



## **Proposal for CB3/ConEdison Settlement Fund 2012/2013 Cycle**

The Lower East Side Ecology Center is applying for a grant in the amount of \$102,781 to continue its EcoBizNYC and Street Tree Stewardship programs to improve air quality and overall health in our community.

EcoBizNYC, a program of the Lower East Side Ecology Center (Ecology Center) works with small businesses to evaluate and help them reduce their environmental impacts. The program started in late 2008 and has succeeded at helping more than 210 businesses in CB3 to reduce their energy consumption, contributions to air pollution, waste, and operating costs. In the last year, the program has engaged 18 local interns who enroll businesses in the program, learn about and practice environmental consulting, and research incentives that can help businesses operate in a more sustainable manner.

Over the past two years, the Street Tree Stewardship program has worked with the NYC Parks Department to plant over 100 new street trees in the Settlement Zone and has worked with community volunteers and interns to make sure the new and established trees are cared for. Newly planted trees require ongoing care and maintenance during the first three years in order to survive on the New York City streets. Through the Street Tree Stewardship program the Ecology Center will continue to ensure the survival of newly planted trees, educate and involve the community, and work closely with NYC Parks Department to have more trees planted in the Settlement Zone.

In the wake of superstorm Sandy, these programs are more important than ever to increase the resiliency of our community. EcoBizNYC helps reduce electricity use by local businesses, which leads to lower power plant emissions that contribute to poor air quality on the local level and to climate change. The Street Tree Stewardship program will work with the NYC Parks Department to plant more trees, replace trees that were destroyed by Sandy's winds and floods, and involve the neighborhood in taking care of the trees that survived. In turn, the street trees will absorb air pollution and greenhouse gases, reduce energy use for heating and cooling buildings in the neighborhood, and help control storm water by absorbing the water instead of letting it overload the sewer system and/or contribute to flooding.

### **Organizational Description and Background**

Outstanding Renewal Enterprises (doing business as Lower East Side Ecology Center) is incorporated as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization with an annual operation budget of \$1 million. The Lower East Side Ecology Center works toward a more sustainable New York City by providing community-based recycling and composting programs, developing local stewardship of green space, and increasing community awareness, involvement and youth development through environmental education programs.

The Ecology Center was founded in 1987 with a focus on community-based recycling programs, providing innovative recycling drop-off centers in the Lower East Side. Today, the Ecology Center offers free public compost collection and education, electronic waste recycling in all five boroughs, works with the public to care for open space in the Lower East Side, and offers environmental education programs to youth and adults. Our programs focus on offering opportunities for all New Yorkers to learn about environmental issues facing New York City and to take responsibility for solving these problems.

The Ecology Center's programs reach tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year. Most of these programs are targeted towards City residents, rather than businesses. EcoBizNYC has allowed the Ecology Center to reach businesses in CB3, an audience that was not historically served by the Ecology Center's programs, and help them understand their business' environmental impacts. The prevalence of small businesses in the Lower East Side and the limited resources that their owners have to put toward sustainability issues makes the EcoBizNYC program a valuable asset to the community.

Similarly, the Street Tree Stewardship program has allowed the Ecology Center to expand its community greening efforts that have taken place in East River Park and community gardens to the blocks right in front of peoples homes in Community Board 3.

### **EcoBizNYC Program Successes**

EcoBizNYC continued to thrive in 2012, adding over 115 businesses to the 100 previously enrolled businesses. This success was achieved through rigorous training of interns, continuing a streamlined program, and capturing the momentum and success of the program to entice more businesses to participate.

In addition to the changes implemented through the program's process of helping businesses reduce their environmental impacts, EcoBizNYC has also induced changes through awarding 13 grants this year, totaling over \$8,700. Grants helped fund weatherization projects such as storefront upgrades, awnings and skylight covers, as well as lighting efficiency improvements, equipment efficiency improvements, and the addition of indoor and outdoor plants.

We have aimed to provide better ongoing, in-person support to businesses and, to that end, have created a bi-annual check-in process that allows for the communication of important program updates to the businesses, as well as allowing us to collect information on the effectiveness of the program and the success of our recommendations. The check-ins have proven to be valuable for extending our interaction with businesses, encouraging the further implementation of sustainability measures, and collecting feedback on the program.

Communication with businesses have been streamlined by establishing a facebook page dedicated to EcoBizNYC, an e-newsletter, and a Twitter account. The program's

visibility on the Ecology Center's website has also been improved, it now has a direct link from the homepage to the program information.

EcoBizNYC has continued to work with neighborhood partners, including Fourth Arts Block, the East Village Community Coalition (EVCC), the Manhattan Borough President's Office (Go Green Lower East Side program, GGLES), and the Lower East Side BID (LES BID). Through these collaborations we have reached more businesses and provided more coordinated efforts to assist businesses.

The program also connects businesses to a number of free incentive programs provided by a variety of organizations and government entities. These programs include ConEdison's Demand Side Management Program, Transportation Alternatives' Bike Friendly Business District, and MillionTreesNYC's Adopt A Tree and Request A Tree programs.

