Policies and Initiatives to Support the Increased Utilization of Urban and Reclaimed Wood in the United States

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This study investigated initiatives to increase the utilization of urban and reclaimed wood across the United States. As society moves towards a circular economy, finding higher value uses for wood from urban trees and decommissioned buildings will contribute to reducing the environmental impacts of landfilling. It will also create jobs and business opportunities. The key findings of this study show policy and program implementation as critical tools for urban and reclaimed wood utilization, including various features in terms of organization, motivation, and funding. Different stakeholders have developed and implemented a wide variety of efforts to make the urban and reclaimed wood industry a fast-growing sector. Results showed that initiatives produce many positive environmental, social, and economic impacts, but that they require community engagement, extensive collaboration and partnerships, as well as unique operational approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban and Reclaimed Wood Utilization

The benefits of urban trees have been extensively documented (Nowak *et al.* 2010), and include lower temperatures, carbon sequestration, noise reduction, pollutant filtration, reduced heating and cooling costs, and others. Urban trees are removed for several reasons, including pest and disease control, development, and storm damage (Endahl 2015; Minnesota Environmental Quality Board 2025). Much of these trees' residues is sent to landfills or used in low-value applications, such as landscaping or as biomass for energy, and it is often considered part of the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) stream. However, much of this material has been identified as a viable source to manufacture value-added products, which was estimated to be as much as 3.2 million tons (Bowyer *et al.* 2008). Many – mostly small – businesses have recognized this opportunity and developed a fast-growing industry (Fig. 1).

Sourcing, processing, and marketing value-added products made from wood from urban trees (or urban wood), require different approaches compared to conventionally sourced materials, as logs and timber from urban trees are widely variable in size, dimension, moisture content, quality, and other aspects; making urban wood more challenging to process than timber from the conventional supply chain (Pitti *et al.* 2020). Collaboration is required between tree removal crews and potential users to identify the

most suitable material, carefully inspecting for metals and other objects embedded in the wood tissue (Pitti *et al.* 2020). Because of the wide variety of species, initial moisture content, dimensions, and quality, sawing and drying urban logs into lumber is often more challenging and costly. The marketing of urban wood products, including promotion, messaging, distribution, and pricing, show some unique characteristics. Many producers who use urban wood emphasize the local and environmental aspects of their products and rely on word-of-mouth to a greater degree than more traditional companies. They also tend to engage in more community outreach (Pitti *et al.* 2019). Using urban wood for high-value applications brings several benefits, including landfill diversion, employment opportunities, education opportunities, and increased perceived value of urban forests.

Wood materials from decommissioned buildings have historically been classified as Construction and Demolition (C&D) debris and disposed of as waste. Reclaimed wood (Fig. 1) can be defined as wood sourced from buildings that can be repurposed for further use as structural elements, flooring, raw material for engineered wood products, and others (Craig *et al.* 2024). Reclaimed wood presents some of the same challenges and opportunities as urban wood. It is often difficult to process due to embedded materials, such as nails, and lead-containing paints (Asa *et al.* 2024). Reclaimed wood has the potential to provide environmental, social, and economic benefits (Raw *et al.* 2024), by keeping materials in circulation for longer times (Piccardo and Hughes 2022).

Fig. 1. Left: Logs from urban trees, sawn and air-drying; center: big-section timbers reclaimed from an old building; right: conference table made from urban wood (Photos by Anna Pitti and Omar Espinoza)

Research Objectives

Because of the environmental, social, and economic benefits from the increased utilization of urban and reclaimed wood, many organizations have started initiatives and enacted policies to support these industries. These organizations include city, state, and federal government, non-profit organizations, industry associations, and others. Initiatives include policies to promote the use of recycled materials, grants to fund efforts to use more urban wood, certification programs for products with recycled content, and others.

