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AI Tech Center being designed to implement many LEED based criteria

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On November 12, 2009, Abul Islam, owner of AI Engineers, Inc. of Middletown introduced the final design of the AI Tech Center to be built on the site of the former WSFB Channel 3 Broadcast House located at 3 Constitution Plaza, Hartford. This sustainable designed 12 story office building is registered with the U.S. Green Building Council and slated to achieve a LEED certification goal of Platinum under the Green Building Rating System. LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The LEED rating system grants bronze, silver, gold or platinum certifications to buildings meeting specific environmentally sensitive prerequisites, with platinum being the highest level.

The LEED green building certificate program provides a rating system in categories, such as, Design and Construction, and Operations and Maintenance. The Design and Construction category contains several sub-categories including LEED for Core and Shell and LEED for Commercial Interiors. This program is not limited to building owners, but is also available to commercial tenants. Like owners, commercial tenants can derive many benefits from participation in the LEED certification program for Commercial Interiors. These benefits have been documented over the past several years by a number of national and regional studies sponsored by the USGBC. The studies have shown that typical business tenants that located their businesses in an LEED certified building or themselves obtain one of the LEED certification levels for commercial space can generally expect to benefit from increased employee productivity, reduced turnovers and absenteeism of staff, improved morale, and reduced operating costs through better efficiency of building systems. These benefits can translate into documented savings, such as those attributed to staff productivity gains of 1% which have been shown to reduce property costs by as much as 10% or \$3 per s/f of rentable space. Another real savings is costs associated with replacing staff, which can run as high as 100% of an employee's annual salary. Environmentally responsible businesses also benefit from a more favorable view by the general public, which enhances their public image. These and other benefits from participation in the LEED certification program can provide long term benefits to business tenants, however, the process of participation in the LEED program can be very involved, cumbersome, and demand a great deal of documentation.

Tenants looking to obtain LEED certification for Commercial Interiors should first seek to implement environmental strategies within their control. Such strategies could include: (1) implementing programs to reduce emissions resulting from employee commutes; (2) putting into action environmentally preferable purchasing programs like buying Energy Star products, using low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) adhesives and sealants, purchasing screw-based compact fluorescent lamps, and buying recycled products; (3) ensuring that employees understand and participate in the building's recycling program, and; (4) developing an energy awareness plan.

Commercial tenants seeking to develop a more environmentally sustainable business model can also achieve this goal by looking at a prospective landlord's practices with regard to implementing green technologies practices and construction methods into their buildings. In this respect, the tenant and landlord can use a more holistic vs. traditional "siloed" approach by looking at the entire life cycle of the building with regard to its sustainability character. Such an approach can be done with both new construction and existing buildings. The goal of this approach is to create a building that meets the LEED certification prerequisites with both parties committing to transparency and accountability in their dealings. To accomplish this goal both the landlord and the tenant will need to commit to including a number of environmental objectives into the lease agreement, whereby the benefits and obligations of each party is clearly defined. This approach requires a truly collaborative approach to lease negotiations with the goal of putting both parties on the road to achieving LEED certification.

The lease can include items, such as; requiring the landlord to incorporate sustainable building requirements into the building or to obtaining a certain LEED certification level for core and shell, providing tenant improvement contributions aimed at obtaining LEED certification for Commercial Interiors, or by making improvements to the building to improve or reduce operating expenses. The lease can also require both tenant and landlord to report to each other on sustainable practices and products utilized in the premises, or having the landlord implement utility metering practices to monitor consumption of energy by each to meet agreed to environmental standards. The landlord may also be required under the lease to provide priority parking for car pools, van pools, low-emitting vehicles and fuel efficient vehicles, or to provide bicycle racks and storage facilities. The parties may include agreement on the allocation of certain environmental incentives like tax credits, rebates and reductions due to usage of Energy Star appliances and products, or agreeing in general to abide by LEED environmental standards in the operation and leasing of the building. This process tends to be more costly and will most likely require the hiring of experts in the field of sustainable design and LEED requirements, such as, an LEED AP Interior Design and Construction professional, an LEED Commission Agent, or an LEED qualified contractor. However, in the end, each party will benefit by implementing LEED prerequisites into the building's design, maintenance and operation. These benefits may include optimizing energy consumption practices by installing energy-efficient, Energy Star-rated equipment and appliances, reducing lighting power by installing lighting controls, such as day light controls and occupancy sensors, to minimize wasted energy, installing HVAC efficiency equipment, zoning controls designed for energy cost reduction, like high-performance resource management systems which produce reports showing energy use on a minute-by-minute basis.

By voluntarily changing business practices and shifting to a more environmentally sustainable business model, commercial tenants become more efficient in their operations and improve their corporate image. Business values are also improved by being more environmentally or socially responsible than the competition.

The AI Tech Center is being design to implement many LEED based criteria. Tenants will be asked to design their interiors and operate their businesses in compliance with many of the environmental standards contained in the LEED certification process. In the end, both the owner and the tenants will benefit financially from the building's operating efficiencies and energy saving components. Another benefit to tenants will be the building's interior environment which will feature a 100% fresh air HVAC system. This building truly represents a model for future commercial construction.

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