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Developing a green mind set and understanding green design

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In the past few years, chances are you have encountered green design on one of your projects, and if you haven't, you will soon, most likely. For those of you who haven't, green design, also known as sustainable design, is the term used to describe the processes, technologies, and strategies that aim to make a project both environmentally friendly and cost effective.

Unfortunately, like many ideas trying to break into the main stream, green design and sustainability encounter considerable resistance when proposed into the marketplace. While green designers try to consider the costs as well as the benefits of their ideas, the building industry and building owners have generally been cool to the notion of greening their projects. The general perception is that sustainability is all about technologies, and that these technologies cost more, are unproven and unreliable, and interfere with the normal way of doing business.

So, as someone interested in development but not necessarily in sustainability, what can you do to avail yourself of the benefits of green design ideas while maintaining your healthy skepticism of green design and the folks who promote it? The first thing you can do is to suspend your disbelief in sustainability long enough to learn about its advantages. In some instances, your benefit might be in long-term capital cost savings, or in an integrated design and construction process that saves time and money. In other instances, the advantages will be in the form of government grants to try green technologies, or in the form of tax breaks.

Whatever your needs, try to identify what in green design can benefit your project and spend your time with the design team making sure they understand what's important to you. Since green design involves an integrated system of process and is much more than technologies, every project will use different elements of sustainability to save time, money, and decrease operating costs. Use the green design team to understand the trade offs on your project and to evaluate how to proceed.

It may be that doing things the way they have always been done is the best alternative for your project, and if so, that is what you should do. The important thing is to understand the costs and benefits of each alternative with sufficient detail so you can make the best choices. The only way to do this effectively, however, is to learn about your alternatives, and to use the design team to help you make the most cost-effective choices for your project. What's more, it's not a black and white decision, since you and the design team might be able to selectively apply sustainable methods and ideas to your project.

Sustainability is more a matter of mindset and assumptions than of technologies and methods. Developing a green mindset can be no more than an extension of the normal processes you go through to evaluate how to bring a project to fruition. Just as you evaluate the costs and benefits of other processes and technologies, keep open the possibility that there is something in sustainability to benefit you, ideologically, financially, or in some other matter that touches on your interests most.

Co-written by Moshe Cohen and Barbra Batshalom. Moshe Cohen is president of The Negotiating Table. Barbra Batshalom is executive director of the Green Roundtable, Boston, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540