This includes urban and reclaimed wood, which traditionally have been categorized as municipal solid waste (MSW) and Construction and Demolition (C&D) debris, respectively, and have been disposed of as waste, or used in low-value applications. A new and growing industry is using these resources to make high value-added products, which presents economic opportunities and environmental benefits. The main objective of this project was to gain an understanding of policies and initiatives to support the increased utilization of urban and reclaimed wood in the United States.

EXPERIMENTAL

This research was conducted in two phases: a census of urban and reclaimed wood initiatives, and stakeholder interviews. In the first phase of the project, an extensive search was conducted to identify urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives in the US, using online research, phone calls, and email communication. Various combinations of keywords were used for the search, such as "urban wood," "reclaimed wood," "utilization," "programs," "actions," and "policies." City, state, and federal government entities names were also added to the keywords, such as Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency, states' agencies for natural resources, forestry, pollution prevention or environmental protection, and cities' urban forestry or parks and recreation departments. Websites for organizations such as the Urban Wood Network, Unified Wood Economy, Vibrant Cities Labs, and others were also consulted. For each policy or initiative found, the information listed in Table 1 was collected.

Table 1. Aspects of Urban and Reclaimed Wood Initiatives Included in the Study

Category	Description
Motivation	Reasons for starting an urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiative
Policies	Guiding principles or strategies toward urban and reclaimed wood utilization
Programs	Organized efforts supporting urban and reclaimed wood utilization
Actions	Individual, one-time activities to support urban and reclaimed wood utilization
Impacts	Outcomes from urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts
Leadership / org.	Who leads and how urban and reclaimed wood efforts are organized
Partnerships / collaborations	Association with external entities for the development and execution of urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts
Funding	Financial aspects of urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts
Project continuity	Long-term continuity of urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts

In the second phase of the research, initiatives were contacted to request an interview to gather in-depth information that may not be available in public documents. The interviews were conducted remotely in the Fall of 2024, and were semi-structured, following a list of questions as prompts (Table 2). In semi-structure interviews, a mix of closed- and open-ended questions are used, with follow-up questions when needed (Adams 2015). This balance between structure and flexibility have made semi-structured interviews one of the preferred methods in qualitative research. Participants were given ample opportunity to add comments.

Table 2. Urban and Reclaimed Wood Initiative Stakeholder Interview Topics

Topic	Question/Prompt
Initiatives	Describe the urban wood initiative in chronological detail.
Incentives	How are urban and reclaimed wood utilization incentivized?
Results	What quantitative and qualitative results have been obtained from the initiatives? How has the public, including relevant stakeholders, responded to the initiatives?
Continuity	What plans and goals do you have for the initiatives?
Barriers	What challenges did you face in establishing and sustaining the initiatives?
Outreach	How was the initiative promoted across the community?
Connections	What similar initiatives are you aware of?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the first phase of the study, 70 initiatives working to increase urban and reclaimed wood utilization in the US were identified (Table 3), including federal, state, and city government initiatives, as well as connected nonprofit organizations. These initiatives were categorized as follows: grants (non-repayable funds), certification systems (recognition for following a set of predetermined standards), networks (created to facilitate connections between stakeholder organizations *via* various platforms), technical assistance (provided in aspects such as marketing, logistics, processing), and local initiatives (stand-alone projects, often in municipalities, that have a distinct focus).

