



Understanding challenges to develop sustainable building structures and environments

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Nowadays customers face ever greater challenges in a world where the harsh economic realities put pressure on decision making, where cost saving and bottom line almost always take priority over social and environmental benefits. Sustainability has come a long way these past few years yet misleading statement that green costs more is still a common misconception, which makes going green becoming almost passé as the new trend of net zero energy gets all the attention. Yet both are related and should be at least considered.

PCGNY Corp. recognizes that it is our responsibility to understand those challenges and to find solutions that will help our customers develop more sustainable building structures and environments. Sustainability means creating places that are environmentally responsible, healthy, equitable and profitable. Green building encompasses not just design, construction or operation phase but also ultimately end-of-life recycling or renewal of structures therefore selecting sustainable materials or materials with much longer life-span expectancy will offset the initial cost long term and allow for operational cost savings.

Buildings are responsible for up to 80% of the greenhouse gas emissions, 75% of electricity consumption and 40% of raw material use. Reducing those emissions in the built environment and implementing green energy alternatives is the least expensive method of abating the adverse impacts of climate change and achieving energy cost savings.

To address building inefficiencies, building assessments can be performed and efficiency programs established. The new Local Law 87 is a mandatory way of performing such audits on commercial buildings spanning 50,000 s/f or more, which is under a lot of scrutiny as many building owners believe it is an unnecessary waste of money. According to Francine Darko of Associated Renewable, which conducts LL87 audits: "Performing an ASHRAE level 3 audit is a great way to identify energy conservation measures that can reduce your overhead expenses by 15-30%. This audit not only helps a building comply with LL87, but the report also serves tremendous use for a building undergoing or considering capital improvements. Therefore, although LL87 requires only a minimum of Level 2 audit, we strongly recommend Level 3 audit to identify deeper level energy conservation opportunities with detail financial and engineering analysis. The government offers many programs and financial incentives to building owners to cover the cost of upgrades." Is it safe to say that LL87 can actually motivate building owners to inquire about net zero energy opportunities while performing energy audits?

One thing is certain, "green business" and opportunities are growing. Even the New York City DOB recognized the need for a new "green department" they presently look to hire for. Gina Bocar said, "The Department of Buildings has an essential role in the PlaNYC for a Greater Greener New York citywide initiative; we are charged with the primary responsibility for implementation of the Greater,

Greener Buildings Plan, which is a suite of laws focused on the largest buildings in N.Y.C. These are buildings that are 50,000 s/f or greater. While they account for only 2.5% of our total building stock, which is almost 1 million buildings, they also account for 45% of our greenhouse gas emissions. The outcome of this initiative is anticipated to result in at least a 5% reduction in energy consumption in New York City by 2030 and will save approximately \$750 million annually"

I have recently moderated a panel of speakers at the World Green Energy Symposium in N.Y.C. I must say it was a great opportunity to learn about new technology and programs implemented globally as well as discuss any social, economic and environmental concerns or problems other participants had to face while considering undertaking "a green challenge".

Every month PWC conducts AIA approved seminar on a different construction topic. As a Chair of the Continuing Education Committee, I strive to bring the best global leaders to present and discuss the newest technology and its application to green and conventional construction. Please go to www.pwcusa.org for more information.

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