

ULI National Roundtable Report

Sustainable Development and Green Building

**Prepared by
Jason Scully**

**A ULI Policy Forum
Washington, D.C.**

March 30, 2004



**Urban Land
Institute**

About ULI

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research institute that is supported by its members. Its mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

ULI sponsors education programs and forums to encourage an open international exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences; initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues, and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 20,000 members and associates from more than 60 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

Richard M. Rosan
President

ULI Land Use Policy Forums. To encourage and enrich national discussion and debate on the leading land use policy issues of the day, ULI holds land use policy forums at which leading practitioners and other experts gather to discuss topics of interest to the land use and real estate community. The findings of these forums serve to guide and enhance ULI's program of work. ULI produces summaries of these forums in its Land Use Policy Forum Reports series, available on the ULI Web site, www.uli.org. By holding these forums and publishing summaries of the discussions, the Institute hopes to increase the body of knowledge that contributes to the quality of land use policy and real estate development practice throughout the country.

National Roundtables. From time to time, ULI brings together in Washington, D.C., representatives of the various interests of the real estate/land development community for a special policy forum called a national roundtable. The objective of a national roundtable is to examine ideas and share perspectives on issues of national importance within the real estate community and with representatives of other interests that have a stake in real estate and land development.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

On March 30, 2004, at the national headquarters of the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C., the Urban Land Institute held a daylong forum—the outgrowth of an earlier forum held in August 2003 in Aspen, Colorado. The goal of both forums was to bring together stakeholders from every sector of the real estate and land development industry to discuss green building and sustainable development practices. The March forum sought to build on the energy and momentum from the Aspen forum to initiate a lasting dialogue on the promotion and implementation of green building and sustainable development practices. The main topics of discussion at this forum concerned the need for improved communication of green concepts and practices within and among organizations and to the public.

The 22 representatives at the forum brought with them knowledge and experience from diverse professions ranging from contracting, architecture, landscape architecture, real estate, and development. Also represented were organizations and businesses, including the federal government, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the Conservation Fund, Hines, and PNC Financial Services Group.

Policy Forum Summary

Kenneth W. Hubbard, executive vice president of Hines, set the tone for the day's discussion with opening remarks that pointed out that the industry is in the early stages of understanding the potential of green practices. One of the conclusions reached at the Aspen forum was that each of the participating organizations could be much more productive if there were a greater degree of communication among organizations, he said.

Hubbard then provided the basis for the day's discussions by posing a series of questions regarding the communication of green building concepts. The questions focused on determining the facts, issues, and discussion points that need to be communicated, as well as on identifying potential consumers and how to help them become more aware of and receptive to green building and sustainable development practices.

With these questions in mind, the forum heard presentations by participants, each of which was followed by discussion. From these presentations and discussions, the following themes emerged:

- acknowledgment of the growing success of green building;
- the need to share information among and within organizations;
- the question of how to market and sell green building and sustainable development; and
- “big picture” issues related to green building and placing it in regional and global contexts.

Green Building and Sustainable Development Successes

Interest in green building is growing at a dramatic rate. A forum on green building and sustainable development with the same level of participation by organizations as the March forum would not have been possible five years ago, Hubbard pointed out. Indeed, the depth of interest expressed by the many sectors of the real estate and land development industry is a sign of growing recognition of the need for green and sustainable practices, he said.

Interest in these issues can also be seen in the growth of the USGBC. Membership and the workload at the USGBC doubles every year, according to Nigel Howard, vice president of the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and international programs. In the past three years, the council's staff size has increased from eight to 37 people, and the budget has grown from \$400,000 to \$12 million. Three years ago, USGBC had 509 members; now there are more than 4,300, with anywhere from 130 to 160 new members joining each month, said Rick Fedrizzi, president of Green-Think, LLC. In 2000, only 12 projects were certified as meeting LEED standards, Fedrizzi said, but by the end of 2003, LEED had certified 82 projects, and as of 2004, 1,200 registered projects were awaiting the certification process.