Table 3. Urban and Reclaimed Wood Utilization Initiatives Identified

Initiative	State	Start	Focus	Type
Alabama Urban & Community Forestry Program	AL	N/A	U	G,N,T
Alaska Local Use Lumber Program	AK	2022	U	C,N,T
Ann Arbor Circular UrbanWood Triconomy	MI	2024	U	T,L
Arizona Wood Utilization & Marketing Program	AZ	N/A	UR	N,T
Arkansas Urban & Community Forestry	AR	N/A	U	G,N,T
California Urban & Community Forestry Program	CA	N/A	U	G,N,T
Camp Small	MD	2016	R	L
City of Chicago	IL	2023	U	L
City of Dallas	TX	2021	U	L
City of Elkhart	IN	2015	U	L
City of Harrisonburg	VA	2017	U	L
City of Long Beach	CA	2022	U	L
City of Milwaukee	WI	2012	U	L
City of Philadelphia	PA	2023	U	L
City of Pittsburgh	PA	2023	U	L
City of Sacramento	CA	2015	U	L
City of Spearfish	SD	2024	U	L
Colorado Wood Utilization & Marketing Program	CO	2000	R	N,T
Connecticut Urban Wood Utilization	CT	2014	U	N,T
Delaware Urban & Community Forestry Program	DE	N/A	U	G,N,T
Florida Urban & Community Forestry	FL	2020	U	G
Forest Stewardship Council	US	2011	R	C
Georgia Forest Utilization Program	GA	N/A	U	T
Hawaii Wood Utilization Team	HI	2018	U	C,N
Idaho Urban & Community Forestry	ID	N/A	U	N
Illinois Urban & Community Forestry Wood Utilization	IL	N/A	U	N,T
Indiana Community & Urban Forestry	IN	2025	U	GN
Iowa Utilizing Urban Wood	IA	2012	U	N
Kansas Forest Products	KS	N/A	U	N
Kentucky Urban & Community Forestry Assistance	KY	2022	U	G
Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design	US	2001	R	C
Maine Project Canopy	ME	N/A	U	G,N,T
Maryland Forests Products Utilization & Marketing	MD	N/A	U	G,N
Massachusetts Forest Utilization & Markets Program	MA	N/A	U	N
Michigan Urban & Community Forestry Initiative	MI	2002	U	G
Minnesota Forest Utilization & Marketing Program	MN	N/A	U	N,T
Missouri Forest Action Plan	MO	2013	U	N
Montana Wood Utilization Program	MT	N/A	U	N
Nebraska Urban Wood Industry	NE	N/A	U	N
Nevada Urban & Community Forestry Strategic Plan	NV	N/A	U	N,T

Initiative	State	Start	Focus	Type
New Hampshire Urban Wood Utilization	NH	2020	U	N,T
New Jersey Utilization & Marketing of Wood Products	NJ	N/A	U	N,T
New Mexico Forest Industry Biomass Utilization	NM	N/A	U	G
New York Urban & Community Forestry Program	NY	N/A	U	G,N
North Carolina Urban Wood Utilization	NC	2020	U	G,T,L
North Dakota Forest Action Plan	ND	2020	U	N,T
Ohio Forest Products	OH	N/A	U	G
Oklahoma Urban & Community Forestry Assistance	OK	N/A	U	G
Oregon Biomass Program	OR	2022	U	N
Pennsylvania Urban & Community Forestry	PA	N/A	U	G,T
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification	US	1999	UR	C
Rhode Island Urban & Community Forestry Program	RI	2025	U	G
South Carolina Urban & Community Forestry Commission	SC	N/A	U	G
South Dakota Biomass Utilization	SD	2005	U	N,T
Southern Community Wood Utilization Group	N/A	2024	U	N
Tennessee Urban & Community Wood Utilization	TN	2023	U	G,N,T
Texas Reclaiming Wood Products from the Urban Forest	TX	N/A	U	N,T
Trees Across Mississippi	MS	2024	U	G,N
Unified Wood Economy	US	2019	U	N,T
Urban Salvaged and Reclaimed Wood	US	2023	UR	C
The Urban Wood Network	US	2017	U	N
US Forest Service Wood Innovations Program	US	2015	UR	G
Utah Wood Innovations Program	UT	2015	U	G,T
Vermont Forest Economy Program	VT	2019	U	G,N
Virginia Urban Wood Utilization	VA	2017	U	G,N,T
Washington DC Urban Wood Reuse	N/A	2018	U	L
Washington Urban & Community Forestry Assistance	WA	2013	U	G
West Virginia Urban Wood Program	WV	N/A	U	N
Wisconsin Urban Wood Utilization	WI	2010	U	N,T
Wyoming Biomass & Utilization	WY	2016	U	N

U = urban wood, R = reclaimed wood, UR = urban and reclaimed wood
G=Grant, C=Certification, N=Networks, T=Technical Assistance, L=Local Initiative

As Table 3 shows, initiatives and policies supporting increased utilization of urban and reclaimed wood are relatively recent, with most of them created in the last 20 years.