ConEdison's Demand Side Management Program provides businesses with a free energy use assessment and subsidized lighting upgrades. While this program has been a strong incentive for businesses, it was not available for much of 2012 because ConEdison's subcontractor's contract expired. We are looking forward to connecting the 40 businesses that are waiting for assessment with ConEdison in early 2013.

Transportation Alternatives' Bike Friendly Business District has been well received by EcoBizNYC businesses. EcoBizNYC helped spread the word and enrolled over 30 businesses in this emerging network that provides bike safety literature, discounts for bicyclists, and requests bike infrastructure, such as bike racks, from the City.

The MillionTreesNYC's Adopt A Tree and Request A Tree programs, was also attractive to EcoBizNYC businesses and more than 35 businesses adopted street trees. We are now going the next step to connect businesses with sources for tree guards, and have been successful in getting a new tree guard installed in front of Sugar Sweet Sunshine Bakery on Rivington Street.

EcoBizNYC had 18 interns in 2012, including 1 post-graduate and undergraduate and graduate students from 9 different institutions. The interns have been trained as eco-consultants, engaging with business owners and evaluating their sustainability needs.

### **EcoBizNYC Program in the Future**

The EcoBizNYC program hopes to grow in 2013 to include more businesses and effect positive sustainability changes in new and already-enrolled businesses. To connect with new businesses, the EcoBizNYC Project Manager, Rebecca Kraus, will continue to build relationships with community liaisons, such as block associations and local organizations. Working with other community-based organizations brings visibility, credibility, and an efficient connection when approaching new businesses.

While the expansion south and west of the Settlement Zone has brought a greater quantity of businesses and led to fruitful collaborations, this year we hope to focus again on the Settlement Zone to fully engage the community there in sustainable changes. This focus does not preclude us from working with businesses in the expanded area, but rather will mean prioritizing the Settlement Zone by assigning more intern time, working closely with neighborhood organizations, and focusing on projects such as street tree stewardship in that specific geographic area. Our aim is to engage more businesses in the Settlement Zone, including businesses that have opened in the past year and businesses that have not been enrolled yet. We have enrolled 83 businesses in the Settlement Zone and will focus on enrolling as many of the remaining 570 businesses in the Settlement Zone that we have had limited contact with into the program. Additional staff and intern time in the area and community collaboration will help us engage these hard-to-reach businesses.

The EcoBizNYC Project Manager will recruit, train, and manage four interns from local universities per semester. The interns will outreach to new businesses, track the progress of current businesses, and research incentives to help businesses operate in a sustainable way. These interns will also be trained in street tree care in order to knowledgeably advise businesses about the benefits of street trees and how businesses can properly care for the trees near their businesses. More details about how the Street Tree Stewardship Program activities and EcoBizNYC activities will be coordinated are given in the following sections of this proposal.

### **Street Tree Stewardship Successes**

The Lower East Side Ecology Center's Street Tree Stewardship Project has worked with the NYC Parks Department Foresters to certify that over 100 new street trees have been planted near the Con Edison Plant with priority given to tree-deprived blocks of Avenues C and D above East 6<sup>th</sup> Street (see the attached Letter from Parks Department and Manhattan Block Planting Map 2012). Over 20% of the newly planted trees were planted on Avenues C and D over the last two years. These trees are now helping to capture the air pollution from the electricity plant that can cause respiratory problems in residents. These trees are also helping to control greenhouse gases from the power plant, further reducing air pollution by lessening demand for energy to heat and cool buildings, absorbing storm water, creating shade, creating wildlife habitat, and many other environmental, safety and quality-of-life benefits.

In order to make sure these trees survive and to maximize their potential benefit to the area, the Ecology Center coordinated community-wide stewardship efforts. Over the past two summers we facilitated 17 Street Tree Internships providing 512 hours of stewardship work. All of these interns were NYC high school students, and 4 of them were residents and/or students in the settlement area. These internships were supported by other community groups and city agencies including NYCHA Riis and Campos Plaza Community Centers, NYCHA Gardening and Greening, TreeKit, Two Bridges Neighborhood Council, NYC Parks Forestry, Transportation Alternatives, GOLES, MillionTreesNYC and TreesNY.

Along with weeding, picking up trash, cultivating, watering, mulching, and planting flowers in the tree pits, the Street Tree Interns made a concerted effort to identify dead or dying new trees in the area to report them to NYC Parks Forestry so the damaged trees would be replaced by the planting contractors under their two year guarantee. The EcoBizNYC interns complimented the work of the Street Tree Interns by encouraging EcoBizNYC to adopt the street trees in front of their storefronts and we led street tree care workdays and stewardship classes with community groups. So far, 35 EcoBizNYC businesses have adopted trees and the following community groups participated in street tree stewardship activities: 9th Street A-1 Block Association, Green City Challenge, Transportation Alternatives, GOLES Afterschool Environmental Program, Henry Street Settlement Afterschool, The Earth School, Bard High School Early College, The NYC Compost Project, GreenThumb, TreesNY, the LES BID, and the ISS Afterschool Program at PS 126. Furthermore, we partnered with four classes at the Earth School to do street tree care to earn points for the MillionTreesNYC Green Points Challenge and one of our classrooms was the overall NYC Champion!

