



Program Summary

Planning Meets Practice: New Decarbonization Tools from ASHRAE, USGBC, and The Retrofit Playbook

Program Brief

On September 23, during Climate Week 2025, NYSERDA, BE-Ex, RMI, ASHRAE, and USGBC hosted a third event as part of a series for the [Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings](#), showcasing the recently published [Guide to Strategic Decarbonization Planning](#) and explore how it connects with the tools, case studies, and planning resources available on the [RetrofitPlaybook.org](#).

The Empire Building Challenge (EBC)

is a \$50 million NYSERDA program that accelerates the decarbonization of tall buildings through public-private partnerships to bring scalable carbon-neutral retrofit approaches to the New York market.

Retrofit Playbook for Large Buildings

is a knowledge-sharing platform dedicated to supporting building owners, operators, and their design and engineering teams in creating cost-effective, long-term decarbonization strategies for large buildings.

Program Highlights

Through opening remarks given by NYSERDA, participants learned about a proven decarbonization planning approach that integrates technical solutions with pragmatic asset management strategies known as Strategic Decarbonization Planning (SDP). SDP is a set of principles and steps organized into a plausible and economically viable framework that makes building decarbonization possible.

Participants then heard about new tools and resources from ASHRAE, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), NYSERDA, and the Retrofit Playbook team designed for practitioners to design and develop retrofit projects utilizing the SDP framework.

Following the presentations, participants heard from leading EBC partner and affordable housing developer, L+M, as well as representatives from ASHRAE, Jaros, Baum & Bolles (JB&B), RMI, and USGBC in a panel discussion focused on how these tools were developed, how to utilize them, and what challenges can arise in actually implementing deep retrofits in tall buildings.

Program Takeaways

Presentations

Laurie Kerr
Principal Climate Advisor
USGBC

Phil Keuhn
Manager, Technical Analysis
Building Decarbonization
RMI

Opening Remarks

Sophie Cardona
Senior Project Manager
NYSERDA

Panelists

Adam Hinge
Managing Director
Sustainable Energy Partnerships

Laura Humphrey
Senior Director of Energy & Sustainability
L+M Development

Laurie Kerr
Principal Climate Advisor
USGBC

Phil Keuhn
Manager, Technical Analysis
Building Decarbonization
RMI

Moderator

Molly Dee-Ramasamy
Director of Deep Carbon Reduction Group
JB&B

Consistent language and frameworks across organizations is most useful to practitioners.

To achieve our climate goals, stakeholders from all corners of the building industry must come together and enable practitioners to move in the same direction in how they approach and design building retrofits. Having ASHRAE, USGBC, NYSERDA, and RMI coalesce around a strong planning framework to guide the industry will help expand the adoption of the SDP approach.

Incorporating planning into building retrofits is critical to achieving deep decarbonization.

Creating a plan that is phased and has analyzed the impact of various scenarios results in a well-considered roadmap that clearly outlines how project teams and real estate companies can achieve their various goals and targets. It enables sticking points to become unstuck by aligning strategic events with retrofit opportunities to make a building ready for evolving technologies, policies, and costs. By emphasizing a long-term planning approach, project teams can remain flexible to bring in more shelf-ready technologies that may not make financial sense now, but can be penciled in for the future.

Project teams should future-proof their buildings using informed projections for future grid emissions and other analysis inputs.

Owners and their design and engineering teams should place faith in the grid's trajectory towards decarbonization and should further the overall efforts towards a zero-carbon future by focusing on their own decarbonization goals. SDP marks an important paradigm shift away from onsite fossil fuel combustion, but managing peak demand through integrative design and utilizing realistic tariffs in electricity cost calculations is crucial to work in tandem with a transitioning grid and keep peak demand costs low.

Dissemination of these new tools will be critical to ensure they reach the right hands.

Through both joint and collective efforts, ASHRAE, USGBC, and the Retrofit Playbook team are broadcasting the SDP framework and its related tools and resources through conferences, events, webinars, and trainings. Additionally, USGBC intends to include the SDP framework into LEED certification requirements, which can work to standardize SDP into more mainstream real estate markets.

Ready to start your decarbonization planning journey? [Get guidance and resources on the Retrofit Playbook.](#)

Need more support? [Attend a live session or online course of the Strategic Decarbonization Planning Training Series.](#)