

**OCL Study Session**  
**LEED: What Is It, and Why Should We Care?**  
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**Presenter:** Tracie Hall, executive director, NY Upstate Chapter, U.S. Green Building Council; Peter Arsenault, architect and GreeningUSA board of directors

**Why care about green building?** Buildings have a significantly adverse impact on climate as well as on people. Buildings are the largest source of greenhouse gases in the U.S. The U.S. Green Building Council created a rating system—LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)—as a voluntary certification system for buildings to be designed, built, and maintained in ways that minimize their environmental impact and are healthier places in which to live, work, learn. USGBC provides tools and guides for building in ways that benefit the planet and the people inhabiting buildings. Goal is to encourage and accelerate adoption of sustainable green building and development practices through the creation and implementation of universally understood and accepted tools and performance criteria.

Green building:

- Does NOT have to cost more.
- Significantly decreases energy use/water consumption/waste/CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Decreases operating costs.
- Increases market value.

LEED certification categories:

- Houses
- Neighborhood development
- Commercial interiors
- Core and shell
- New construction
- Schools, healthcare, and retail

The LEED certification program can be applied to any building type and any building lifecycle phase. Rating encompasses design, construction, operation and maintenance. Don't just design/build a building and expect it to be "green." Operations and maintenance are integral—types of products used for cleaning, ie.—are important factors to maintain integrity of LEED-certified building.

Credits and points are awarded based on various category goals that recognize performance in five key areas of human and environmental health. Categories are:

- Sustainable sites—Selection of site, management of site during construction, minimizing impact on ecosystem, using appropriate landscaping, etc. Don't build on farmland, build on brownfields, e.g. Minimize auto use, preventing suburban sprawl.
- Water efficiency—Smarter use of water through more efficient appliances, appropriate landscaping, rain barrels, ie. Reducing demand on water-treatment system.
- Energy and atmosphere—Probably most expensive category. Reducing amount of energy building consumes. Efficient design, efficient appliances and lighting, use of renewable/clean energy, e.g.
- Materials and resources—Strategies for reducing waste, promoting reuse and recycling, use of sustainably produced products and regional materials, compact fluorescent lighting, e.g..

- Indoor environmental air quality—Strategies for improving indoor air, access to natural lighting and fresh air, etc. Promotes healthful (mental and physical) indoor environment. Nonsmoking buildings (an issue in other states). Heating/Cooling controls that can be personally regulated.
- Innovation in design and regionalization credits—Design that exceeds criteria in LEED certification system; regionalization credits address an environmental priority of a specific region.

Extra points can be awarded for other things, such as use of particularly innovative design features that address an area not covered by LEED.

LEED is not about “points.” It’s about providing best possible environment for users of buildings and for the planet. Use points as a guide and credits as a tool for achieving a green building.

Steps toward certification: Register project/Track and document progress/Apply for certification. Number of points earned determines level of certification:

- LEED-certified
- LEED-Silver
- LEED-Gold
- LEED-Platinum

Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES just earned LEED Silver certification—first LEED-certified public school in NY State.

USGBC no longer performs actual certification; Green Building Certification Institute created by USGBC to provide third-party certification and professional accreditation.

USGBC provides education and outreach in addition to LEED guidelines and tools.

Onondaga County needs to focus on existing building stock and retrofit those buildings.

Helpful resources for communities wanting to go green:

- *greenplaybook.org*—Provides resources for communities trying to become more green.
- *usgbc.org*

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**Peter Arsenault:**

A lot of cities/counties/towns adopting LEED as a program—voluntary or otherwise.

American Institute of Architects (AIA) surveyed communities all over the country to find out what they are doing in terms of sustainability—prepared a document on local leaders in sustainability (see separate document).

Function of “green building” programs—Establish mandates or incentives for promoting/encouraging green/sustainable building practices. More than 90 percent of those who build “green” follow LEED program established by USGBC.

Looked at public, residential, commercial buildings. Among the findings:

- Seen a 50 percent increase in green building programs since 2007. More than 53 million people live in cities with green building programs. Started off slowly in early '90s; picked up steam in 2003.
- At least 138 cities across country have green building mandates, most often LEED Silver. Not enough just to be certified. Among cities over 50,000, pretty good representation around the country. California has most; Florida second.
- NY State only has three cities over 50,000 with policies with green building programs. Six counties in NYS have green building policies.
- Twenty-four of the 25 largest metropolitan regions, centers of economic growth, have center city with green policy.
- In many communities, public policy is leading the way—establishing laws that state-owned buildings have to meet certain standards (as in NYS). Some communities also have mandates for private/commercial/residential building.
- Effects of economic downturn—60 percent said there was no change in their green-building policies. 24 percent made policies more stringent. Seen as a help in economic hard times and good for the community's broader economy.

Some incentives/services that can be used to encourage green building:

- tax incentives
- bonus density
- expedited permitting
- permit fee waivers
- subsidizing LEED fees
- green building awards
- energy-efficiency block grants
- revolving loan funds for green projects
- training for employees and constituents

LEED certification is not hard to achieve today—builders are doing much of it already. Achieving LEED silver certification also is not such a stretch. Much of it just makes good business sense; becoming more standard.

Aside from initial fees, basic LEED certification should not add anything to cost of building. Achieving Platinum certification can increase costs by 10-12 percent—but increased cost is more than made up for by 30-60 percent improvement in building performance, resulting in lower utility costs.

Additional tips for promoting sustainability locally:

- Make greening efforts inclusive
- Train and accredit municipal employees
- Keep it simple—minimize red tape
- Pursue additional sustainability initiatives (beyond green building)
- Pursue economic development—green jobs
- Think regionally
- Minimize legal barriers like code restrictions
- Promote holistic green communities—livable, walkable.

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