



## Edward Fitzpatrick

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# Ed Fitzpatrick: Environment goes hand in hand with economy

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Photos from 12 years ago show the site strewn with construction debris and railroad ties. Across the street were vacant lots and dilapidated homes remarkable only for how many times the police responded to those addresses.

But on Monday, President Obama's chief environmental adviser found a very different scene when she arrived for a tour of Riverside Park.

Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, found the former illegal dump site in Olneyville has been transformed into a lush and active park, thanks to government money and private investment. The park is alive with a playground and community garden, a fish ladder and bike path. The vacant lots and decrepit houses have been replaced by a series of well-kept, newly built homes.

Jane Sherman, retired director of the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project, said skeptics questioned whether people would invest in Olneyville and take care of the park. Today, she said, "It's incredible and wonderful. Neighbors are using it and taking care of it."

Frank Shea, executive director of the Olneyville Housing Corporation, said 51 units of affordable housing have gone up, and crime has plunged. "We had

delusional dreams, and it has succeeded beyond our dreams,” he said.

Sutley came to Rhode Island at the invitation of U.S. Sen. [Jack Reed](#), Democratic chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on the interior and the environment. During her visit, she talked about America’s Great Outdoors Initiative, which includes federal funding for urban parks and waterways.

I asked her about the increasingly partisan split on global warming. On Saturday, the Boston Globe reported that 38 percent of Republicans say the earth is warming, and just 16 percent say it is caused by humans. But while he’s changed his mind on other issues, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney reaffirmed his view that global warming is real and humans are contributing to it.

Sutley said, “The science is strong that our climate is changing,” and “The kinds of strategies that address global warming are also good for our health and for our economy.” She noted that in his State of the Union address, President Obama said 80 percent of U.S. electricity should come from clean energy sources by 2035. (Critics say his definition of clean energy is too broad, given that it includes “clean coal,” among other things).

Sutley emphasized the value of making cars, homes and commercial buildings more energy-efficient. For example, she said we’d save \$20 billion a year if commercial buildings became 20-percent more energy efficient. During her visit, she toured the Box Office, a building made from 32 brightly colored steel shipping containers visible from the Route 6-10 connector. She said it’s an example of energy-efficient building that reuses materials in a unique way.

During the interview, Sutley mentioned Maine, where Gov. Paul LePage has called for opening 3 million acres of the North Woods while casting it as a battle between jobs and nature.

Sutley made a point applicable beyond Maine’s borders: “I think we see that a healthy environment and a healthy economy go hand in hand. In fact, when we look at things like the clean-energy economy, we think that is really a key to our continued prosperity and leadership around the world.”

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