### **Street Tree Stewardship Going Forward**

The Ecology Center would like to continue our stewardship efforts for the new and established street trees, and continue to work with the Parks Department to plant more trees and replace dead and storm damaged trees in the Settlement Zone. According to a 2010 report from *Cities and the Environment*, which studied the stewardship efforts of Friends of Greenwich Street in TriBeCa, about 10% of new street trees are dead or missing after two years and up to 25% are gone after seven years. The report goes on to show that the mortality rate of street trees can be brought down to below 1% with a local stewardship program. This data points to the conclusion that continuing our Street Tree Stewardship Program in the Settlement Zone will maximize the potential benefit of local street trees.

For the 2013 funding cycle, we will continue to work with Parks to plant more new trees, continue community stewardship, and increase the efforts of EcoBizNYC to facilitate business owners to take care of the trees in front of their businesses.

In October, Ecology Center staff went on a site visit to the neighborhood street trees with the Parks Department Forestry staff assigned to our area. Despite most of the blocks in the settlement zone being fully stocked (see Manhattan Block Planting Map 2012), the foresters helped to identify new tree sites. Additionally, Parks made a commitment to replace any street trees that may have been damaged by the winds and/or brackish floodwaters of Sandy.

We plan to continue to work with community and youth groups in the neighborhood to provide street tree stewardship with the goal of increasing tree survival and the environmental benefits of street trees. The Street Tree Internship program can continue to be successful with a team of high school students able to provide water and stewardship for the trees during the summer when it is most important. In the summer of

2012, we were permitted by the NYC DEP to use fire hydrants to facilitate watering trees.

During the spring and fall, when high school interns have less time to care for trees, we will work with community groups and residents that can take care of the trees right on their block. We will be able to provide free compost and mulch for these stewardship activities through the NYC Compost Project in Manhattan, a program funded and managed by the Department of Sanitation. The Ecology Center has the contract to run this program in the borough of Manhattan, and one of the compost coordinators from this program will assist in all stewardship activities. We would also like to build tree guards with the community groups using Parks-approved plans and reclaimed wood. These tree guards will protect the street trees and will give the neighborhood trees a unified look. Our goal will be to work with most, if not all, of the community groups we have partnered with in the past to hold street tree workdays in both the spring and fall of 2013.

In the coming year, we would like to connect the Street Tree Stewardship program more closely with the EcoBizNYC program. We have found that the street level businesses that EcoBizNYC works with have the most resources and a great interest in having the benefits of the trees. The businesses have more access to water, and the shade and aesthetic that the trees provide can help attract customers. Some of the initiatives that we would like to provide for businesses taking care of trees are: a contest for best business sponsored tree pit, providing plants and specialized tools for businesses to improve tree beds, bulk purchasing or subsidized tree guards, outreach materials in English and Spanish to explain the main steps that businesses and residents can take to care for their trees, and specialized stewardship trainings for businesses.

## **Timeline**

January – March 2013

EcoBizNYC:

- Recruit and train four spring interns to engage new businesses and check-in with currently participating businesses
- Specifically work to understand any improvements to businesses that could help them recover from damage from Sandy
- Work with businesses to develop proposals for spring round of sustainability grants
- Begin discussing new initiatives with businesses, including Street Tree care

Street Tree Stewardship Program

- Begin planning spring stewardship days with community groups
- Work with EcoBizNYC to finalize tree care guide
- Develop tree health assessment guidelines specifically for areas heavily impacted by superstorm Sandy

April – August 2013

EcoBizNYC:

- Recruit and train eight spring/summer interns to engage new businesses and check-in with currently participating businesses
  - Award Sustainability Grants (late April/early May)
  - Work with interested businesses to beautify street tree pits through planting flowers, offering tools for reduced prices, and bulk purchasing of tree guards
  - Work with businesses to develop proposals for fall round of sustainability grants
- Street Tree Stewardship Program
- Hold 7 stewardship days with community groups
  - Recruit and train 15 Street Tree Stewardship interns
  - Assess the health of trees damaged by Sandy and work with Parks to replace those trees
  - Begin planning fall stewardship days with community groups

September – December 2013

- Prepare report for Community Board 3 on project activities
- EcoBizNYC:
- Recruit and train four fall interns to engage new businesses and check-in with currently participating businesses
  - Award Sustainability Grants (late September/early October)
- Street Tree Stewardship Program
- Hold 3 stewardship days with community groups

## **Staff**

Rebecca Krauss has been the EcoBizNYC program manager for two years and began with the program as an EcoBizNYC intern. She has a Masters of Urban Planning and a background in sustainability. She will continue to help the EcoBizNYC program grow and evolve.

Daniel Tainow has been the Education Director for the Lower East Side Ecology Center for the past two years. Dan has a strong background in environmental education and natural resource conservation, having led educational workshops and greening workdays for all ages. Dan, a resident of the Lower East Side, will continue to develop and implement the Street Tree Stewardship Program.

In addition, Christine Datz-Romero, the Executive Director, and Caroline Kruse, the Development Director, of the Ecology Center are staying involved in the management of the program.