



Real estate trust of the rainforest: Instruments of sustainability

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Tremendous effort has gone into developing ratings systems to which building and energy standards should comply so that they yield an ecological dividend in addition to providing for the basic functions an office building is intended to provide—such as workspaces, protection from external elements such as weather and environmental factors, and control of internal elements such as ventilation and light, etc. ASHRE, LEED and LEED-EB are exemplary of such rating systems.

We seem to be at a developmental stage in which the conversation is evolving towards sustainable "whole building" practices, and contributing to that conversation are such organizations as "Whole Building Design Guide" and such factors as:

- 1) Increased awareness of impact of operational behavior and product choices
- 2) Decreased cost of many green products
- 3) Increased range of green products/services
- 4) Performance of many green products has become more efficient
- 5) Investors willing to wait longer to generate an anticipated ROI.

Acknowledging and applauding the tremendous benefits achieved by ratings standards and whole building thinking, I propose that we begin thinking in terms of a "whole earth state"—that is, being in a state of "carbon net zero."

The challenge of operating a building in a "whole earth" state is a challenge to meet, particularly in existing buildings where retrofitting can take sustainability achievements only so far.

And—building decisions are made by building owners or their property managers—not tenants.

David Platner, visionary and founder of the "RainTrust" (www.raintrust.org), takes the "whole earth" approach right back to the individual tenant, providing every individual an opportunity to make a carbon net zero choice through the "Foot For Foot" program.

According to Gregg Roberts of the RainTrust and principal of CitySites N.Y., the "Foot For Foot" program is akin to entering a 10K race as a fund raiser for charity. For example, a tenant of a 30,000 s/f space can sponsor 30,000 s/f of rainforest for a modest cost on an annual basis. A "whole earth" balance is assured because the energy load of a typical office space is slightly more than offset on a foot for foot basis by the oxygen produced in the rainforest. The sponsor has access to pictures of its acreage, provided through GPS tracking.

The goal of the RainTrust is "ensuring that the Earth's forests continue to function as our best natural resource against global warming." During the last 5 years, 30 million acres of rainforest have come under the program in Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia. The focus on three important initiatives in support of their goal:

- 1) Educating indigenous peoples about the detrimental effects of deforestation
- 2) Developing sustainable business such growing organic coffees or producing condoms from

removing the bark from rubber woods which does not harm the tree

3) Hiring security staff to protect rainforests from being deforested by poachers

Another compelling reason to protect the Brazilian rainforest in particular is, according to Gregg Roberts, because 25% of the world's fresh water is contained within its aquifer. Fresh water may likely be the next natural resource to rapidly dwindle in supply—and it seems prudent to protect such a vast resource now, by protecting its ecosystem and the trees atop it.

Our emerging eco-economy generates multitudes of new business opportunities that put decision-making power into the hands of individuals. Authentic products and services that are eco-friendly create healthy legacies for our future generations—and in a sense—create a trust.

As a trust encompasses both the tangible and the intangible, in a very meaningful way, the RainTrust is our collective trust, as it is a tangible asset of real estate. And it is held in trust, as instruments of a trust generally are, for our future generations who place intangible trust in us to do "the right thing".

It's absolutely marvelous that we can!

For further information visit:

* American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) - www.ashrae.org

* Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Rating System (LEED) - www.usgbc.org

* Whole Building Design Guide - www.wbdg.org

Not mentioned in article and can be useful resource:

Green Globes - www.greenglobes.com.

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