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings presents a strategic three-step decarbonization approach, proven effective by real estate industry leaders and expert consultants. Building owners and their teams can use this approach to enhance their properties through integrated engineering solutions strategically paired with long-term capital planning for effective decarbonization. The technical resources are what make this playbook standout,” said Brett Bridgeland, Principal, Carbon-Free Buildings, RMI.

Marta Schantz, Co-Executive Director, Randall Lewis Center for Sustainability in Real Estate, ULI, said, “Retrofitting large assets is hard. Add in the complexities of electrification and a cold climate, and it’s even harder. ULI is thrilled that NYSERDA is educating the market on strategic decarbonization with its new Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings resource.”

The announcement of the third EBC cohort, featuring leading affordable and low-to-medium income housing projects, and an event to launch the platform will be held at Building Energy Exchange in downtown Manhattan on June 11.

The Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings follows the release of the related High Rise / Low Carbon Series produced by BE-Ex and NYSERDA, which advances the decarbonization of New York’s existing buildings by sharing the low-carbon retrofit success stories of the EBC partners through videos, events, and other informative resources.

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