Fueling this growth is a greater understanding of the financial costs and benefits of green building. Gregory Kats presented an overview of the findings of a research project conducted by him and his consulting firm, Capital E. The report on the project, *The Costs and Financial Benefits of Green Buildings: A Report to California's Sustainable Building Task Force* (available online at www.cap-e.com/ewebeditpro/items/O59F3259.pdf), found that it costs an average of 1.84 percent more to construct a LEED-certified building than one that does not qualify for certification. Examination of the financial benefits of green buildings revealed a total 20-year net benefit of \$49 to \$66 per square foot, compared with an average extra cost of \$3 to \$5 per square foot to build green.

Growing concern about environmental quality and potential health impacts of development are also part of the increasing interest in green building and sustainability. Fedrizzi observed that greater numbers of consumers are demanding buildings that are more energy efficient and building materials that are nonpolluting, recyclable, and biodegradable. He believes that the market for green building projects will grow as the public learns more about the dangers of poor indoor air quality posed by many conventional building products. Litigation costs for lawsuits prompted by poor indoor air quality may also spur demand, he said.

As another example of the growing interest in and demand for green buildings, Fedrizzi cited the Solaire, a residential tower in Battery Park City in lower Manhattan. Because it is only two blocks from the former World Trade Center, it was commonly believed that no one would want to live there. Instead, the building was leased out quickly at higher rents than previously seen in that area. Fedrizzi attributed this to a marketing program that highlighted the green and environmentally sustainable features of the building.

Information Sharing

The topic of information sharing was raised in almost every discussion and presentation during the forum. Forum participants expressed their need for more information in a number of different ways—as a desire to learn more about a specific topic, to see greater sharing of information and research findings, to enhance the dialogue among organizations, and to see increased educational opportunities for practitioners.

Forum participants called for access to information on green building and sustainable development at every level and in every sector of the real estate and land development industry. Many would like the cross-organizational dialogue experienced at both this forum and the Aspen forum to continue. Participants wanted information that would help them to motivate and interest people within their organizations, and to see information disseminated in such a way that all the members of a project team—from architect and contractor to developer—would be on the same page on green building practices. Finally, the participants think it is important that the public, especially the potential consumers of green products, be made aware of the benefits and savings associated with green practices.

Sharing among Organizations

Forum participants want there to be more dialogue among organizations. They agreed that cross-organizational dialogue is laying the groundwork for future collaboration and sharing of information and research findings. The participants want their various organizations to have access to the same knowledge so that they will all be on the same footing in advancing green building. “What I’d like to see today are some ideas for coordination and consolidation of resources to bring green building to the mainstream of our nation’s builders,” said Ray Tonjes, chairman of National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) green building subcommittee.

Participants envisioned that working from this common knowledge base, individual organizations then could get information tailored to their specific needs. The needs expressed most frequently by participants were for information that would help them to educate their members and that could be used to help market and sell green building and sustainable development products to clients. “You might have to have a common ground of information, but you have to disseminate it with some pretty clear targets in mind,” said Hubbard, summarizing the discussion. “Even though a lot of the information may come from that same body that’s been developed by a group like this [the forum participants], people need to pick who their target audience is and then redevelop the information for that audience.”

The forums were viewed as a good way to structure dialogue among the different organizations. Participants also said they relish the opportunities the forums provided for informal dialogue and conversation among individuals. Some voiced concern over the need to include more voices in these cross-organizational dialogues: the interests of appraisers and the insurance industry were not represented at the forum, Robert Cassidy, editor-in-chief of *Building Design and Construction* magazine, pointed out. In addition, efforts must be made to get speculative developers more involved in green building issues, said Roger Platt, senior vice president and counsel of the Real Estate Roundtable. He argued that more must be done to convince developers of the benefits of building green.

When asked what role ongoing communication and exchange of information should play in green building, Fedrizzi articulated a vision for future collaboration among organizations. “There must be more forums like this,” he said. “There should be committees among us that focus on integrating these ideas and plans together. Instead of coming up with competing programs, let’s sit down and figure how to develop or design an agenda together. And how that’s done—I throw that back to the group. Because it’s a collective wisdom on figuring out how we can break these walls down and how we can integrate a plan together where this great building activity can benefit from these wonderful ideas with regards to land, neighborhoods, and so forth.”

