



Top 2014 green trends that enhance building value

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As a commercial real estate appraiser, monitoring green trends is part of the complex process of valuing green real estate. In 2014, I foresee property owners taking new steps forward to enhance sustainability. There will be greater focus on greening existing buildings with retrofits and renovations of N.Y.C.'s vast stock of older commercial buildings. New laws will necessitate some of those projects, but the improving economy and need of property owners to be competitive beyond asking rents and location, will be compelling forces.

The next trend is the goal of becoming a zero energy or net-zero-energy building which has zero energy consumption and zero carbon emissions and relies on exceptional energy conservation and on-site renewables to meet all heating, cooling and electricity needs.

It's a lofty, complex, expensive goal requiring collecting energy, often through solar or wind power, ultimately matching demand with production, as well as state-of-the-art HVAC and super-efficient energy usage. It will be a long time coming - the U.S. has set a target of net-zero-energy for new commercial buildings by 2030 - but they have already moved from being perceived as unachievable to feasible.

The next trend continuing to grow is energy efficiency including monitoring, benchmarking, retrofits, consumption reduction, use of alternative energy sources and new technologies. Solar power will continue to make inroads with lower-rise, flat roof buildings.

Light-emitting diodes (LEDs), long considered too expensive, are becoming a game-changing source for commercial buildings, gaining ground against fluorescent and incandescent lighting. LEDs are energy efficient, have a long life span and are now available in white light. They are one of the solid state lighting systems (SSL technologies) that the Dept. of Energy says have the potential to reduce U.S. energy usage by nearly one half and contribute to our nation's climate change solutions. Which brings us to a trend that is being addressed with some urgency - water conservation. As climate changes impact the amount of rainfall and, thus, water supply, there is anticipation of a fresh water crisis and critical interest in water conservation including recycling of grey water.

The last trend may seem removed from green, but isn't as it increases building and property management efficiency. It is Internet-based cloud computing. This enables users to access info from any computing device - PCs, Macs, smart phones and tablets - from anywhere with Internet connectivity.

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