At least 20 initiatives were started since 2020. Most initiatives support utilization of urban wood (62). Regarding geographic distribution, more than half of the initiatives are in the South and Midwest regions. Six initiatives have national reach.

In the second phase of the research, initiatives were contacted to request an interview, and 14 projects agreed to participate. Table 4 lists the organizations interviewed for this research. The remaining sections discuss the results from the study, including the industry census and the stakeholder interviews.

Table 4. Urban and Reclaimed Wood Initiatives Interviewed

City/Organization	State	Interviewee Position
Baltimore Wood Project	MD	Consulting Director
Camp Small	MD	Yard Master
City of Ann Arbor	MI	Urban Forestry & Natural Resources Planning Coordinator
City of Elkhart	IN	Environmental Program Coordinator
City of Milwaukee	WI	Urban Forestry District Manager
City of Philadelphia	PA	Director of Consulting
City of Spearfish	SD	Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Superintendent
Connecticut Forestry Dept.	CT	Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program Specialist
Tennessee Forestry Dept.	TN	Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator
Unified Wood Economy	US	Partnership and Outreach Director
Urban Ashes	MI	Urban Wood Consultant
US Forest Service	US	Wood Innovations Specialist
USFS-UCF Region 5	US	Urban and Community Forestry Assistant Program Mgr.
Virginia Forestry Dept.	VA	Forest Utilization and Marketing Specialist

*Interview participants were anonymized for confidentiality.

Urban and Reclaimed Wood Utilization Policies

Policy can be a powerful tool in the implementation of urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. Results from this research have shown that municipalities have implemented policies that use different approaches for urban and reclaimed wood utilization, including the creation of organizational structures, enforcing initiatives and committees, changing language in ordinances, adding wood utilization to the tree life cycle, and requiring wood salvaging. These policies allow municipalities to regulate and implement urban and reclaimed wood initiatives to increase their utilization.

Language changes in ordinances

Cities and states have used specific language as a tool in promoting urban and reclaimed wood utilization. For example, in Virginia, some local governments have changed language in their policies to include urban and reclaimed wood use as part of general urban forest management, to overcome the limitations derived from the Dillon's Rule, which states that local governments have only the powers expressly granted to them by the state (Wirt 1989). Similarly, the state of Tennessee uses "community wood" utilization, to increase the accessibility and the range of applications for these policies.

Wood utilization as part of the tree life cycle

Some states and municipalities have incorporated urban wood utilization as part of the tree life cycle in their policies and include it as part of their urban forestry activities, rather than treating it as a separate activity. Virginia and Tennessee have pioneered this approach, which provides the benefits of a policy without having to enact specific ordinances. Keney Park, CT, has also made this change in approaching tree life cycle management (Keney Park Sustainability Project 2025). Such practice plays a significant role in integrating and normalizing urban wood utilization into urban forestry activities.

Reclaimed wood salvage requirements

Some cities have turned to salvage requirements as a way of encouraging reclaimed wood utilization. For example, the city of Seattle requires that a salvage assessment be conducted for some buildings set for demolition, to determine the potential value of the

building materials, including wood (Seattle Public Utilities 2025). This local policy is supported by the state of Washington (King County 2025). These policies also facilitate the development of initiatives such as the Baltimore Wood Project, to encourage the use of materials from decommissioned buildings, thus extending the life of these materials and providing social and economic benefits. The Baltimore Wood Project started when 4,000 vacant rowhomes were designated for removal, prompting the city to explore more sustainable methods of removal than demolition, and required that wood, among other materials, be salvaged in the process (Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development 2016).