Sharing within Organizations

Participants also said it is important to continue disseminating information to the members within their organizations. Every sector of the real estate and land development industry has a role to play in bringing green building and sustainable development to the mainstream, they believe. Daniel E. Williams, an architect/planner in Seattle, said the role of the architect is to integrate research findings and coordinate players. Architects also serve as integrators and translators, working with many different parties to help realize a common vision. Richard Rosenthal, chief executive of the Rosenthal Group in Venice Beach, California, sees the real estate agent as an intermediary between buyers and sellers. Those knowledgeable of green practices are able both to sell green buildings and to promote the larger concepts of green building and sustainable development to the public. Both Tonjes and Melinda Flores, environmental program coordinator for the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of America, emphasized the need for contractors to be well versed in green building techniques.

Many organizations have or are in the process of setting up programs to teach their members about green building and sustainable development, and participants expressed the desire that such efforts continue. Tonjes discussed efforts at the NAHB to establish green building guidelines, which he believes is another example of the progress being made to bring green building to mainstream real estate development practices. Further, the green guidelines will help to educate NAHB members on the benefits and importance of green building practices, he said.

Alison Kinn Bennett, sustainable building projects manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is working on a similar effort to create specification language for model green construction of federal construction projects. Also, Flores said the AGC is in the early processes of helping members to start a discussion on the role contractors can play in green building practices.

Marketing Green Ideas

Professional organizations not only have to keep their members informed on green practices, but also have to sell the concepts of green building and sustainable development to both their customers and the public. Participants said the two main reasons they seek information and research findings is to better educate and inform their members and to more effectively market and sell green building and sustainable development.

Skepticism about green building practices runs deep. Forum participants and their constituents must help move people past notions that green buildings have a “Jerry Garcia feel,” Fedrizzi argued. Throughout the day, participants shared ideas on how to convince people of the benefits of green building and sustainable development practices. Participants want to send out the message that green projects need not be expensive or look weird, and that these projects can actually offer savings and other benefits.

The issue of who the target audience is for these messages was raised several times. Two main audiences were identified: clients/consumers and the public. Because each segment of the building industry has different clients and consumers, it is important for individual organizations to tailor information and to craft specialized marketing messages to their own audiences, participants agreed. Many also said it is important that a marketing approach aimed at the public be coordinated among organizations.

Basic Tools for Marketing Green Projects

Forum participants suggested some basic marketing tools that can benefit everyone. Both Fedrizzi and Gary Saulson, director of corporate real estate at the PNC Financial Services Group, noted that because of their novelty, completed green building projects are easy to

market. “Green buildings are marketing and public relations bonanzas,” Fedrizzi said. The challenge for those who wish to build green projects is to figure out how to move past the novelty of these products and sell people on the ideas behind green building and sustainable development and get them to recognize the value added by a green project over a conventional project.

One important technique many participants mentioned was to take a positive approach to marketing green building. Using two definitions of sustainable design, William Reed, vice president of integrated design consulting at Berkeley, California-based Natural Logic, explained the difference between a negative approach and a positive approach. The first definition he offered—“design and construction practices that significantly reduce or eliminate the negative impact of buildings on the environment and occupants”—emphasizes the negative, he said. But his second definition—“design and construction practices that support and improve the health of the systems that sustain life”—emphasizes the positive.

Reed and the other participants believe it is important to emphasize the beneficial aspects of green and sustainable practices when marketing or selling green products. Negative messages, such as those in the first definition, can be off-putting and detract from the positive environmental contributions and benefits green building provides.

Branding, through which people associate a product or service with a specific company, is one of the main tools of the marketing. Many forum participants believe that when people learn that a building is a green building, they should immediately have a clear understanding of what that means, and that branding is a mechanism for making this possible. Participants had many ideas of how this branding could be accomplished.

Saulson is working with PNC’s marketing department to develop posters to hang in the company’s green bank branch buildings to tell customers and employees alike that they are in a green building and then explain what that means. “The more people have an understanding of what this [green building] means, the more comfortable they’ll become with it,” Saulson said. He believes that through the posters, people will begin to identify green buildings with a number of positive qualities.

LEED certification offers another, more comprehensive approach to branding green projects. Because the LEED certification process provides an objective and standardized means of assessing how environmentally friendly a building is, LEED is a de facto brand, participants said. LEED certification sends a clear, unambiguous message about the extent to which a building meets green standards of construction. In a discussion of the difficulties faced by the National Association Realtors (NAR) in developing its new national headquarters in Washington, D.C., Rosenthal noted that city planning officials were interested in having a LEED-certified building in the district. When NAR told city officials that the association wanted to build a green building, the city asked if the building would be LEED certified. This LEED name recognition provides a method of standardization and comparison that sends a clear message regarding high-quality construction. “LEED certification is currently the gold standard for green building,” Saulson said.

