



The developer's role in sustainable design and LEED construction: One cannot avoid "green"

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In real estate, sustainable design and LEED construction are not new. In fact, the design community has been involved in sustainable design practices for years. But applying these design elements often meant paying a premium during construction and unwanted explanation for the developer. In the last five years, however; technology, education and public awareness have radically changed the development landscape. New materials and technologies have reduced, and in some cases eliminated, the cost premium for green environmentally sensitive materials. Life cycle cost analysis on highly efficient systems and sustainable design have made their mark on development's bottom line. Education of the development community and real estate professionals in sustainable design has shown this form of development is financially viable and, if used properly, can present a distinct competitive advantage. Public awareness on the importance of environmental stewardship and responsibility has exploded. One cannot avoid "green," it is front and center in the media, at work, and at home.

LEED in Action

As an owner/operator of a large commercial portfolio, Ciminelli has always had a focus on reducing costs and improving operating efficiencies, while still maintaining a high level of finish and design. Ciminelli's involvement with LEED and the USGBC was a natural fit. In 2005, I became Ciminelli's first in-house LEED accredited professional, something that even today is unusual for a development company. Having LEED APs on staff at Ciminelli means more than pursuing sustainable design and green building in our development efforts. It also speaks to the company's commitment to sustainable design and green building, Ciminelli is able to lead the process themselves instead of contracting it out.

Early success in employing sustainable design elements and sharing LEED benefits with the client came for Ciminelli through a project for a leading construction services company headquartered in WNY. Due to the nature of the client's business, it was apparent that the new, 26,000 s/f facility they were proposing would be a perfect way to illustrate the benefits and efficiencies of LEED construction. By building green, the company would aim to set the standard in new building construction in the area.

Having a LEED AP on staff allowed Ciminelli to control and forward the project through its initial concept stage, to design and construction, and to occupancy, all the while maintaining the necessary controls over costs and implementation. From the onset of the project, Ciminelli worked with the client to plan the construction of the building, with the goal of achieving a Gold Level rating LEED certification for the client. The result was a highly efficient building which will reduce its annual energy consumption by more than 32% and its annual water consumption by over 41%. The client agreed that the interior environment and air quality were one of their highest priorities of the project.

They wanted to create the best possible work environment for their employees. To this end, zero VOC paints, carpets and sealants were installed, as were advanced day-lighting techniques and exterior view sheds. Interior air quality and thermal comfort are measured and monitored to ensure optimal comfort. The building will consume less energy than a standard design facility, which was accomplished through efficient HVAC systems and in-floor radiant heat throughout the entire facility. The concept of the in-floor radiant heat was taken outside as well, and heat loops were installed on the ex-terior walkways to act as a permanent snow melt system. This eliminates the need for salt or chemical melting systems in the icy winter months. New technologies were employed in rest rooms and break rooms to incorporate low-flow water fixtures and dual flush toilets, radically reducing the amount of potable water that will be consumed. The exterior of the building employs night sky compliant lighting to reduce light pollution, and a "green" compliant roof system which was designed to meet the applicable emissivity and reflectivity standards. The site boasts drought tolerant, native species landscaping with no permanent irrigation system to help further reduce water consumption. The facility is positioned on a previously developed site, and is able to make a connection to the town's bike trail network. To encourage its use, lockers and changing facilities were installed for employees who utilize the bike path.

LEED Today

It is evident that sustainable design and green building are here to stay. What is "green" and cutting edge today, will probably be incorporated into local codes in the next several years, so if you are hesitant to get involved in "green" today, you will most likely be compelled to do so in the future. A very clear shift in the development paradigm has occurred. In the past, it was Ciminelli's job to introduce and explain the benefits and importance of sustainable design to a potential tenant or client; the developer had to initiate the discussion and overcome the resistance. Ciminelli has these same potential tenants and clients initiating the discussion and asking how sustainable design and "green" building concepts will be incorporated into their project.

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