Urban and Reclaimed Wood Utilization Programs

In addition to policies, municipalities and other parties have developed various programs to promote the use of urban and reclaimed wood. According to results from this study, these programs typically take the form of one or more of four types: certification, educational programs, grant programs, or scaled biomass campuses.

Urban and reclaimed wood certification

Some environmental certification standards include urban and reclaimed wood, as a market-based approach to promote their use. These programs usually include third party certification, the use of a logo to identify certified products, and chain-of-custody certification. The Forest Stewardship Council and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification include a "Recycled" label for products made from recycled materials (FSC-STD-40-007 2011; PEFC 2025). Under the Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design (LEED) system, projects can earn credits for using recycled and locally sourced material (U. S. Green Building Council 2019). TreeCycle America developed an identification and tracking system to ensure local and sustainable wood sourcing (Barron 2015). The Urban Salvaged and Reclaimed Woods organization certifies urban and reclaimed wood products based on sourcing, processing, and quality (Urban Salvaged and Reclaimed Woods Inc. 2025).

Urban wood educational programs

Education has been essential for the success of urban and reclaimed wood programs. The formation of some of these programs was supported by the US Forest Service, such as the Urban Wood Network, the Urban Wood Academy, and Unified Wood Economy (formerly Urban Wood Economy). The Urban Wood Academy's focus is on the educational components of urban and reclaimed wood utilization, for example hosting annual workshops across the nation. The Urban Wood Network provides a variety of educational outreach activities, such as four annual webinars and various in-person events. These educational programs work to increase public awareness of urban and reclaimed wood and, as a result, increase demand for their products.

Grant programs

Federal and state organizations have implemented financial support systems which may fund urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives, primarily through grants. At the federal level, the US Forest Service's Wood Innovations Grant Program has funded projects that included urban and reclaimed wood utilization (US Forest Service 2023). At the state level, the Minnesota's Pollution Control Agency issued a Wood Waste grant, to support waste wood utilization initiatives (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 2025).

Urban and reclaimed biomass campuses

Recently created "biomass campuses" were described in an interview as a large-scale biomass processing site. These campuses attempt to bring urban wood utilization to scale by processing large amounts of urban wood in value-adding applications. This often involves the employment of individuals from underprivileged populations. One example is the partnership between Unified Wood Economy, municipalities, and local businesses. Unified Wood Economy is currently working on projects in several states, partnering with cities and businesses in the process (Unified Wood Economy n.d.). These programs are still in development, but the goal is to eventually develop a model to easily replicate in other municipalities.

Motivation

Urban and reclaimed wood initiatives are created for a variety of reasons. The most common responses about these motivations are described below.

Tree pests and diseases

A common trigger for the beginning of urban and reclaimed wood efforts is the spread of tree diseases, such as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). The need to remove trees affected by the EAB has created large amounts of ash tree logs and residues, some of which are suitable for high value uses. For example, the urban wood initiative interviewed in Spearfish, SD, originated from the actions set in their 2018 Emerald Ash Borer Action Plan, which required a certain number of ash trees to be removed from the city each year to combat the spread of this invasive wood-boring beetle. To avoid wasting this wood, it was collected in a lumberyard for public use. Similarly, the initiative interviewed in Elkhart, IN, began due to concerns of wasted wood because of ash tree removals, thus bringing them to reuse the wood within the community. In addition to EAB, other tree pests, including Gypsy Moth, Western and Eastern Tent Caterpillars, Douglas-fir Tussock Moth, Spruce Budworm, Asian Longhorned Beetle, Bark Beetles, Aphids, Scale Insects, and Pine Beetles, can cause significant damage to trees (Lang 2018), thus accelerating urban tree removals.

