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Becoming a Positive Part of the Net Zero Future

— by Ben Stapleton

For years now, conferences have become an integral part of how we operate in modern business. An opportunity to escape from the routine of our regular work day, meet new people who share similar interests, catch up with old friends and former colleagues (and meet new ones), hopefully catch a healthy dose of inspiration from a keynote or two, and of course, peruse the exhibitor hall for that latest product or service that is going to make you look like a genius come Monday. As with so much of life in 2020, COVID-19 has made how we used to do nearly everything just not possible anymore. But we're Americans damn it, we won't give up, and we soldier on virtually, finding a way to deliver the conference experience the best we can in our new reality.

But maybe, just maybe, conferences couldn't continue to be what they were anymore, maybe that model was broken, maybe we were just going to conference after conference because that is what we were used to doing and starting to question what the value was we were getting out of them. As this pandemic has shown us, our routine needed to be shaken up, we needed to evolve—and the virtual conference is quickly replacing the conference of old. For all these reasons and more, USGBC-LA is proud to be an official Conference Partner for NZ20, the world's largest net zero building conference and expo. Building on the success of our [19th Annual Municipal Green Building Conference & Expo \(MGBCE\)](#) with over 1,200 attendees, this is your opportunity to witness the continued evolution of the conference into a virtual event first hand.

A hub for thought-leaders and industry-shapers in climate, carbon, energy, water, waste, and transit, the annual [Net Zero Conference](#) brings green building pioneers from around the world together virtually for two days of inspiration and education to evolve our built environment. The event will feature educational sessions, virtual building tours, and keynotes from [community leaders](#) like Jamie Margolin and Zanagee Artis of Zero Hour. Their virtual platform will inspire communication, providing attendees with opportunities to engage and

ask questions during sessions and networking events. It will also feature a virtual Expo Hall, where attendees will be able to meet exhibitors “face-to-face” through video chat (so don’t worry, you’ll still get to bring those genius ideas back to your office).

As part of the program, USGBC-LA will be showcasing our 2020 cohort of innovative startup companies from our Net Zero Accelerator, all of which are delivering solutions to help make net zero carbon, energy, water, and waste a reality in the built environment. What better evolution of the conference than for you to witness fast pitches 17-member companies that have been selected for their strong potential to be game changers in building technologies and materials, as well as green jobs creation, and with solutions ranging from reducing carbon across emissions-intensive industries to saving buildings from wildfires to providing access to clean power anytime and anywhere. One of these companies will receive an award for their innovation during the Trailblazer Awards ceremony at the end of the event, which you won’t want to miss.



Stapleton stands alongside 2019 Trailblazer Award recipients, including Net Zero Accelerator showcase winner Yotta Energy and USGBC-LA partners LADWP, Southern California Edison, and the City of LA.

We’re also partnering up with NZ20 to host our first virtual job fair leveraging our Talent Portal, something we are looking to do on a regular basis going forward to provide all those who’ve lost their job or opportunity to advance their career due to COVID. We’re looking to provide a conduit for connection in the sustainability industry and hope for the future by

creating an industry hub for jobs, training, featured employers, a mentor network, volunteer [Green Building Corps](#), and more. The Career Fair event will be free for all to attend, so please join us whether you're job seeking or hiring. Be part of the positivity that comes from committing to a net zero future.

In closing, we can't forget that we need to make sure we're having fun, making actual human connections with other real people, and staying focused on our mission of making the world a better, more sustainable, more equitable place. As part of that, I hope you can join us during the closing Happy Half Hour, where I will be joined by a diverse group of friends and colleagues to reminisce about the year so far while we have a drink or two and find hope for what is yet to come.

About the Author

Executive Director for USGBC-LA. A native Angeleno, Ben Stapleton is a recognized sustainability leader, who brings to this position extensive experience and connections across real estate, technology and innovation. He launched and managed the La Kretz Innovation Campus in Downtown Los Angeles, most recently serving as SVP, Operations & Finance for the LA Cleantech Incubator (LACI). The Campus has become an epicenter for sustainability in the region featuring events with prominent local, national and international leaders, while being home to a community of cutting-edge businesses and nonprofits. At LACI, Stapleton led major operational growth, program development, and partnerships to triple revenue for the non-profit. Simultaneously, he helped lead efforts that resulted in the La Kretz Innovation Campus becoming an iconic green building for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the City of Los Angeles, with multiple certifications, as well as pilot projects targeting waste, water, and energy efficiency. Stapleton has also held the positions of Managing Director of the LA Better Buildings Challenge and Vice President & Cleantech Practice Group Lead at JLL. He has served on the boards of LA Bioscience Hub and USGBC-LA. Representing competing schools in Los Angeles, Stapleton holds a MBA from the University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business, and a Bachelors of Arts degree in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles.



