



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Public-private partnerships lead the way in sustainable design/build developments

By JILL ESTERBROOKS, Special to the Daily Transcript
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In San Diego County and all along the West Coast, private developers and public agencies -- from city and county municipalities to state universities and all branches of the military -- are forming green partnerships to design and build large-scale sustainable projects.

"In many ways, these public-private partnerships have been the early pioneers and leaders of adaptive reuse and other sustainable development concepts," said David Pfeifer, AIA, principal at **Domus Studio Architects** (formerly Dominy + Associates), noting such local public-private mixed-use projects as Liberty Station on the former Naval Training Center site and Petco Park and surrounding Ballpark District in downtown San Diego.

With today's ever-expanding green building codes and heightened public awareness of eco-friendly development, he said public entities and private developers alike are coming under increasing pressure to think even more about the environment when designing and building their projects.

In San Diego County, developers are teaming up with designers to push through more sustainable public and private buildings. Instead of boasting about being the biggest or tallest project in town, the rally cry among developers is being the "greenest."

The county of San Diego's new \$531 million operations center in Kearny Mesa and the city of San Diego's proposed redevelopment of the downtown Civic Center and City Hall are two of the latest high-profile, public-private partnership ventures that will boast the best of sustainable design and building practices.

Green dream teams

"It truly takes a village to build green," said James Robbins, AIA, principal and director of design for **RJC Architects**, a San Diego-based firm that specializes in public and commercial work.

RJC Architects joins **Roel Construction** and other team members on the 37-acre, seven-building County Operations Center project, which is a public-private venture between **Lowe Enterprises** and the county of San Diego.

"This will be the largest green project in the region," said Robbins, noting that the development and disposition agreement requires Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification. Robbins has been the architect (along with **Soltek Pacific** as the builder) on numerous public-private design/build projects, which he noted, "allow the owner/builder/architect team to sort through the available strategies and achieve the greatest conservation return on investment."

Among these collaborative efforts are the Naval Facilities Engineering Command's \$32 million renovation of the historic Del Monte Hotel at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., which was designed to LEED Gold standards, and the \$30 million Surge Building/Parking Structure #4 at University of California, Irvine that met LEED silver standards.

Robbins said that it is "almost impossible" to achieve LEED certification on such a massive project as the County Operations Center without the early vision and strong commitment of all project partners. "LEED is not a one-time decision, and involves design, construction practices and building management."

While architects are vital members of the "green village," the decision to design and build sustainable buildings starts at the top.

According to Robbins, developers who own their buildings are usually already convinced about the merits of green building, because they accrue the benefits of reduced operating costs and higher functionality.

"Developers with a short time frame are sensitive to market preferences, and, increasingly, large national corporations prefer space in green buildings," he noted. "If developers can create projects with green halos (for minimal cost), those projects are competitively advantaged in the marketplace."

Pillar of green design

Renee Worme, sustainability manager for **Gerding Edlen Development**, agrees that the public sector has led the green building push; but in recent years, private companies are eagerly jumping on the bandwagon in order to provide healthy places to live and work.

"The world is changing rapidly with global warming and rising energy costs, and the average person is becoming much more aware of the environment and the size of their carbon footprint," said Worme, whose Portland-based firm is a finalist for development of the new downtown San Diego Civic Center and City Hall Complex.

The Portland-based Gerding Edlen Development has a long history with sustainable and urban reuse projects and currently has 39 LEED certified or registered developments on record.

The company's success with sustainable development has been in partnering with clients (both public and private) that share its green building convictions, as well as a commitment to an integrated design process, which Worme described as "the pillar of green building."

The process starts with all members of the design team -- plus the whole community of "stakeholders" in the project -- working in a "charrette" to get their best ideas into an integrated design.

"A French term, charrettes are intensive workshops that enable design teams to use whole-system thinking to explore the interconnections among such elements as restorative site development, innovative energy-saving design and engineering, creative functional design concepts, worker productivity enhancements, and strategies to improve environmental sensitivity in design and construction," she explained.

The design effort then proceeds in a carefully integrated process, as opposed to the traditional process in which every consultant makes his or her contribution at the "appropriate" time, in a linear fashion. The charrette process can take several weeks, but it also can significantly reduce the overall time required for design.

Gerding Edlen has used this process for many of its large-scale developments, including the Brewery Blocks in downtown Portland, where five blocks of a nearly defunct brewery were transformed into a mixed-use urban development that garnered a handful of LEED awards, including one platinum, four golds and one silver.

One innovative green program that resulted from the integrated design process was a district system that used one centralized chilled water plant, rather than a separate one for each building, for a \$350 million project that took six years to complete.

Worme predicts that more and more of these kinds of streamlined approaches will be developed to help reduce front-end capital costs and provide more energy efficient and water conserving buildings.

RJC's Francesca Bestetti, a LEED-certified architect, said "biomimicry" is an innovative method that seeks sustainable solutions by emulating nature's time-tested patterns and strategies -- "like a solar cell that was inspired by a leaf."

"The goal is to create products and buildings that adapt to life on earth over the long haul," said Bestetti, who is part of the sustainable design team seeking to save energy, cut material costs and redefine and eliminate waste at the new County Operations Center.

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