Platt envisions another way of branding green buildings: developers, builders, and owners creating their own brands to market their portfolios of green projects. A company would use a marketing campaign to explain the benefits of their green buildings to the public as well as to potential buyers and leasers. Platt believes that companies could use green construction as an indicator of high-quality construction and design. Because many new buildings are already heavily promoted, adding messages about green practices would be an easy extra step that would let people know that the company is a provider of high-quality, environmentally friendly buildings, he said.

Marketing Aimed at Clients and Consumers

Forum participants interested in marketing green building products to potential consumers wanted to learn more about what information is available on the benefits of green building and how to present it to their targeted audiences. Specifically, participants wanted any information or research data that demonstrated the benefits of green building over conventional building techniques.

They were most interested in information on the relationship between green building and productivity—the extent to which green buildings reduce absenteeism, promote

health, and motivate employees to be more productive. Many studies have found a connection between environmentally friendly school buildings and improved performance by students, Fedrizzi pointed out. While participants were interested in these studies, they said they also want more studies investigating the connection between green building and employee productivity. However, there is not much information available on this topic. Participants discussed some data sources, but also noted that data collection is a problem. In some instances, building owners and contractors do not want to release these data because of liability concerns, participants noted. This is especially true of studies that examine employee health.

Another reason for the limited amount of information on this topic is the difficulty of finding objective measures of employee health and productivity. In designing his study on the costs and benefits of LEED-certified buildings, Kats said he was unable to find such direct measures. In lieu of exact data, Kats assumed, based on available information, that there is a positive relationship between green buildings and employee productivity. In estimating the savings associated with green buildings, he then assigned a value of 1 percent savings due to increased employee productivity at green projects. Kats said that it was better for this study to be “approximately right” rather than “exactly wrong” in estimating the costs and benefits. Even with Kats’s conservative assumptions, the study found that green buildings create substantial savings in terms of employee productivity.

Michael Pawlukiewicz, director of environment and policy education at the Urban Land Institute, asked forum participants if there were any standards, benchmarks, or other criteria that could be used to assess the benefits of building green over traditional construction. Kats said he does not believe that there is a large enough sample of green buildings to be able to establish benchmarks. However, he said he believes that there are a number of good databases available and that that represents a good start. In addition, data collected so far indicate that green buildings offer definite, valuable, positive benefits over conventional buildings.

Alex Hecht, legislative analyst/attorney at the National Multi Housing Council, asked Kats how the operations and management numbers in his study were collected. This information, like the information on worker productivity and benchmarks, is very difficult to measure, Kats said. However, Kats believes that once appraisers and the insurance industry become more actively involved in green building, more accurate data will become available.

Even with data showing the benefits of building green, participants indicated that they think the way the information is presented is important. Too often green projects are perceived as being risky. Howard said the conception of risk needs to be “turned on its head” so that investors, buyers, and developers perceive the risks of *not* building green. Working with investors in the United Kingdom, Howard helped to set up a system to assess real estate portfolios by identifying buildings that could cause environmental risks. Investors started defining problem buildings as those that are potentially detrimental to the environment rather than focusing on how much it costs to build green.

Agreeing with Howard’s approach, Williams pointed out that developers, architects, and contractors can face serious legal issues by not building green, such as those caused by mold contamination or poor indoor air quality. Williams believes that the case for building green can be made that much more convincingly when one takes into account the legal risks posed by conventional building techniques.

Marketing Aimed at the Public

Participants agreed that it is important to communicate with the public on issues related to green building and sustainable development, and that it would help if these communications were an outgrowth of cross-organizational dialogues. Deron Lovaas, deputy director of the Natural Resource Defense Council, pointed out that organizations like his and the EPA have a reputation for credibility regarding environmental conservation and similar topics, but that they have no credibility when talking about economic issues related to the construction and real estate industries. In response, Hubbard said that to some extent all of the organizations represented at the forum lack credibility on some aspect of sustainability. He believes that the

larger question is how the organizations can work together, using each organization’s unique strengths and perspectives to promote green building and sustainability.