Diverting wood waste from landfills

Diverting wood waste from landfills is a significant driver in the creation of initiatives. In 2018, 12.2 million tons of wood were sent to landfills across the United States. Many municipalities have responded to this challenge with urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. Virginia started their initiative with the goal of diverting wood that would otherwise have been converted into mulch. The Baltimore Wood Project started with the need to reduce waste from the removal of 4,000 rowhomes (Coggs 2023). The city worked to develop an innovative solution of deconstructing the homes to resell and reuse the materials and thus avoid waste. An added benefit of this waste diversion is the carbon sequestration associated with wood and wood products. For instance, the Conservation Corps of Long Beach in California cited extended carbon sequestration as a primary driver in their initiative (Haggerty 2024).

Cost savings

Cost savings are a primary factor driving the creation of urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. Milwaukee is a prime example of this, as their initiative began as a cost-saving approach, and now saves them an average of $73,000 each year, mostly from

avoiding tipping fees. Other municipalities have searched for value in their local wood. For example, Pittsburgh saw wood from storm damage as a source of income and pursued the development of their own urban wood initiative to produce the highest possible value from these resources (Davey Resource Group 2012). These cost savings provide an economic benefit to municipalities and encourage the implementation of urban and reclaimed wood utilization projects.

Urban and Reclaimed Wood Initiative Organization

The formal organization of urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts plays a crucial role in their success by providing structure and access to different resources and processes. Whether headed by a local government or a partnership between a municipality and a nonprofit, each organization style has its benefits and drawbacks.

Federal government

Federal urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts are almost exclusively held under the State, Private, and Tribal Forestry organization, according to a US Forest Service representative. This agency houses the various resources provided to states and local initiatives such as grant programs, technical assistance, and informational and networking resources. As interest in urban and reclaimed wood utilization grows, there are hopes to include the Urban and Community Forestry department in these efforts to diversify the backing of urban and reclaimed wood utilization. This would allow more resources, specifically time and expertise, to be allocated to these initiatives.

State governments

The states' Departments of Natural Resources (DNRs) play a central leadership role in urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. Two key policy events are considered to have significantly influenced the development of state-level urban and community forestry programs: the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 and the 1990 Farm Bill (U.S. Government Info. 2025). These legislative milestones serve as the basis for DNRs involvement in numerous urban wood utilization programs across the nation. State urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives are typically organized under the DNR or Pollution Control (PCA) agencies, which typically contain an Urban and Community Forestry department. Occasionally, a state will have a specialized urban and reclaimed wood department or position, such as the Virginia Urban Wood Program that has a full-time Forest Utilization and Marketing Specialist (Virginia Department of Forestry 2025), but most remain under the broader umbrella of urban forestry. Additionally, some states have worked together to form urban and reclaimed wood utilization committees, such as the Southern Community Wood Utilization Group (Southern Group of State Foresters 2024), which includes several states in the US south and works to promote urban and reclaimed wood utilization across the area.

County, city, and town governments

At the local scale, the department under which urban and reclaimed wood utilization falls is much more variable. Most city-based initiatives, including those in Philadelphia and Baltimore, are under a specific department or partnership of multiple departments within the city government, often related to or involving the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry departments. Some municipalities have their own Urban Forestry department leading these initiatives, such as in Seattle (Seattle Public Utilities 2025). These

departments may choose to head initiatives alone or to work with external partners. Some cities, such as Milwaukee, have policies requiring city committees to work on executing urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives (Coggs 2023).

Partnerships and Collaborations

Cities often work with external partners to achieve their goals. These partnerships and collaborations play a vital role in the implementation of urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives and contribute significantly to their overall impact.

