

Green Jobs in the Field

Mark Chambers, Director of NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability (MOS)



Mark Chambers began his career as an architect before transitioning into sustainability and policy. Mark regards his time as an architect as a pivotal experience that informs his work today.

“At its core, architecture and sustainability policy are both about problem solving,” Chambers said. “When I apply the skills I learned in architecture to climate policy and action, I am able to unpack how systems are intertwined. This systems-thinking background is crucial for responding to climate change, an issue

that touches every aspect of life. The lesson here is that there are infinite opportunities to address climate change in your work, both directly and indirectly.”

Mark enjoys working on climate change in New York City in part because of how influential local policy can be.

“Climate policy is huge not just for us here in NYC, but for the rest of the country and world,” Chambers said. “New York City can unlock the potential of other cities wanting to do similar work, and we take this leadership role very seriously. It’s not just about us; it’s beyond the five boroughs.”

An urbanist and licensed architect, Mark has dedicated his career to working on high performance design, zero waste policy and city scale building energy efficiency, with a focus on equitable economic growth, public engagement and promoting transparency through data and innovation. He holds a bachelors degree in Architecture as well as a masters degree in Public Policy and Management with a concentration in urban and regional economic development from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA.

A climate issue beyond green buildings that Mark feels passionate about addressing is plastic pollution.

“We need to pay attention to the perverse and endemic quality of plastic pollution,” Chambers said. “I think that we underestimate and undervalue how significant the problem is. Plastics, especially single use plastics, are with us forever. We’re creating things we can’t uncreate, making things we can’t unmake.”

Mark applied systems thinking to connect plastic pollution to environmental justice issues.

“The canary in the coalmine with the plastics issue is our oceans,” Chambers said. “This becomes especially important when it comes to the disproportionate impact on different populations. If your life, the lives of your family and the lives of your community depend on fishing, then the collapse of ocean ecosystems and increased plastic pollution has significant impacts, not just for the fish but for you and your community. This reality exists in coastal communities all across the globe. When we do things to address plastic pollution here in NYC, it’s not just because it feels good, it’s because it’s crucial to human life. The least flexible and most vulnerable among us will reap the most damage from issues like these.”

Something that gives Mark hope are young New Yorkers.

“Young New Yorkers will and are defining their own future,” Chambers said. “Part of my work tries to give them the tools to act on that. We need to give them the tools and then get out of their way. We also have to acknowledge the problems that we’re trying to solve are problems that older generations created. Young New Yorkers have shown us very clearly that they are not going to exist in any grey area when it comes to responding to climate, and I’m inspired by that energy and passion.”

Mark’s advice for young people is to stop waiting for permission.

“Generationally, we’ve consistently waited for permission and waited for our time to be able to have an impact,” Chambers said. “In a world and an era in which time is not a luxury, young people need to use the amazing and infinite tools at their fingertips to immediately and actively begin the work. You can begin anywhere, you don’t have to wait until you feel like ‘I’ve earned the right at this table’, the table’s big enough, just pull up a chair.”