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Implementation of Sustainable HOA Certification

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Project Purpose

As organizations that govern residential communities and their infrastructure, **homeowners associations (HOAs)** have the influence and collective buying power to drive sustainability initiatives. They exist at the forefront of sustainability initiatives designed to decrease carbon and resource footprints of buildings and communities, like Energize Denver and Waste No More. Yet their unique governance structures, restrictions, and regulations often force them to the sidelines of sustainability conversations.

CAP Management is an HOA management company that recognizes the potential of HOAs in driving sustainability goals. In previous years, they partnered with MENV Capstone teams to research HOA sustainability guidelines and develop a Sustainable HOA Certification Program. This year, a third Capstone team tested the certification across five pilot HOAs. Only one of the five qualified for certification in the end, but the collective pilot experience revealed numerous lessons about the content and implementation of the certification that can enhance its future application. The resulting Certification Version 2.0 simultaneously assists HOAs to comply with local ordinances while centering community-based sustainability solutions.

Methodology

1. Pre-Certification

Five of the 75 HOAs within CAP's portfolio were selected for the pilot program based on their representative building sizes and ages, homeowner demographics, reserve funds, and sustainability priorities.

					
Property Name	Dahlia House	Grafton	Lakehouse on 17th	The Burrell	University Park Tower (UPT)

2. Certification

Through collaboration with HOA Boards, Community Managers (CMs), and CAP's Chief Sustainability Officer, necessary documents and data were collected for each property. The data was used to complete certification scorecards, evaluate their current level of sustainability, and prioritize their future needs. Two additional events, the Burrell Homeowner Orientation and the Waste No More Ordinance Panel, also contributed data about sustainability perspectives and priorities.

3. Post-Certification

Completed scorecards were discussed with the pilot CMs in a post-certification interview, which provided detailed qualitative data about each pilot property's experience with the certificate. This was paired with team notes and experiences piloting the certification framework to extract common themes regarding certification content and implementation.

Outcomes

1. HOA Certification & Action Plans

Only one of the five pilot communities —Lakehouse on 17th—achieved any official certification level. Tailored Action Plans were created for each community to guide their sustainability investments and support their future certifications.

2. Lessons Learned Report

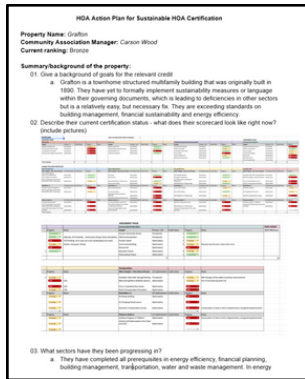
The pilot revealed several key themes regarding the content and implementation of the original certification, which hindered its success. These were synthesized into 12 lessons learned, that provide critical takeaways and suggestions based on specific pilot experiences.

3. Certification Version 2.0

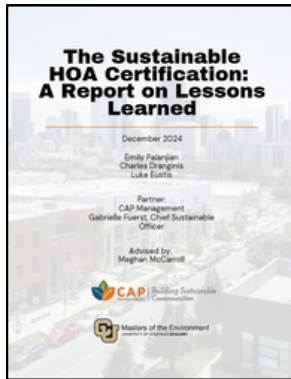
The pilot experience revealed several issues with the original certification, including a high barrier to entry and unrealistic benchmarks within specific credits. Thus, the certification framework and credit library were restructured to address these issues. The most notable changes made to Version 2.0 is the shift from a pyramidal to a columnar form, and the sorting of community-oriented credits into a brand new pillar.

4. Roadmaps

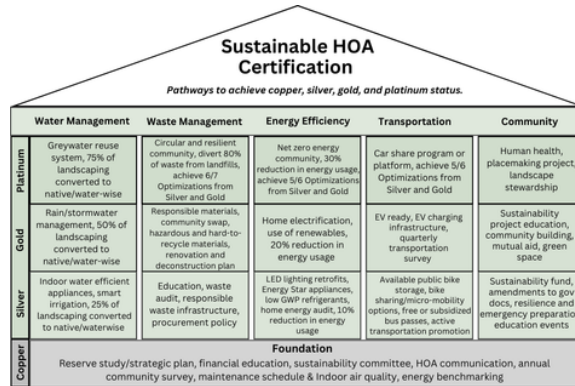
To provide HOAs with greater support and education regarding sustainability initiatives, roadmaps were developed for each sustainability sector. These provide an overview and easy-to-use checklist that can guide the management of community-wide environmental and economic endeavors.



1. Action Plan Sample



2. Lessons Learned Report



3. Version 2.0 Framework



4. Roadmap: Governance

Impact

This capstone project provided the most direct impacts for the five participating pilot properties. Lakehouse on 17th became the first certifiably Sustainable HOA in the Denver Metro area. The Burrell established a Homeowners Orientation to help make sustainable living accessible to its low-income homeowners. UPT was set up for their EPA Community Change Grant application, which would fund essential health, safety, and energy efficiency upgrades. Additionally, each of the five pilot properties is now better equipped to comply with local sustainability ordinances and invest in short- and long-term sustainability projects.

At a broader scale, the piloting of the Sustainable HOA Certification Program demonstrated the potential of HOAs in driving community sustainability. The lessons learned not only inform how best to engage HOAs in the future, but also increase the accessibility and achievement of the certification itself. We hope this work will inspire an ecosystem of HOA communities to leverage their buying power and create a healthier, happier, and more sustainable future.

Acknowledgements

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