



## May 2014 Sustainability Hero Christopher A. Brown P.P., AICP, LEED-GA, Principal Planner, City of Hoboken and Coordinator of the Hoboken Green Team

Christopher Alexander Brown grew up in the Bronx, the northernmost of the five boroughs of New York City. He and his two sisters were raised by their parents who came to New York from the Caribbean islands of Antigua and Jamaica. Chris' first experience with the environmental movement was an 'ah-ha' moment that developed after an initially frustrating experience.

In July 1989, with the passage of Local Law 19, recycling became mandatory in New York City. He remembers how at first separating paper and plastic on a weekly basis was a real adjustment for his family. Especially because his mother was an Avon Lady and her business produced a large number of extra cardboard boxes and packaging. As a kid, he did not enjoy having to separate all of the boxes and the subsequent preparation for curbside pick-up. Chris likes to use this example when he is talking about sustainability and how regulations can help influence behavior. In present day, Chris can never throw a plastic bottle in the trash because recycling is an ingrained behavior. The recycling mandate turned out to be effective.



Chris is a leader in the Sustainable Jersey program in his role as the municipal liaison and coordinator of the City of Hoboken Green Team. The City achieved certification in 2011 and is currently working on re-certification for 2014.

As a Principal Planner for the City of Hoboken, his work includes coordination of environmental sustainability initiatives, preparation and management of grant applications, and assisting in various capacities with local development projects. Chris graduated from State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo with a Master of Urban Planning degree concentrating in Urban Management. He has a solid foundation in land use planning through engaging in the preparation of redevelopment studies and plans, crafting affordable housing strategies, and preparing zoning regulations and development review applications.

Before working for the City of Hoboken, Chris was employed at a private engineering firm in South Jersey. At this same time, he added the LEED Green Associate credential to his accomplishments. Achieving this credential focused his work on urban sustainability, which he says has provided an additional dimension to his urban planning career. Studying for the Green Associate test helped inform Chris to different solutions which he could recommend to clients through site plan review and master plan goals. He currently uses this toolbox every day in Hoboken.

### **Hoboken's 'Rock Star' Green Team**

In April of 2010, Hoboken City Council passed a resolution supporting the City's participation in the Sustainable Jersey certification program. Since that time, a Green Team comprised of city staff and members of the local community was assembled and continues to meet monthly. The community members of the green team come from the Quality of Life Coalition, the Shade Tree Commission, the green construction industry, environmental planning and engineering firms,

the solar industry and the Department of Environmental Protection, just to name a few. Chris said that Hoboken is lucky to have an extremely intelligent and dedicated Green Team, all of whom he refers to as ‘rock stars’.

Chris said he quickly realized at his first green team meeting that his role would be to harness the energy that members brought to the table in order to coordinate and move Sustainable Jersey actions forward. Sustainable Jersey staff can attest that Chris is constantly working behind the scenes to coordinate questions about the process, timelines and actions the team wants to pursue. He advises new green team leaders to ask good questions, inspire and fully use the talents of community members. Chris tries to be creative with agendas which keep the group on track to accomplish goals. Creating a team that's greater than the sum of its parts is, to some extent, a function of leadership, and Chris has definitely done a skillful job of inspiring and harvesting the talents of the group.

Chris points out that it is helpful to have government support. Mayor Dawn Zimmer is very progressive towards environmental sustainability and the tangible impacts that green infrastructure can create within the City. The Mayor and City Council have been consistently supportive of projects and ideas raised by the Green Team. Chris says the support is reflective of the forward thinking community that understands the benefits of sustainable initiatives. Chris said that pursuing sustainable actions in an urban city does present different opportunities (existing density; culture of walking and biking) and challenges (higher costs for infrastructure improvements). He recommends the book by David Owen called [Green Metropolis: Why Living Smaller, Living Closer, and Driving Less Are the Keys to Sustainability](#) which tells the story of why urban areas present solutions to climate change and preservation of natural resources.

### **Hoboken Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan**

The City of Hoboken experiences chronic flooding during storm events due to a high percentage of impervious surface and a century-old sewer system. With Superstorm Sandy, half of the City was flooded and an estimated 20,000 people were stranded in Hoboken, surrounded by water. Flooding and stormwater management is a major issue and the city has pursued green options in developing solutions. The [Hoboken Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan](#), funded by Together North Jersey, is a strategic plan to address flooding caused by the increased intensity and frequency of severe weather events. The Plan developed place-based stormwater management and flood control strategies and identified implementable climate adaptation action steps for Hoboken, which also may be applied to other flood-prone areas throughout the region and state. Chris served as project manager for the development of this plan.

