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The Year of 2011: The Green Movement - Socially responsible building management and tenancy

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Building owners focused on meeting market demand know the trend toward "Green" buildings is here to stay. They also know that the market will demand these "green" workplaces and building inventory that does not provide for the optimal environmental experience as well as operating cost efficiencies will soon be obsolete.

Given that there are hundreds of millions of square feet of commercial space inventory currently on the market or occupied and that these leases will eventually need to be negotiated based on current market conditions, what can be done to stay competitive? Tenants will be demanding the reduced operating costs of a green building - even if negotiating a lease on a property that is not performing at that level. Landlords and owners will be left picking up the tab for a portion of the tenant's operating costs or losing the potential income to a more competitive site. The balance between the need for long-term competitiveness and the financial feasibility of immediate building upgrades is one that each Owner or portfolio manager needs to consider on a building by building and market by market basis.

Clearly, some level of a "green" retrofit is called for. But what does this mean? For those weighing the alternatives, the following information will provide useful tips and strategies to determine the level of retrofitting appropriate for your building and your budget.

Green means many things.

Improving the environmental performance of your property is cost effective in the long run but can also be a realistic short-term investment.

Individual building systems can be addressed such as the HVAC with installation of water-saving faucets and commodes.

Electrical opportunities include the use of CFL light bulbs, which not only save on energy costs but maintenance costs as well, and systems that provide power at different levels to address peak and off-peak needs of tenants. Looking for a way to save on operational costs company wide, Starbucks has exchanged its bright and halogen lighting sources with Led, saving millions of dollars a year and demonstrating that retrofitting can be cost effective.

Tenant work can be addressed by specifying the use of regional materials as well as recycled building materials. Everything from carpets (made from recycled plastic bottles) to wall board and fabrics are available that are made from recycled materials. As well, left-over construction materials and debris can be recycled or donated to reduce the "waste" from the project.

Buildings are being constructed, literally all over the world, reusing shipping containers as the primary building element. One particularly creative and environmentally friendly structure is being built in Boston at One Merrimac St. The "Green Park & Charge" will be Boston's first electric vehicle charging station and parking facility. A container building will be constructed on the site, providing a

bank ATM, neighborhood retail and incubator office space. Understanding that the introduction of electric cars for general consumer use necessitates the need for charging stations, Dinosaur Capital Partners, LLC is leading the pack in the reuse of this former gas station site. In addition to the structure built from recycled materials, the project is a positive reuse of an urban brownfield and the site will employ solar-powered LED exterior lighting. This environmentally-conscious project is the first in what will become a more typical reuse of sites as consumer demand and energy availability support the transition from petroleum fueled automobiles to electric powered versions.

Specifications and guidelines can be developed to assist tenants in the selection of green materials for their build-out and incentives.

Green can mean the entire site.

Landscaping offers the potential to improve the property's green performance. Plantings reduce the need for mowing which reduces the use of petrochemicals on the site.

Runoff from storms can be gathered and used to irrigate the beds or gardens or for cooling equipment.

In addition, the parking lot becomes an opportunity to support a green company culture. Preferred parking spaces can be assigned employees who drive low-emission vehicles or space can be shared by employees who take public transportation or carpool to work a significant amount of the time.

In a related approach, the "Green Park & Charge" project at One Merrimac St. in Boston will offer drivers with electric or hybrid vehicles a ten percent discount on competitive parking fees and will charge drivers of SUVs and gas guzzlers (EPA mileage rating less than 15 miles per gallon) a 10% surcharge for parking at the facility.

Using environmentally safe ice and snow melting products also lessens the environmental impact of a given property.

Who can help me go green?

Most architects and contractors are aware of the green choices available in the design and specifications they provide to building owners and users. Some of these professionals obtain LEED certification, Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED), which is available through training and subsequent testing. These certified professionals are experts in designing and retrofitting properties to achieve the maximum energy efficiency and the greatest reduction in the associated carbon footprint.

As well, the LEED program itself offers resources and lists of steps building owners and managers can take to operate and manage their buildings more efficiently.

If your company will not be working directly with an architect or product specifier, considerable information is available on the internet, not only about green materials and building system choices, but also about successfully completed green projects. Information can be gleaned from these sources and ideas mined that will work under a variety of property and budgetary constraints.

Going Green Checklist:

Building Construction

- * Use recycled materials when available
- * Minimize waste
- * Incorporate solar panels
- * Weatherproof the facility efficiently

Building Systems - Renovation and New Construction

- * Install most efficient HVAC systems
- * Use water-saving plumbing fixtures and piping
- * Use recycled building and finishing materials for tenant work
- * Install energy-efficient lighting - interior and exterior

Site Options

- * Re-use roof drainage for site hydration
- * Landscape
- * Use energy efficient lighting options
- * Minimize chemical usage

What does it mean to go green?

Over 500 buildings in Mass. have obtained LEED Certification, the standard for environmentally appropriate building construction and operation, and more are applying every day. From office buildings to schools to manufacturing plants, Owners and operators of buildings across the Commonwealth are recognizing the benefits of an environmentally responsible approach to their property's construction and/or operation.

A few LEED Certified buildings in the Metro West area include 959 Concord St., buildings at Framingham State College, 200 Summer St. in Holliston and the Genzyme facility and 200 Crossing Blvd. in Framingham.

Building owners have a responsibility to minimize their property's contribution to harmful environmental effects. Going green means that this responsibility is taken seriously and that an example is set for those that lease the property. As more and more companies look to economize and reduce waste they quickly find that their building operations are a place where great savings can be found.

Going green is also a wise business decision as it is clear that the market demand for green space is growing and that the need to use the best practices available to protect the environment and building user's general health is well recognized.

A green building typically provides a healthier and cleaner workplace as well as improved efficiencies and lower operating costs. These factors are all draws for potential tenants as a recent survey showed over 70% of tenants responding that they would consider the "greenness" of a property in their leasing decision.

Consider what can be done to address these issues in your building or current workplace. We all can contribute to going green, whether that means turning the lights off at night when we leave the office...or a total renovation of a facility.

Katherine Wellington is a principal at IPS/Investment Property Specialists, Inc., Framingham, Mass.