

GREEN HOUSING IN CENTRAL INDIANA: THE OBSTACLES OF AWARENESS— CHANGES TO SUSTAIN THE FUTURE

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Former Vice President Dick Cheney once said that “conservation may be a sign of personal virtue,” but it is not a basis for “sound, comprehensive” policy. My research on “green” housing initiatives and policies in the United States leads to a different conclusion. Without changes to housing policy, green housing cannot become mainstream. Nevertheless, those policy changes likely depend on personal changes in Americans’ ethical visions of the good life and cultural ideas about the built environment. Since the 2006 launch of the LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) system of certifying buildings as “green,” there have been only 69 LEED certified projects in Indiana. Indiana is ranked 26/50 for number of LEED buildings in the country by state, and Indianapolis is ranked 32/50 by city. Furthermore, the state of Indiana has only one policy concerning LEED buildings, and all Indiana cities combined have only four policies. Compared to nearby states, Indiana is far behind. Based on a case study of Michael Reynolds (the creator of Earthships), an interview with a local Earthship builder/owner, and an analysis of LEED certification standards and city, state, and federal building codes, I address the policy, cultural, and ethical obstacles to building more green housing in central Indiana. My research suggests that overcoming personal obstacles is the first step, as the individualistic nature of American society, the focus on economic gain and comfort, our ideals of “the good life,” and the scary nature of change, all prevent central Indiana from adopting and promoting “greener” building techniques. By changing the ways in which Americans think about their cultural and ethical existence, we can become more optimistic when considering policy and code changes.