



Thinking About Building LEED?

A POCKET GUIDE FROM MCA CHICAGO

LEED has proven itself as the premier rating system, if not the only legitimate rating system for commercial buildings. However, there are still some owners and even designers that don't feel LEED certification is necessary. While every owner must make that choice, there are some important points to consider about LEED certified buildings before you begin your building project.

LEED Certification:

- Increases the value of your building, both for sale & lease
- Conserves energy, water and materials, saving money
- Makes buildings healthier and more comfortable for tenants and employees, which increases occupancy rates and lowers absenteeism and sick days
- Makes your building better for the environment
- Makes it possible for you to qualify for tax rebates, expedited plan review, fee waivers & zoning allowances, depending on where your building is located



You can certainly achieve most of these results without LEED certification. But how do you know whether you truly have a sustainable building? Would you buy an automobile without a mileage rating, or food without an ingredient listing?

Practical Things You Need to Know About LEED

Areas for LEED Certification:

- Having a sustainable building site which addresses things such as development density, storm water, access to public transportation, heat island effect and light pollution.
- Saving water through intelligent landscaping, water reuse, and water saving fixtures.
- Saving energy, and thus our atmosphere, through more efficient heating, cooling and lighting systems, or supporting renewable energy.
- Smarter use of building materials through recycling, salvage and also using local or rapidly renewable materials.
- Improving Indoor Environmental Quality and making building occupants more comfortable, while keeping them healthier.

Know the Cost:

While the first cost of a LEED building is close to that of a “traditional” building, there are higher soft costs and possibly higher time costs. The good news is that if you know what you want from the start, you will make up for those additional costs in savings on operating costs. You will also enjoy an increased value for your property. The rise of international real estate investments can make the value of your building much greater than that of a non-LEED building. However, since LEED is still a relatively new rating system, architects may not have accurate costs. Be aware, and be realistic.



Many buildings these days are built on designs that are less than complete. Due to the nature of LEED, the design will be close to completion before construction begins. You do have control over the cost and time involved by choosing “how green” you want your building to be. LEED buildings are certified at four different levels. The highest is LEED Platinum. Less expensive to achieve are LEED Gold and LEED Silver. These levels are based on points that are earned by utilizing sustainable features. You can work with your design team to choose points that are within your budget and time frame.



Know Your Design Team:

If you are doing a LEED project you want a design team that has experience with LEED. Make sure you ask to see their portfolio of LEED projects. The number of architects and engineers that have experience with LEED is still somewhat limited. If you prefer to work with a designer who is not experienced in LEED, you should consider using a LEED consultant to help. If your architect has LEED experience he/she can be your LEED consultant and possibly, your decorator.



It's All in the Paperwork:

LEED is about verification, so maintaining documentation is essential, and time consuming. Since it is a well-regarded certification, the points don't come easy; you do have to earn them. If you do end up working with a project team that has little or no LEED experience, everyone needs to understand the importance of documentation and the time needed to be put towards it.



Commissioning is Your Friend:

One of the big soft costs in LEED is the commissioning. In commissioning you have a commissioning agent, or CA, that is responsible for making sure all of the energy systems in the building are installed and operating correctly. This is a big part of the verification of the sustainability, but also a big part of insuring you get a payback on the building. The commissioning agent has to have a reputation for being able to work with the owner, designer & contractor to make sure everyone's expectations are met. If you want your project to go as smoothly as possible you need to make sure that everyone understands what is expected from the project. One way to do this is to make sure that the HVAC and Electrical contractor have copies of the commissioning checklists before they bid on the job. Never try to use commissioning to get a \$10 job for \$5.

Get Involved:

One of the most under-utilized parts of the LEED process is selection of the owner project requirements or OPR. This comes under the commissioning prerequisite but is really part of the design of the project. The owner is supposed to come out and tell the designer what they want from the project. This can be as simple as stating that you want an office building with parking for 50 people, or that you want a six-story building with radiant heating, composting toilets and solar panels. Often the owner hasn't given it enough thought early in the project to clearly state what they want from their LEED building. Later it might be too late or too costly to provide it. Before beginning your sustainable project, it would be worthwhile to attend trade shows like Greenbuild to become familiar with some of the new technologies available.

The newer and more innovative the technology, the more you probably want to look into it. Some of these cost more but they may pay for themselves quickly, too. Also, don't just look at the cost but the cost differential between that item and a conventional one. Make sure you spend some "big picture" time thinking about how these things will actually work in your work environment. Will the people that work in your building like it as much as you do? What about your clients?





Don't Forget About Your Image:

You may be doing this to save money or just to do the “right thing” but that doesn't mean you shouldn't play to your strengths. If you are in the water business, focus on water saving technologies. If you are in the health business, focus on low emitting materials and increased ventilation.



Pick the Right Construction Team:

This is similar to picking the design team. It is preferable to have a General Contractor that has LEED experience. It is also important to make sure the General uses subcontractors that have LEED experience. If the contractors involved in the energy systems like HVAC and lighting are not familiar with LEED it could negatively affect your project. A good general will know this, but it should not be assumed.



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