

Sustainability & Climate Change Reporter



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Posted at 9:32 AM on April 30, 2010 by Glenn Amster

USGBC Launches LEED for Neighborhood Development

The U.S. Green Building Council ("USGBC") on April 29 implemented the long-awaited [LEED for Neighborhood Development rating system](#) ("LEED-ND") in response to an increasing awareness that it will take more than high-tech buildings to achieve a sustainable future. LEED-ND emphasizes siting, design and other criteria "that bring buildings and infrastructure together into a neighborhood and relate the neighborhood to its landscape as well as its local and regional context."

Pilot Projects

Examples of how LEED-ND should work can be seen in the more than 200 neighborhood developments registered as LEED-ND [pilot projects](#), one of which is the former 2010 Winter [Olympic and Paralympic Athletes' Village](#) at Vancouver, B.C.'s False Creek. The certification for the Vancouver project was based on its proximity to the downtown core, mix of uses, affordable housing, green buildings and habitat restoration. Other pilot projects in the Pacific Northwest include the 340-acre [South Lake Union Urban Center](#) in Seattle and the [South Waterfront Central District](#) in Portland, Oregon. But the LEED-ND pilot projects are spread across 36 states and the District of Columbia, with nearly 50 in California, plus four Canadian provinces, Mexico, China and Korea.

LEED-ND Criteria

Projects can achieve LEED-ND certification by meeting all of the prerequisites and earning points in three environmental categories:

- Location and Linkage,
- Neighborhood Pattern and Design, and
- Green Infrastructure and Buildings.

Additional points may be earned through the use of sustainable innovation and design techniques that do not fall within the three categories or through regional bonus credits, a category which

recognizes the best environmental design and construction practices in a project's locale. As with the LEED building program, silver, gold or platinum LEED-ND certification is available, with each status requiring a higher number of points.

A New Focus

The primary distinction between LEED-ND and its building-focused counterparts is the emphasis on neighborhood. In the LEED-ND rating system, all of the categories are applied at the neighborhood scale. For example, LEED-ND includes a greater number of credits for such things as infill development, transportation connectivity, and access to recreational and public spaces.

LEED-ND is designed to reward multi-building development projects that achieve objectives consistent with what has come to be known as smart growth or new urbanism strategies. It will most often be appropriate for mixed use, multi-building projects on infill or brownfield sites in urban areas. A single-use residential project may be a good candidate if it helps create a sense of neighborhood in an area, for example, already well-served by retail, commercial and other services. LEED-ND also can facilitate redevelopment of existing neighborhoods, providing owners with performance criteria for rehabilitation of older structures and ideas for improving infrastructure and public spaces.

Whether a candidate project is single use or not, a mix of uses is vital to the principle underlying LEED-ND: creation of sustainable neighborhoods. The project mix may vary depending on any number of factors, but when placed in context almost always will mean housing in walking distance to services, retail and restaurant uses, open or public spaces and places.

While LEED-ND is a new direction for green building, judging from the number of registered pilot projects it may be an idea whose time has come. Even for projects that may not plan to seek LEED-ND certification, the system nevertheless will provide a guideline for decision makers and an overall incentive for better residential, commercial and mixed-use developments.

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Lane Powell PC | Your Pacific Northwest Law Firm®

Seattle

1420 Fifth Avenue

Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98101-2339

Phone:

206.223.7000

Fax:

206.223.7107

Portland

601 SW Second Avenue
Suite 2100
Portland, OR 97204-3158
Phone:
503.778.2100

Fax:
503.778.2200

Olympia
111 Market Street NE
Suite 360
Olympia, WA 98501
Phone:
360.754.6001

Fax:
360.754.1605

Anchorage
301 West Northern Lights Blvd.
Suite 301
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone:
907.277.9511

Fax:
907.276.2631

London
Office 2.24
148 Leadenhall Street
London, EC3V 4QT, England
Phone:
020.7645.8240

Fax:
020.7645.8241