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The impact of LEED-ND for Cleveland

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Submitted by Marc Lefkowitz | Last edited February 21, 2008 - 11:44am

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We're five years into the modern green building era—as defined by the birth of U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system—and in that time America has seen exponential growth in green building and measurable impact, USGBC Vice President Tom Hicks told a packed house at Levin College on Feb. 6.

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Out of 9,000 projects that have registered for LEED in the U.S., only 1,200 have been certified, Hicks says, adding that more will be as the group catches up to demand. To do so, USGBC formed a new group, the Green Building Certification Institute, to run its certification process and deal with the rising demand.

Environmental benefits of LEED-rated buildings include a 35-50% energy savings, a significant figure for a country that pumps more than one-third of its carbon into the air from buildings, Hicks says.

USGBC, the largest green building group in the U.S., is expanding its reach to 55 countries including India and Canada. The U.S. needs to set the example and share its lessons, Hicks said, with developing nations like India and China.

LEED for Neighborhood Development will help: Northeast Ohio's four LEED-ND projects join 240 from six countries in a pilot program where design in and between private and public spaces encourages biking and walking to work, shop and play.

Expanding the scale of LEED to neighborhoods is starting to have an impact on urban design, Hicks says. It's influencing how cities and states are dealing with regulatory obstacles, and, in some cases, its leading to incentives, green building policies or new efforts to encourage green design.

In Cleveland, for example, LEED-ND project coordinators and the city's Office of Sustainability are forming a "green team" with department heads at City Hall to handle changes to codes and, perhaps, develop standards so that all developments in the city are green by nature.

Cities that have responded to LEED with incentives, requirements and new initiatives include:

- Gainesville, Florida – A 25% reduction of the permit fees for single family homes and fast track permitting for green buildings.
- Arlington, Virginia – Bonuses to allow for more density or height for all building types.
- Sarasota County, Florida – requires county buildings to meet LEED standards, and offers fast track permitting to new commercial, residential or residential remodeling construction that meets USGBC standards.
- The State of Illinois – passed a Green Neighborhood Act that will provide three builders of LEED-ND developments grants of up to 1.5 percent of their total cost.

A family living in a LEED-ND neighborhood stands to cut annual costs by \$3,148—savings from their well-designed, energy-efficient homes, the easier access they have to transit, jobs, schools, and recreation, according to the USGBC.

Savings and larger societal goals are at the core of Oberlin's LEED-ND development, known as East College Street. Naomi Sabel, one of three recent graduates from Oberlin College's Environmental Studies program who's heading the project, the first for their Sustainable Community Association, told the Levin crowd that they chose to redevelop the site of a former Buick dealership into a mixed-use place because its vacancy has held back the small town center from rediscovering its vibrant, walkable

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Marc Lefkowitz

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