In addition, Hoboken received a \$20,000 Sustainable Jersey Small Grant to design curb-extension rain gardens, totaling approximately 800 feet that will treat and filter storm water runoff. The City plans to break ground on this project later this spring.

### **First Citywide Car Sharing Program**

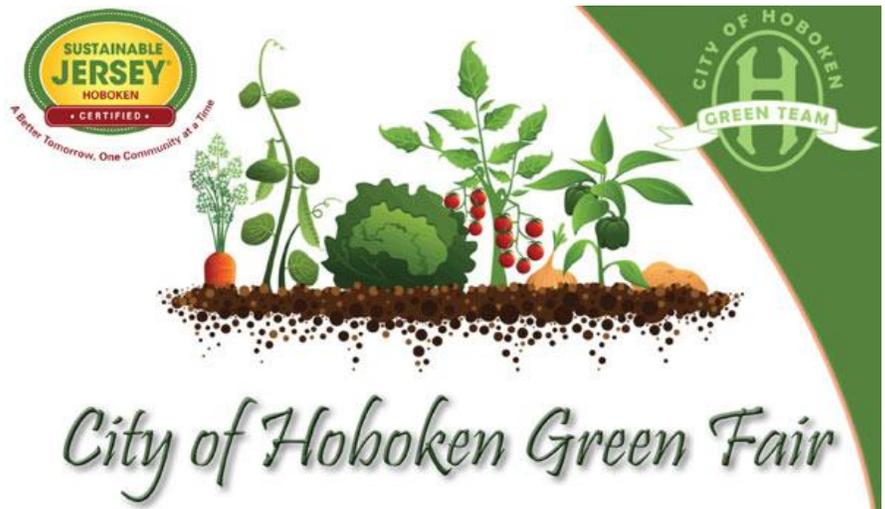
During summer 2010, the City of Hoboken implemented the nation's first true citywide car sharing program, known as "[Corner Cars](#)." The program is designed to reduce on-street parking demand in dense urban areas. Though the majority of workers in Hoboken commute by transit, walking, or bicycle (nearly 70%), a large number of these workers still own vehicles even though they only operate them a couple times per month. The Corner Cars program works effectively filling the niche for this subset of the population, because it allows them to save thousands of dollars per year and the hassle of urban car ownership, while still having convenient access to a vehicle a few times per month. The Corner Cars program creates a situation where vehicles are both highly-visible to residents on street and highly accessible because they are spread out around the city to be within a five minute walk of 90 percent of Hoboken residents. Vehicles can be reserved online and then rented by the hour. Residents save money on car ownership and never have to worry about

searching endlessly for on-street parking, and the car sharing vendor pays the city for the privilege of parking on-street per space each month.

### City of Hoboken Green Fair on May 17

The City of Hoboken Green Team will host the [3rd Annual Green Fair](#) on Saturday, May 17, 2014 from 11 am to 4 pm at Church Square Park. Chris takes the lead in organizing the fair but is very appreciative of the volunteers whom recommend the vendors and create the marketing materials. The fair features live music (organized by a Green Team member whom is a well-known local musician) and organic food vendors. It's intended to introduce sustainable lifestyle choices to the community, raise awareness regarding environmental issues

and demonstrate how consumers can reduce their impact on the earth by selecting sustainable, eco-friendly products and services. With a \$2,000 Sustainable Jersey Capacity Building Grant, Hoboken purchased several rain barrels and plans to host a rain barrel demonstration table at the fair. The remaining grant funds will be used to purchase reusable shopping bags to be distributed to residents at the Green Fair. The purchase of these bags is being coordinated by a dedicated Green Team member.



In addition to submitting for re-certification with Sustainable Jersey, the City of Hoboken Green Team is also working on a Green Guide for Renters and Homeowners. It will be a one-stop shop for everything green-related in the city. Chris was assigned to research the pet waste section of the Green Guide and subsequently became quite an expert on cat litter. One of his recent proud accomplishments was convincing his girlfriend to purchase non-clay cat litter for her adopted feline.

In his spare time, Chris likes to go to the gym and stay fit by running local 5K races; look for him at the May 31 McCarren 5K - Benefiting St. Nicks in Brooklyn. He enjoys riding his bike to work every morning (he sold his car in 2011 after moving to Hoboken), visiting historical places, reading, playing guitar and playing chess. He listens to indie-alternative, hip-hop and R&B music. He is also the APA-NJ Professional Development Officer and a Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) member. The PAB conducts the accreditation process for all planning programs in North America.

To learn more about the City of Hoboken Green Team, like their Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/hobokengreenteam> or read their [2011 Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#).