

## **Decarbonization Download Vlog – Full Interview Transcript**

### **5 Questions with Bard College**

#### **Maria**

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Decarbonization Download. My name is Maria Vargas, and I am the Director of the Better Buildings Initiative and the Better Climate Challenge at the U.S. Department of Energy. We are excited today to be joined by Taun Toay, the Chief Financial Officer of Bard College. Bard College is a partner not only in the Better Buildings Challenge, but also in the recently launched Better Climate Challenge. Taun, thank you so much for being with us.

#### **Taun**

Thank you. I am happy for the partnership and happy to join you.

#### **Maria**

Well, let's dive right in. Tell me, why is decarbonization important to your organization?

#### **Taun**

For a college in higher education not only as a field, but especially with who we are targeting for future policy makers and change agents in the world, decarbonization is at the front and center of everything that we do. Decarbonization is on the minds of people that are coming of age, our college, and people that are interested in teaching students. And for us, it is critical that we are training them and giving them the right tools to go out into a very difficult world with a very complex problem ahead of most industries and most services.

#### **Maria**

Thank you, Taun. You sort of addressed this, but help us understand better: Who are your stakeholders and your customers, and why do they care about decarbonization?

#### **Taun**

First and foremost for us, our stakeholders are faculty and students, as well as the staff that supports all of the infrastructure here. This is an existential crisis for people coming of age. I think that we potentially face a species-ending event if we fail to actually correct course. Avoiding that is going to require collective effort and technological advancements, but it is also going to require that we do not become defeatist - that we actually see hope in what that training can do for changing the trajectory. That is the greatest risk to people that are 17 to 25 years old, who are really the key stakeholders and who we are educating and trying to train to capture and tackle very complex problems. That could be overwhelming to somebody that was not looking at it from a lot of different angles and feeling like they are too old to be able to address it for positive change.

#### **Maria**

Taun, it is terrific that you are leading by example. What projects are you most excited about?

**Taun**

For us, it is important first to say that higher education and many industries need to be leaders in technology. We have the unique position of being able to pilot technologies that perhaps the market isn't there for yet, or invest in research and development around technology that maybe does not have the monetary incentives for development at this stage. And that's a great role for us to be in as higher education: to be pilots of technology and living laboratories for applications.

That said, some of these new technologies are what I find most exciting. We have put a lot of work into piloting micro-hydro dams to take advantage of even small water flows and creeks that exist all throughout this nation that are untapped for energy, or would have infrastructure buy-in barriers that would be out of reach for most people. We are looking at getting that technology cost down so that even a local farmer or a resident who has a creek running through their backyard could be able to harvest some of that technology. That, coupled with some of what we do around geothermal, is very exciting when it comes to how we can improve building efficiency using the renewable energy technologies that are available to us.

It is very difficult to improve the envelopes of buildings from the 1850s and beyond. We are working with a very old physical plant, as are many colleges and institutions throughout this country and throughout the world. But that's an exciting challenge. How do we employ new technology in old infrastructure? How do we take advantage of not only onsite generation, but where we don't have those technologies that are the lowest hanging fruit? We don't have the solar patterns of Arizona or the wind patterns of South Dakota in the Hudson Valley of New York, but we are able to take great advantage of something like geothermal technology. More than 40% of our campus square footage is covered by geothermal, and we are aiming to get that to 80% as part of the Better Buildings Challenge.

It is exciting how we think about actually deploying technology in the ways that suit our locale, but also with an advanced look towards the future of where this emerging technology is going to be most helpful.

**Maria**

Very exciting stuff. What challenges do you see in reducing carbon emissions?

**Taun**

We have the great fortune of a beautiful historic campus, which is also a huge challenge. We have buildings that date from the 1850s that are still usable and are part of the character of this campus. But bringing those older buildings up to new environmental standards is a real challenge.

We have tried to invest in onsite generation and really minimize emissions of our buildings by deploying what is available to us, such as renewable energy technology.

**Maria**

Terrific. All very exciting work. Well Taun, Bard College has made the decision to move ahead and be a leader in decarbonization. What would you say to other organizations who are considering this work?

**Taun**

We have to be proactive. We cannot be reactive to this issue. There is no Plan B because there is no Planet B. This is a very critical and urgent task for all institutions to come together to face.

I think that many institutions fall into reacting to trends, and we really have to be at the forefront to have a chance at truly addressing the climate crisis. We have to be willing to put money into untried technologies. We need to be willing to invest where others are not, or where the market's not ready to invest. That is going to be the only way that we can really advance as a society to address this huge change and challenge in front of us.

**Maria**

Wonderful. Well, Taun, thank you so much for being here today. We appreciate your perspective as the CFO of a large, important organization, and the partnership of Bard College with the Department of Energy in the Better Climate Challenge. We appreciate all you're doing, your commitment to sharing, training the next generation of leaders, and being with us today to share a little bit about what you're learning. Thank you so much.

**Taun**

Thank you. I appreciate the partnership, and I'm looking forward to working with you all on this.