



TISHMAN CENTER · OCTOBER 25, 2022

[RE-BLOG] Sustainability Town Hall Highlight



Reposted from the [Milano School](#)
[blog](#)

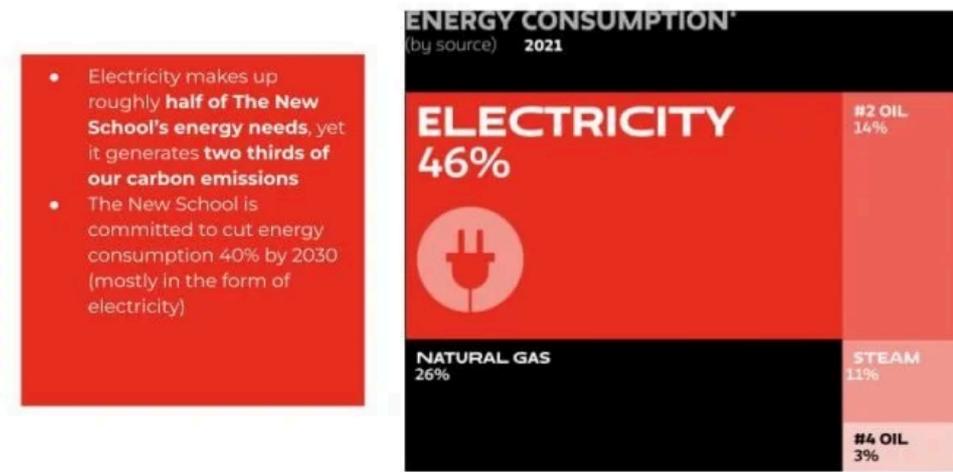
WHY A TOWN HALL?

In recognition of Climate Week 2022, The Tishman Environment and Design Center (TEDC) hosted an online town hall to discuss sustainability at the New School. The format of this discussion was an attempt to bring faculty, staff, and students together to exchange knowledge and voice concerns about energy consumption and waste management. As the school aims for goals such as being “net zero” by 2050, it is essential that everyone is involved in the process of not just figuring out the when, but also the how. Terms such as “net zero” don’t always reflect actual movement towards a more environmentally just system, as many know. That is why it is so important to involve the entire New School community in this mission to construct a more environmentally sound university.

Whether it be a reduction of electricity use, divestment in fossil fuels, or ambitious composting goals, every initiative requires a dynamic and inclusive approach. Not only because the whole community has a right to be included in the planning and implementation of processes, but because it will be students, faculty, and staff who will ask questions surrounding accountability and whether sustainability goals are truly being met. All of this and more

was discussed at the Sustainability Town Hall, led by Mike Harrington (Director, Sustainability Engagement at TEDC) and Ashley Kossakowski (Director, Energy Management and Sustainability for The New School Facilities Management department).

ENERGY



- Electricity makes up roughly **half of The New School's energy needs**, yet it generates **two thirds of our carbon emissions**
- The New School is committed to cut energy consumption 40% by 2030 (mostly in the form of electricity)

ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND WASTE MANAGEMENT AT THE NEW SCHOOL

To start the event, Mike acknowledged the realities of climate change and its lopsided effects on the Global South, black and brown communities in the West, poor people, and other marginalized peoples across the globe. Mass flooding in Pakistan, hurricanes causing destruction and loss of power in Puerto Rico, land loss on Alaskan coasts, and devastating droughts in Ethiopia are all examples of people who contribute very little towards

climate change being affected the most. Universities have a long history of being environmentally harmful in many regards. As the ongoing climate catastrophe affects more people around the world, it is important that these lopsided effects are kept in mind. The unfolding climate crises cannot be ignored and neither can the ways in which major institutions have contributed to them historically.