Local businesses

Local businesses are critical partners for many urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. Some initiatives rely on local businesses to run their urban and reclaimed wood utilization projects, such as Ann Arbor's partnership with Urban Ashes and their Circular UrbanWood Triconomy model ("Triconomy" n.d.). Other initiatives work with local businesses to carry out select steps in the supply, processing, and commercialization of urban or reclaimed wood products, such as the city of Milwaukee's partnership with a local sawmill to process their urban wood. These partnerships allow local businesses to integrate themselves into the projects and add value in the process.

Networking programs

Networking programs work to connect stakeholders in the wood and reclaimed wood industry with the intention of creating learning and collaboration opportunities. One well known program is the Urban Wood Network, which stretches across the United States to connect municipalities, businesses, and other stakeholders (Urban Wood Network 2025). This connection is achieved primarily through their website, where the Urban Wood Network promotes events, provides educational resources, and highlights initiatives (Urban Wood Network 2025). Other networks, such as the Southern Community Wood Utilization Group, work to accomplish similar goals with a specific focus around urban wood, by facilitating face to face communication through meetings and workshops.

Higher education

Colleges and universities have also served as useful partners in municipalities' urban and reclaimed wood initiatives. Many initiatives are housed in cities with prominent university presences, such as Black Hills State University in Spearfish, SD. The initiative provides wood materials for forestry and bioproducts classes in return for promotion from the school to students and other local stakeholders. States such as Virginia also collaborate with a diverse range of educational institutions to develop various initiatives such as biomass processing and urban wood reclamation on campus through events and classes. These efforts not only market and promote the urban and reclaimed wood initiatives but also work to educate the next generation of voices in the urban wood industry.

Initiative Results

Initiatives to increase the use of urban and reclaimed wood vary widely in the way they track progress and measure success; however, some common themes emerged from this analysis. Results in general can fall into three categories: environmental, social, and economic impacts.

Environmental impacts

The most frequently mentioned environmental impacts from urban and reclaimed wood utilization efforts are landfill diversion and carbon sequestration. Some of the diversion of wood waste results mentioned range from 323 logs in Philadelphia's initiative (Cambium 2026), to over 16,000 tons of wood from the Baltimore Wood Project, according to interviews. There is ample room for growth, however; for example Seattle sends over 60,000 tons of urban and reclaimed wood to the landfill each year (Staff 2023). This has led initiatives such as Baltimore's Camp Small to develop higher diversion goals to continue improving their initiatives and increasing their capacity. According to Grossi *et al.* (2023), repurposing wood resulted in the lowest carbon footprint among three end-of-life scenarios, with a final Global Warming Potential balance of 13,309 kg CO_2eq, compared to 21,006 kg CO_2eq for landfilling and 52,373 kg CO_2eq for incineration with energy recovery.

Carbon sequestration is another environmental benefit of urban wood utilization. Ann Arbor, for example, identified the potential to sequester 1.54 million tons of carbon through urban wood utilization (Kisner 2023). Though this potential has been identified in various cities, only Baltimore has reported carbon sequestration outcomes, at over 2,000 tons of carbon each year (Galvin *et al.* 2020). As initiatives continue to develop, carbon sequestration has been identified as a relevant metric to track in the determination of impact of these projects.

Social impacts

Urban and reclaimed wood utilization has various social benefits, especially regarding community engagement and serving underprivileged communities. These social impacts primarily focus on job skill development. For example, the Baltimore Wood Project hired formerly incarcerated individuals in the deconstruction of the designated rowhomes with the intention of developing job skills and employability. This mission has carried on to Camp Small, which employs similar groups to work in processing urban and reclaimed wood on site. Unified Wood Economy works to prioritize these social elements, such as skill development and employability in their projects by working with municipalities to meet their individual social needs. During interviews, these values were mentioned by several initiatives.

Economic impacts

Some of the most compelling results of urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives are the economic benefits they provide. The use of urban and reclaimed wood contributes to local economies by adding value to wood, generating job opportunities, and reimbursing money back into the community.

