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Commercial development benefits of green building

In many people's perception, green design strategies are seen as an added cost or unnecessary expense to "normal" development. In reality, most principles of green development aim at improving the traditional development process and increasing certainty and, therefore, profitability. The goals of green development are to increase health for people and the environment, and decrease the use of resources while increasing efficiency.

Commercial development benefits from green design in a few ways. First, since the design goal is for optimum long-term use and easy turnover, it minimizes the costs of churn or retrofit for new tenants. Appropriate building systems integration decreases the need for costly lighting and mechanical equipment. It incorporates flexible zoning, controls and monitoring which keeps operational costs down. All of these kinds of green design strategies result in the best benefit in our current market - tenant attraction and retention.

In order to incorporate green design effectively into development, a few key things need to happen:

Increase certainty as early as possible. Communicate your green design goals with permitting and review authorities as soon as possible and quantify their role in improving the neighborhood. Cities and municipalities are very sympathetic to green strategies and may be able to streamline your permit or review process depending on how strongly you incorporate them into your project which can pay for them up front.

Get input from design professionals or consultants experienced in green design as early as possible in order to understand the scope relating to true cost and cost savings. The big cost savings will be achieved through site and infrastructure planning and building siting and massing for energy efficiency. These strategies are cost neutral or cost saving, increase the value of your project and result in long term operational savings, which can translate into market advantage.

A cost estimator should be involved as early on as possible and should be involved in evaluating the choice or impact of construction delivery method on the outcome of the project. This will help control costs and increase certainty, and reduce the number of change orders associated with the project. In order for green to be cost effective, you are essentially doing the "Value Engineering" up front.

Design team selection is critical in a green project. Selecting a team that has experience incorporating green design on at least three projects is ideal, although still difficult to find. Successful teams should be able to quantify their past experience in cost savings, projected or measured operational savings and by describing a well integrated collaborative design process with other consultants. Clearly communicate expectations and goals to them from the beginning. When possible, the General Contractor and/or Construction Manager should be involved at this early phase. Clear goal setting up front will eliminate or reduce the uncertainty in the design and construction process. This includes change orders and other costly surprises. This can also target insurance concerns such as indoor air quality.

Involve the local gas and electric utilities and maximize the amount of incentives you can get for better equipment and fixtures. Again, this will not only add to the value of your building up front while decreasing your cost, but will make your property more desirable in the market place.

Implementing green strategies in commercial development means more efficient construction up front, lower operating costs and better long-term value for prospective tenants. Incorporating smart strategies does not require increasing first costs, or risk. In fact, greening is more about reducing risk and adding value, which, in turn, can increase profitability as well as promote public and environmental health.

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