Every year, The New School produces 2.5 million pounds of waste. A significant portion of this waste is diverted from landfills, but this still adds quite a bit to the university's total emissions. In terms of energy, Ashley explained the different ways in which energy is supplied to university buildings across the city. The majority of the energy comes from electricity, but despite the fact that it is technically 'cleaner', electricity still makes up two-thirds of the total emissions at The New School. Natural gas, two types of oil (one more 'dirty' than the other), and steam are also used. Considering all of this, what would making the university more sustainable mean exactly?

Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. With that in mind, some concrete steps towards reducing campus waste and emissions have

been taken. Composting and recycling, for example, play a huge role across campus buildings. There are signs, though admittedly confusing at times, with specified bins beneath them to help everyone sort their trash and recyclables. The New School was also one of the first universities to completely divest from fossil fuels, which will inherently change the percentage of energy that comes from fossil fuels down the line. Water is being treated and reused at the University Center and, with the help of student designed posters, water usage was reduced by 5% as part of the NYC Department of Environmental Protection Water Conservation Challenge in 2019. Two of the most successful initiatives were, pointedly, inclusive in their implementation.

Reducing waste and energy use on campus requires everyone at the university. It is important then to proceed with continued transparency and to update signage detailing the specifics of sustainability focused processes already in place. Questions and concerns voiced at the town hall proved just how essential mass participation really is to this process.



OBSTACLES AND GENERATING COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS

As mentioned above, some of the signage on campus can be a bit confusing. The composting sign, for example, has a picture of what looks like a hamburger on it despite the fact that meat is not supposed to go into the compost bins.

Battery waste locations aren't widely spread across campuses. Most students, faculty, and staff are not even aware of how much waste and energy consumption is leading to toxic emissions due to a lack of access to updated data. They also have little say in goals set by the university and little opportunity to ensure accountability if goals are not met. Another sustainability issue stems from a lack of informational resources being provided to schools

that want to reduce waste in their specific departments. All of these obstacles, as vocalized by participants, limit waste and energy reduction on campus. Nonetheless, these concerns and questions spoke to the widespread desire to participate in creating a more sustainable, environmentally just academic institution. The key now is to keep moving forward by getting more and more people involved.

TEDC is helping bridge the gap in information across campuses and aiding in further organization of collaborative approaches to solving sustainability issues at The New School. After listening to the concerns put forth, TEDC and the Facilities Management department plan to update signage on campus, find ways to better broadcast information surrounding sustainability initiatives, and organize regular discussions like the town hall. The Facilities Management department will also continue to work on phasing out the use of fossil fuels, aim towards a 40% reduction in energy consumption by 2030, explore what it means to be “net zero” by 2050, and work with the varying schools to design material solutions. They are also planning to form a committee comprised of students, faculty, and staff that will focus exclusively on sustainability. Working with the various schools to design and implement

environmentally sound initiatives on campus will address climate and environmental (in)justice at the university and beyond. The journey will be difficult but working together will provide the needed bases for effective action.

To learn more about sustainability on campus, [click here](#). If you're interested in learning more about TEDC and the great work that they do, check out their website at www.tishmancenter.org. You can also reach out to Mike Harrington for more information about TEDC via email at mikeharrington@newschool.edu. Expect to see updated signage and more information about opportunities to collaborate with others on this issue in the future.



Comments (0)

Newest First

Preview POST COMMENT...

PREVIOUS

EJ Leaders Crushed Climate Week: Let's Continue Building Community

CLIMATE WEEK

NEXT

Five Years After Landfall

CLIMATE JUSTICE, EJ, STUDENT BLOG

Tishman
Environm
ent
and
Design
Center,
The New
School

79 5th
Avenue,
16th
Floor,
New York,
NY
10003

212.229.5
321
tedc@new
school.ed
u

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up to receive
our monthly
newsletter which
includes updates
on our work and
upcoming events.

SIGN UP

We respect your
privacy.

HOME

ABOUT

CAMPUS
ENGAGEMENT

EJ DISRUPT
DESIGN: An
Environmental
Justice Movement
Fellowship

RESEARCH &
PRACTICE

NEWS & EVENTS

BLOG

[Tishman Center for Sustainability](#)

