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President's message: Green building guidelines

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I have already heard one item of good news: New England home builders are one step ahead of their colleagues in other parts of the country when it comes to "green building."

That was the welcome message on January 2nd as Dan Paquette of DJP Consulting met with the Rhode Island Builders Association's Board of Directors to tell us about what we need to do to keep ahead of this important national trend. Dan, a longtime member, is heading a RIBA Green Building Committee to help us do just that.

In a point that I found pleasingly ironic, Dan said that because of the tough codes and other regulations we have to follow in New England in general and Rhode Island in particular, we as home builders are already ahead of the game when it comes to the green building guidelines recently issued by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

As a result, green building at this point looks like it will incur a minimum of inconvenience for us and little or no additional costs because, effectively, we're already doing it, Dan believes.

"Green" will even be the theme of our home show this year, with many "eco-friendly" products and educational seminars.

Of course, there has to be a "fly in the ointment."

NAHB is working very hard to turn its guidelines into the official green building standards accepted throughout the country. But the U.S. Dept. of Energy is pushing its own proposed standards, and the U.S. Green Building Council (GBC) has come forward with its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System, or "LEED."

RIBA joins NAHB in believing that home builders need to take the lead in any design or rating system that's adopted for general use, especially for any codes that might eventually result. We don't need to be at the mercy of another bureaucratic process over which we have little or no control.

Not only that, but NAHB's guidelines will lead to standards that are voluntary but effective, and reasonable for builders to implement. We in New England will indeed be ahead of the game, as Dan suggested.

In contrast, the LEED certification for a house is between \$500 and \$2,000, depending on things like how big the house is and if there's a certifier in the area. The builder will have to pay, then pass the cost on to the home buyer. The cost to become a certifier hasn't been determined yet, but GBC says it's aiming for it to be lower so more people will seek certification.

NAHB is being smart and proactive when it comes to getting in front of the issues that are going to come forward in green building. NAHB knows the industry, knows the issues, and they know what's realistic for us. Let's help NAHB do it now, before the pressure comes from regulators, legislators and the public because of global warming, environmental concerns and the like.

If you are a home builder, the best way you can help is to get involved in RIBA's Green Building

Committee. Specifically, the committee is looking for a builder who has a standard house that can be tested against the NAHB Green Building Guidelines. You can help get us started on this issue locally, and generations of RIBA members to come will probably thank you for it.
Call Executive Director Roger Warren at (401) 438-7400.

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