

Real Estate Update

Building Green Buildings

By John D. Sullivan

In our April/May and July, 2009, Real Estate Updates, we briefly discussed the LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system. But there is more to building



“green” and there is much confusion about standards and what it means to have a “green” building.

What Is a “Green” Building?

Energy Star® appliances? Green Label Plus™ carpeting? Use of

Green Seal™ or EcoLogo™ products? Mandatory recycling? Something else?

No one knows. There is no standard definition. Building owners can claim they are “green” based upon whatever criteria they choose.

LEED

LEED is the U. S. Green Building Council’s nationally accepted



benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. It is a voluntary system in which

points are awarded for meeting certain minimum criteria in several categories:

- Sustainable Sites
- Water Efficiency
- Energy & Atmosphere
- Materials & Resources
- Indoor Environmental Quality
- Innovation & Design Process

Based on the number of points earned, a building can be designated LEED Certified, LEED Silver, LEED Gold or LEED Platinum.

There are different criteria for various types of buildings and for different stages of a building’s life cycle. LEED currently has standards for:

- New Construction
- Core & Shell
- Commercial Interiors
- Existing Buildings Operations & Maintenance
- Homes
- Schools
- Healthcare
- Retail

Neighborhood Development standards are being evaluated in a pilot program.

LEED is rapidly becoming the recognized standard for commercial buildings. For example, Washington now requires that all new government buildings over 5,000 square feet qualify for at least LEED Silver. GSA has the same requirement for federal buildings. If someone is looking for a building that has been independently verified as “green,” then LEED can provide that assurance.

NAHB Green Building Program

The National Association of Home Builders has its own rating



system. Like LEED, it is a voluntary program. However, it only applies to residential buildings. It also rates buildings by assigning

points for meeting standards in several similar categories:

- Lot Design
- Preparation and Development
- Resource Efficiency
- Energy Efficiency
- Water Efficiency
- Indoor Environmental Quality
- Operation, Maintenance, and Homeowner Education
- Global Impact

Based on the number of points earned, a house can earn Bronze, Silver or Gold ratings. Whether LEED for Homes or the NAHB Green Building Program becomes the residential national standard remains to be seen.

Fad or Future?

With the cold winter weather upon us and the recent news of “Climate-gate,” one might wonder if this is all just a fad. Maybe it is, but I doubt it. As noted above, green buildings involve more than measures to reduce carbon footprints.

Many of these measures can yield significant operating cost savings and improve the quality of the occupants’ work environment. Savings may be realized through reduced use of potable water and electricity and installation of high efficiency HVAC systems. Typi-

cally, the increased initial costs amortize over the first few years after installation. Natural lighting, reduction of volatile organic compounds and other air contaminants, increased outside air intake, and community connectivity can make buildings much more desirable.



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