



Greenbuilding Certification

A number of green building certification systems have been developed over the last 15 years. These systems have been developed in part to enable people to determine how 'green' their buildings really are, by creating independent, objective criteria.

The earlier certifications were aimed primarily at commercial buildings but many of the systems in use now cover residential homes too. This article will discuss two of the most popular that are in use in the Pacific Northwest.

LEED

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) has been in development since 1993 under the auspices of the US Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org). LEED in particular was initially aimed at certifying commercial buildings, but has diversified over the years to include remodeling of existing buildings, commercial interiors, neighborhood development and residential homes.

LEED works on a system where each green design feature qualifies for a number of credits. If your project reaches a specified minimum of credits your building will be certified as a LEED project, at higher levels of credits it may qualify for 'Silver', 'Gold' and 'Platinum' levels.

Typical design features that qualify, are the use of local materials (manufactured within 500 miles), use of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified lumber (www.fsc.org), natural daylighting, natural ventilation, use of EPA-certified appliances, and so on. LEED certification is broken down into a number of categories and you can pick and choose which credits within a category are suited to your project

The downside to LEED is the documentation required for verification that you have actually met your design goals. Every credit you claim has to be thoroughly documented, and then each credit is subject to review, a process that involves substantial fees.

It is very advisable before you start the design process to include a LEED Accredited Professional (LEED AP), such as an architect, on the team. LEED AP's are usually design professionals who have taken the LEED

accreditation exam and therefore fully understand the design, documentation and review process.

In the past it typically added 5% to 6% to the cost of a project by applying for LEED certification – with no guarantee of success. However recently the USGBC has reduced its fees and streamlined its application process by moving it online. Recent projects have been able to obtain certification at no additional cost by achieving cost savings through the design process itself. Usually LEED certification will lead to lower utility costs over the life of the building and improve the occupants comfort.

So why would anyone aim for LEED certification? Some want the prestige, but more often LEED certification is being specified by the federal government (including the military) in the contracts it awards. The City of Seattle also now specifies that all its public buildings that are over 5,000 SF must be at least LEED certified, if not higher.

Built Green

Built Green (www.builtgreen.net) was created for residential property builders. It is a certification scheme designed by the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties. In a similar way to LEED you can earn credits for achieving green design goals such as natural ventilation, use of environmentally friendly materials such as low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, finishes and insulation, and so on.

With Built Green there is a 5 star rating system - from 1 star at the lower end to 5 stars for the 'greenest' homes. Independent, third-party verification is optional for 1, 2 & 3 star ratings, and mandatory for 4 & 5 star ratings. Even when self-certifying there is documentation to complete - although nowhere near as onerous as LEED. With all projects you have to be a member of Built Green, and enroll each project that will be certified. As always there

are fees involved, although again these are less expensive than LEED.

Built Green's primary purpose is to certify homes that have been built by developers or builders so that the buyer knows exactly how green their new home is. An example of this is the Issaquah Highlands residential development east of Seattle. All homes here are Built Green 4 or 5 star rated. Also both the Fire Station and Blakely Hall (the community hall) at Issaquah Highlands are LEED certified. These homes should lead to higher comfort levels, better indoor air quality and lower heating and cooling costs due to their environmentally friendlier design necessary to achieve their rating.

There are currently no Built Green or LEED rated buildings in San Juan County, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't be interested in these green building initiatives. Even if you are not going to actually certify your building, there is a lot to learn from LEED-H (for homes) and Built Green. All of the design credit information is freely downloadable and can be a great source of ideas for your project.

Green Globes

Besides these two systems there is also Green Globes from the Green Building Institute (www.thegbi.com/greenglobes/), and many states and cities have their own schemes to certify green buildings.

SJC Conservation District

One of my roles here at the Conservation District is to promote green building and to create a green building rating system suited to our local needs.

Steve Hussey is a Natural Resource Planner for the San Juan County Conservation District. Please feel free to call him with your questions about conservation issues in our county at (360) 378 6621 or email him at shussey@rockisland.com. **Green Building Certification**

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