Urban and reclaimed wood initiatives create value added from materials that are considered waste or of very little value. Camp Small noted that this was possible through the processing of the material, thus transforming the wood into a more desirable and valuable product. In great part, the value in urban and reclaimed wood stems from the story and marketing behind the material. For example, TreeCycle America uses a "TreeID" to trace where their certified wood comes from, thus adding a story and sentimental value to it (Barron 2015), and a business in Minneapolis keeps track of the zip code of the area where urban wood came from, from log to final product (MPCA 2025).

Finally, urban and reclaimed wood initiatives often choose to put a portion of their revenue back into the community. A representative of Philadelphia's initiative stated in an

interview that they pledged to donate 15 percent of earnings to Tree Philly, a nonprofit that works to increase tree canopy urban coverage in Philadelphia neighborhoods, thus adding a circular aspect to urban forestry. Other initiatives provide the public with durable goods for free or at low cost. For example, Washington DC's initiative transforms urban wood into stools and desks that can be requested free of charge for classrooms in local schools (DDOT Urban Forestry 2025). These examples exemplify the reinvestment of urban and reclaimed wood initiatives into their communities and the subsequent economic benefits.

Funding

Urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives require funding to develop, start, and sustain. Funding for such projects comes from a variety of sources, as explained below.

A considerable amount of funding for urban and reclaimed wood utilization comes from the federal government. Funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRS 2025) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2022 (BlueGreen Alliance 2023) have allowed states significant freedom in how they spend federal funding, and some states have opted for some of these funds to be used in urban forestry and, sometimes, urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives, such as Seattle's urban wood warehouse (Staff 2023). There are also federal grant programs that have funded projects involving utilization of urban and reclaimed wood, as explained before. These efforts work to offset the financial burden that urban and reclaimed wood initiatives may bring to municipalities and make utilization efforts more accessible. Some states have made funds available to develop urban forestry that sometimes contribute to urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives, such as funds provided by Michigan's NextCycle initiative under the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy that provided a grant to fund the city of Ann Arbor's initiative.

Funding is occasionally available on a local level to finance urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives. These funds are not typically designated for urban and reclaimed wood initiatives specifically, but rather for a broader range of projects to benefit the community. An example of this is the City of Baltimore Innovation Fund, which provided the loan used to start the Camp Small initiative. General grants and loans such as these can serve as a more accessible, locally driven way to fund developing urban and reclaimed wood utilization projects.

Project Sustainability

As important as the development and operation of urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives is the creation of structures and policies to ensure their continuation into the future. To address this need, several municipalities have implemented additional policies, programs, and actions to maintain these projects. Washington DC, for example, requires the continuation of their urban wood initiative by law (Yturralde 2019). Similarly, city comprehensive plans such as Ann Arbor's A02 Carbon Neutral plan and Chicago's Urban Forest Management Plan, include aspects of wood utilization (City of Ann Arbor 2020; Chicago Bureau of Forestry 2023). Other initiatives are also working to expand the market for urban and reclaimed wood and increase their efforts to ensure lasting impacts

CONCLUSIONS

1. As urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives have been created, several models have been developed. These models typically include the establishment of wood

collection and processing, structures to facilitate collaborating with community partners, education outreach to communicate the high quality of the end-products, and systematically reporting metrics on the results of initiatives.

2. Urban and reclaimed wood utilization requires greater community engagement and support than conventional industry, as the associated products rely to a higher degree on emotional and social value. This often requires collaboration and partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations.
3. Urban and reclaimed wood utilization initiatives can be difficult to sustain over long periods due to leadership changes, reliability of funding sources, and other factors. This has led to the failure of several projects, but some programs have successfully overcome these challenges with the implementation of policy tools to ensure continuity.
4. To be successful, urban and reclaimed utilization initiatives must be tailored to the individual needs of a state, city, or organization and thus require creativity and innovation in their development and execution.

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