

LEED Certification and Building Green

by Neil Terry



By now you have probably heard of the idea of having a green building. But what is it really? Everyone is aware of the debate surrounding our environment and how we, as humans, have been decimating it. Stewardship of our environment means finding ways to save it for us as well as future generations. We are all obviously aware of how industry and transportation pollute the environment and affect the atmosphere, water and soil. We need to do more to reduce emissions of toxic gases and chemicals from these sources. But how does this relate to our buildings? Buildings in themselves are not considered polluters. They don't foul the air with toxic emissions or pollute the ground and water

with chemicals. However, the very materials that are used to construct buildings can be products of polluting methods of manufacture or of non-renewable resources. The gases released from finish materials within the building can affect our health. Improper lighting and the building's poor indoor environment can affect our very psychological being by making us depressed and less productive.

The movement to address these issues in our built environment engendered the concept of green buildings. Many owners, architects and builders touted their buildings as being green with little evidence of how their buildings helped the environment or improved the condition of their occu-


pants. Out of this need to establish quantifiable standards for what constitutes a green building was born the Green Building Council and their program for "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design" (LEED). LEED is based on a point system and provides minimum requirements for a building to be considered "green" or LEED Certified. LEED essentially consists of a project checklist under 6 different categories that encompass all elements that are critical to green buildings. The categories are: Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy & Atmosphere, Materials & Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, Innovation & Design Process. Each of these categories are assigned a given set of points based on which the project team may make certain design choices to attain a level of certification. Buildings can achieve a basic level of LEED Certification (26-32 points) or by doing more than the minimum requirements achieve higher levels of certification called Silver (33-38 points), Gold (39-51 points) or Platinum (52-69 points).

You may be familiar with LEED Certified buildings. Most are government buildings, especially related to environmental programs or academia. It would appear that these buildings have the means to achieve LEED certification and don't need to compete in a real estate market where frills can add up quickly and undermine your ability to lease space. For the most part, information on the cost effects of going green are not easily available. Few buildings have become LEED certified and those that have are not comparable to Medical Office Buildings.


It would seem that on the surface LEED certification for a Medical Office Building is out of reach. But here in Arizona, due to our climate and

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environment, we have codes and building methods already in place that achieve several of the requirements for attaining LEED certification. We have used low-flow water fixtures for more than a decade, our night sky ordinances reduce light emissions into the atmosphere. As a rule, most owners prefer the use of low-water plants and emitters as the preferred method of watering these plants. The requirement of many municipalities for owners to retain their building sites for storm water on site rather than allowing it to flow onto adjacent sites and streets attains a point as well.

Additional points can be achieved by simply using sound architectural design practices such as orienting your building and particularly windows to minimum sun exposure. Allowing natural daylight into the building achieves points. Providing trees to shade your building and parking lot does as well.

Many materials are now available whose use would further generate LEED points for your building. These materials are made from recycled or rapidly renewable resources and as a rule have no emissions of toxic gases that could harm you or occupants. Generally, the closer to home these materials are manufactured the better, since one of the goals of a green building is to reduce pollution by minimizing the amount of transportation needed to bring the product onto your job site. Finding a waste management company to handle recycling of waste materials that would normally go into a land fill, can reduce by 90% the amount of construction materials that would have been disposed of by normal means. Indeed, several local waste management companies have taken on this challenge and will offer this service if requested.

In this spirit, on a recent project our firm was able to achieve 20 of the 26 required points to attain basic certification without adding much cost to the building by simply following local building codes and zoning ordinances, using sound architectural and engineering design practices and finding alternative building materials. In our opinion, all owners should, as a minimum, try to achieve as many LEED points in designing their next project. This should be

standard practice whether or not you can afford to spend the cost to have your project certified.

The cost for certification, which is above normal costs of construction, lies in the LEED's prerequisite to have the project independently commissioned by an entity who isn't the designer or builder. This commissioning requires extensive inspection and testing during construction and verification after occupancy that the systems do perform as required. Post-occupancy review requires a full cycle of systems to demonstrate that their performance meet the requirements of LEED. Estimates of cost for this commissioning range from 1/2 to 3% of the overall construction cost. It is key to obtaining certification since it is the means by which the Green Building Council knows that your building has met all of green building standards that your building was designed to obtain in the first place. It is such a small cost to contribute to the achievement of harmony with our environment.

Having a green building is beneficial to all and should serve as an attraction to tenants. As green design becomes the norm and tenants demand it, those who fail to embrace it may find their buildings obsolete and un-leasable. And as green architecture becomes more common, building standards will increase as we humans realize that healthy environments are more important than profit, or at least as important. It seems all too logical that we in the business of supporting the professions attending to people's health should offer the healthiest environments possible and LEED can help us attain that.

If you are interested in pursuing having a LEED certified building or simply providing a healthier building for your tenants, a LEED certified design professional can assist you in developing a green building. The Green Building Council has an excellent website that provides more information on LEED certification (www.usgbc.org). Take the challenge! Start building greener for us and our future generations.

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evident. Due to their having relationships with numerous vendors that provide service to more than one (1) location, generally a management company can obtain better pricing than a member of the association's board of directors who may attempt to handle these negotiations on their own. Additionally, with their experience a management company is usually more qualified to screen and evaluate a vendor's ability to perform the service required and perhaps more importantly, verify they carry sufficient insurance to protect the association and individual owners interest in the case of a problem.

A management company also serves as a buffer between all the individual owners. More often than not, owners do not agree on all aspects of the work to be done by the association. These disagreements can prevent the association from caring for the common areas or required aspects properly. They can also lead to bad relations between the owners, which is not healthy when owners are also living so close to one another. A skilled management company can be the one making suggestions and obtaining approvals on maintenance and improvement matters, rather than having one owner fight with another who may see things in the same light. Compliance with the Conditions Covenants and Restrictions (CC&R's) is another area that professional management can assist with. Not only verifying that all individual owners are abiding by the CC&R's but enforcing the their compliance when it is discovered there is a violation.

Additionally, in most cases a professional management company is more qualified to prepare and produce association budgets and plan for both long and short-term capital reserves. As association dues are usually the point of biggest contention between owners, having understandable professional budgets that give sufficient detail as to how dues are calculated and how funds are being spent is of utmost importance. This is especially true when it comes to collecting and projecting for sufficient reserve. Nothing can cause more heartache to administering an association than to have an unexpected event require owners