Ken Sandler, acting chief of the EPA’s municipal waste branch, suggested that Madison Avenue become involved in national efforts to market green building, citing the examples of Smokey the Bear and Woodsy the Owl as nationwide marketing programs that helped educate the public about environmental concerns. Such a national campaign could help to brand green building projects, Sandler said, and he believes a unified, national campaign aimed at the public would help the market for those products to grow.

Green Building in Social and Environmental Contexts

Participants agreed that it is important to keep in mind the big picture of the motivating factors behind green practices while continuing to focus on individual projects and situations. Those who wish to build green must start out with an awareness of the interrelationship and interconnection among elements of the environment, Reed said. Too often, he has seen green projects fail because they did not start out with this perspective, he said.

To illustrate his point, Reed showed forum participants a Venn diagram that consisted of four circles representing the economy, society, the natural environment, and quality of life. The circles did not overlap, showing that people perceive each of these spheres to be separate and independent of the others. He then showed a diagram to demonstrate how each of these aspects of life is actually interrelated. In the second diagram, the economy circle is inside the circle representing society, indicating that the economy is a societal construct. The society circle is inside the circle representing the natural environment, indicating that the society is a part of the natural environment and exists because of the water and food provided by a healthy environment. The circle representing quality of life overlaps all of the other circles, indicating that quality of life is based on a combination of societal, economic, and ecological factors.

In highlighting the need for green building and sustainable development practices, Fedrizzi pointed out that society is facing the threat of future water and energy crises. For similar reasons, Williams talked about the need to move beyond focusing on individual buildings to look at an area's larger regional issues and environmental impacts. He suggested that people start by looking at impacts on watersheds and airsheds, because changes in both of these resource areas can have profound effects at the regional level. "As quickly as possible, we must jump scale from building and get into regional and community size, because it is at the larger scale that we are going to be able to solve some of the sustainable and green issues," Williams said.

Regional approaches to sustainable development are becoming more commonplace. John Norquist, president and chief executive of the Congress for the New Urbanism, described that organization's partnership with the USGBC on the LEED Neighborhood Development project, which aims to bring urban form into the discussion of sustainable development.

The topic of regional issues brought the discussion back to the need for dialogue and collaboration among organizations. The challenges addressed by green building and sustainable development are multifaceted and they manifest themselves at the local, regional, national, and global levels. They require both multiple and unified approaches at all these levels. For this reason, the participants believe cross-organizational collaboration is essential. Doug Steidl, president-elect of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), reiterated the need for cooperation.

"My goals here are collaboration," he said. "We [AIA] have taken a posture that however we can help, we will help. There are issues that need addressing that are beyond any organization, and however we can be a part of that collaboration is important."

Policy Forum Agenda

TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2004

- 9:00 a.m. **Welcome and Introductions**
Kenneth W. Hubbard, *Executive Vice President, Hines, New York, New York*
- 9:30 a.m. **Overview of the Status of Green Building in the United States**
Rick Fedrizzi, *President, Green-Think LLC, Syracuse, New York*

Discussion
- 10:15 a.m. **Making the Business Case for Green Building**
Gary J. Saulson, *Director of Corporate Real Estate, PNC Realty Holding Corp., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Discussion
- 11:15 a.m. **Measuring the Benefits and Costs**
Gregory H. Kats, *Principal, Capital E, Washington, D.C.*
Daniel E. Williams, *Principal, Dan Williams Architect, Seattle, Washington*

Discussion
- 12:30 p.m. **National Association of Realtors' LEED-Registered Headquarters Building**
Richard Rosenthal, *CEO, Rosenthal Group, Venice, California*
- 1:30 p.m. **Market Acceptance Challenges Face Green Building and Sustainable Development**
Kenneth W. Hubbard
Ray Tonjes, *Chairman of the National Association of Home Builders Green Building Subcommittee, Austin, Texas*

Discussion
- 2:30 p.m. **The Future of Sustainable Development**
Jack Blevins, *Chief, Planning Division, Fairfax, Virginia*
William G. Reed, *Vice President, Integrated Design Consulting, Natural Logic, Berkeley, California*

Discussion
- 3:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

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