

Building a Green Library

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If your library is currently considering a renovation, expansion or new facility, you have probably encountered the terms “environmentally sensitive,” “sustainable,” “green,” and “LEED.” Over the past five years, green design has blossomed from an industry trend into a serious consideration for nearly any organization considering a new construction or renovation project.

Why Build Green?

No building is more perfectly suited to green design than a library. Because of the relatively stable occupancy of library buildings—as opposed to residential and office buildings that change hands every few years, for example—you are most likely to save a significant amount in operating costs, sometimes significantly outweighing the initial cost premium of constructing a green building. Other measures such as improving indoor air quality and incorporating natural daylight can increase staff performance and lower sick days, and ameliorate patron comfort and health.

Additionally, as public institutions, libraries set an aesthetic and philosophic example for their communities and take part in setting their reputation. A green building helps protect the surrounding ecosystems and minimizes the strain on local infrastructure. The process of constructing a green library is a great learning opportunity for students and illustrates to your community the advantages of incorporating green design into the places where they live and work.

If community approvals and fundraising are concerns for your library, the potential for LEED certification, or even incorporating green design elements, may serve as an additional incentive for voters and donors. While the design of the building may not be able to convert dissenters to supporters, it often does have the potential to call more supporters to action.

How to Go Green

You and your architect should begin to explore options for green design at the outset of the design process. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) point rating system incorporates sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. You may choose to incorporate elements from all five areas and pursue LEED certification from the United States Green Building Council, or forgo certification and choose from the menu of “green design”



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options to suit your library’s needs. An experienced architect or LEED Accredited Professional will be able to interpret—within the realm of your library’s program and budget—which of the LEED points will be inexpensive or easy to obtain, and which may be irrelevant or too costly to pursue.

School district libraries, which are reviewed by the New York State Education Department, should be aware of the newly established NY-CHPS (Collaborative for High Performance Schools) guidelines, a self-certifying method for public school buildings to incorporate green design elements into their facilities. CHPS, which may soon apply to libraries as well as public schools, emphasizes criteria that contributes to student learning, reduced maintenance, and long building life and offers a less expensive alternative to LEED certification.

Regardless of the size and budget of your planned library renovation, expansion or new facility, green design is an opportunity for your library to save money and resources, improve employee and patron health, and serve as a beacon of inspired and responsible design for the community you serve.

Beatty, Harvey & Associates Architects recently gave two seminars on architecture and green design at the 2007 NYLA Annual Conference. BH&A, one of the founding members of the United States Green Building Council, has designed countless successful sustainable projects. Their portfolio includes over seventy-five libraries, several projects for the Environmental Protection Agency, schools and universities, community facilities, residential and hospitality projects, and government and commercial office buildings. For more information, visit www.bha-architects.com. ♦