

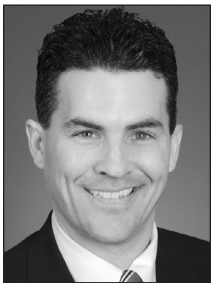
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Green Trend Not Going Anywhere, Especially in Trail-Blazing Bay State

By Daniel L. Monger



The many new green building projects around Massachusetts and the rest of the country, as well as the increasing number of green regulations and incentives, are evidence of a trend that is here to stay.

As of mid-March, 35 Massachusetts projects had earned a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating from the U.S. Green Building Council. They include the Genzyme Center in Cambridge, which earned the highest LEED rating – platinum – in 2005, and the Manulife U.S. headquarters in South Boston. Other buildings with LEED certification are as diverse as a Shaw's Superstore in Worcester, the Stanley Elementary School in Waltham and the new Terminal A at Boston's Logan Airport, a nationwide first for airports.

Boston is one of the first major cities to require green building standards and one of many communities promoting green standards through various policies and incentives. In January, the Boston Zoning Commission voted to require that all new buildings over 50,000 square feet meet green building standards by qualifying for 26 of 69 available points within the LEED rating system. While mandating that the buildings meet basic LEED standards, the zoning commis-

sion will accept either the official LEED certification or direct documented proof of qualification without requiring the building owner to go through the more extensive documentation process and added expense of actually obtaining the certification.

Between the first LEED certification in March 2000 and mid-March 2007, the non-profit U.S. Green Building Council, based in Washington, D.C., certified a total of 723 building projects throughout the country, including one of the highest-profile green projects, the 46-story Hearst Tower in New York City. That building earned a LEED gold rating in September 2006. Developers have registered many more hundreds of projects to begin the LEED certification process.

Other high-profile plans for LEED buildings include those for all the new buildings in the World Trade Center complex, which New York Gov. George Pataki announced last September will be designed to meet LEED Gold standards.

They will join the Seven World Trade Center tower, which achieved a gold designation for its exterior construction in March 2006.

The USGBC projects that by 2020, more than 30 percent of all new nonresidential construction will meet LEED standards.

The federal government and many local governments either already have adopted or are currently contemplating adopting laws and policies that require, or at least encourage, landlords, developers and contractors who do business with them to meet LEED certification standards in the projects that serve government needs. According to the USGBC, as of February 2007, there were 53 cities, 10 counties, 17 states, 33 school districts and 11 federal agencies across the United States and Canada that have developed some type of LEED certification requirement or incentive, and that number

appears to be growing fast.

Across the country, incentives offered include density bonuses, expedited permit reviews, reductions in development fees and other economic benefits. Massachusetts incentives include a density bonus offered in the city of Acton. The state Legislature also has considered LEED- and non-LEED-related tax incentives, and currently is considering "green communities" legislation.

Advantages to the purchasers and end-users of a LEED certified building include significant savings over the costs of occupying a similar building that is not energy-efficient and an overall work environment that is cleaner and healthier for employees.

Applying for Certification

To obtain LEED certification, you may apply in one of the following categories: new commercial construction and major renovation projects, existing building operation and maintenance, commercial interiors projects, core and shell development projects, homes, neighborhood development and schools. Currently, programs for new retail construction, health care, laboratories and schools are under development.

The rating system consists of points for categories of project performance. Initially, certain prerequisites must be met to obtain the basic certification, followed by a number of optional points awarded for various additional categories. Currently there are four progressive levels of certification for new construction: certified (26 to 32 points), silver (33 to 38 points), gold (39 to 51 points) and platinum (52 to 69 points). LEED rating systems for existing buildings, commercial interiors, and core and shell are based on a different number of total possible points with slightly different point thresholds for each system.

continued on page 2



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The project owner or the designer who seeks project certification first registers the project with the USGBC and then submits information necessary to obtain the certification. This includes information on the building's design and post-construction information. Points are awarded in the primary categories of sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor-air quality. Additional points deal with innovative design and other environmentally friendly features and areas not covered by the primary categories. The rating system generally is performance-based, rather than prescriptive, an effort the proponents say is meant to encourage innovation.

Cost of Certification

So what is the cost of certification? First, there is a minimal project registration fee, followed by the certification fee, which is based upon the type and size of a project and whether the applicant is a member of the USGBC. The typical fees range anywhere from \$1,750 to \$22,500.

However, obtaining certification requires that a project be designed in such a way as to

meet the standards and therein lies a critical piece of the cost analysis. According to the USGBC, it is possible to build a LEED-certified or silver project at no additional cost. However, while additional costs depend on the scope and size of the project and type of sustainable technologies used, the organization says that certified and silver levels generally can be implemented for up to 2 percent cost increase. It further estimates that gold and platinum levels can be achieved at cost increases ranging from zero to 7 percent, but says that most of the initial costs can be recouped within two years through lower operating costs, including energy and water savings.

That said, using a design professional who is knowledgeable about the LEED system is important if certification is a goal for your project. Toward that end, the USGBC has developed a training program for professionals, which includes a test on the rating system and its implementation. An individual who passes the test becomes a LEED Accredited Professional (sometimes referred to as a LEED AP). Currently, there are no eligibility requirements for taking the LEED AP test. It is open to anyone capable of studying and

learning the material and its application. Nevertheless, the USGBC encourages a background in project management and green building, and the majority of test-takers and LEED APs are architects, engineers, interior designers and facility managers.

LEED-certified has become a buzzword in the building industry and has quickly been adopted by a number of both public and private entities as a guide and often a requirement for their projects. In addition, by following some of the guidelines included in the LEED program, projects often can achieve cost savings over their lifecycles and result in healthier spaces for tenants and others to occupy. The LEED system continues to evolve through the USGBC, forums and meetings where a wide spectrum of interests are represented, including those of both public and private concerns and various design, development, and construction specialists. To the extent that the trend in adopting and implementing this certification program continues, LEED certification and the policies and goals that it reflects, will become more commonplace and may become the standard in the real estate and construction industries. ■