



Leed Certification Increases The Quality, Value And Marketability Of Your Home

USGBC Director of Residential Technical Solutions Asa Foss weighs in on the myriad benefits to energy-efficient building.

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04/16/2019

Since its founding by Rick Fedrizzi, David Gottfried and Mike Italiano in April 1993, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has led the way in sustainability-focused practices in the building industry. Quickly growing to an international nonprofit coalition that sources from the entire building industry, USGBC subsequently developed the gold standard in green construction: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. LEED certification extends to both commercial and residential properties and focuses on improving the performance of five key metrics: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, plus indoor environmental quality. Asa Foss serves as the Director of Residential Technical Solutions at USGBC, a position he has occupied since joining the council in 2009. In this role, Foss is responsible for the implementation of existing standards, as well as the development of periodic updates. He spoke with ESTATENVY about how a LEED

approach to home design, construction, operation and maintenance significantly impacts quality—both of the home, and of the lives of its inhabitants. Quality Materials and Installation Translate to a Higher Quality of Life “In terms of real tangible benefits, it’s comfort,” Foss said of the greatest benefit to a LEED-certified home. “Meaning fewer hot and cold rooms, which means even if you’re close to a window or exterior wall, it doesn’t feel cold.” Indoor environmental quality is one of LEED’s five points of focus and extends not only to insulation, but to elements like noise pollution and odor as well. According to Foss, having a LEED-certified home as opposed to its counterpart “likely means you have heating and/or cooling systems that are not as loud. And there’s a really special focus on indoor air quality. In a newly constructed home, you know that new home smell? It should not be as pungent in a LEED property because the builders would put in low-emitting materials and vent systems that exhaust out the bad air and bring in fresh air.”

LEED Certification Increases the Value of Your Home

Upfront cost premiums vary significantly based on the building code in one’s area and generally have become more stringent in the past 10 years. “If somebody is in a location with an up-to-date energy code, the delta between legal minimums and what [LEED certification requires] is going to be much less than those in area without up-to-date energy codes,” Foss explained. “On average, that’s cost premiums of about two percent.” In response to the concerns some prospective buyers may have about the upfront costs of going green, Foss said: “It’s really about what your priorities are. Some green materials can be more expensive than conventional materials, but you don’t necessarily have to do that. LEED and other energy standards have a lot of space for people to make their own decisions; a lot of the projects that do LEED certification are affordable housing, so there’s definitely a way to make green work if you’re anywhere on the spectrum of affordable to luxury housing.” Whatever the upfront costs, Foss explained that the long-term savings are worth the investment. “I’ve been tracking the studies on sale and resale premiums for some time, and the premiums for LEED-certified projects tend to be anywhere from two to nine percent based on location, and the national average is a little over four percent. That is, if you think about it, a pretty substantial premium,” said Foss. [As a Dwell.com article on LEED-certified houses across the U.S. and Canada attests](#), “Not only do LEED-certified homes use less energy and water, they’re also cost-effective, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and use resources in smarter ways.” So even if upfront costs give homeowners pause, the long-term payoff—both for the environment and for your pocketbook—is worth it.

LEED Certification Plays Into the Marketability of Your Home

“I do think there’s a credibly rosy market for [LEED homes],” Foss said. “Just because the benefits are so wide that, depending on what your priority is, you get that advantage—if you want a higher-quality home, LEED is emblematic of that. Looking for lower energy and water costs? That’s a huge component of LEED certification. Looking for a smart investment? You could have an installed premium of two percent but resale on four percent, so that’s a no-brainer,” Foss explained. Given that LEED certification is this advantageous to homeowners, it’s no wonder that major players in the real estate and financing industries are taking notice. “The big agencies that underwrite most of the loans, like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, they’re looking at it and seeing energy-efficient potential to be an advantage to homeowners because of the chance of lower interest rates. [With lower interest rates] you can purchase a slightly more expensive property because you have a lower utility bill, or a slightly larger loan,” Foss said. The shift to LEED has also been noticed by multiple listing services. This benefits current and prospective homeowners by standardizing and consolidating the energy-efficient data central to an informed buying/selling experience. “Green building and energy efficiency have

really gone mainstream,” said Foss. **Buying LEED Is Easier Than Renovating, But Small Changes Can Still Make a Big Impact** When asked about converting to a LEED-certified home, Foss emphasized that it’s best to “build it right” at the beginning instead of planning on a renovation down the road. “Building a new home that’s LEED is relatively easy to do—it means doing a better job. Trying to renovate an existing property to be more sustainable, energy efficient and comfortable—that’s a bigger challenge because it means replacing systems, going into walls... it gets complicated quickly. But there are a lot of things that people in current homes can do that are straightforward to make the space more comfortable and efficient,” Foss said. Some of those straightforward improvements that yield serious benefits include better insulation, especially in the attic and roof. “That’s hands-down the cheapest, easiest, most impactful thing to do,” said Foss. **Your Build Team Should Know the Fundamentals** “LEED certification really looks at the holistic approach to ‘green.’ LEED looks at every aspect of construction—site development, location, etc.—so a lot of the primary benefits that people see in a LEED-certified house have to do with the fact that it tends to be a higher quality project, and higher quality property. Trying to do things better tends to require that the builder and development team really be experienced—overall, the building construction process is challenging when you ask people to do more, so only those who have mastered normal construction and know the limitations can go on and exceed that,” said Foss. **Health and Wellness Trump All** While a commitment to a healthier, more sustainable way of living gave birth to LEED and has remained a driver in the green industry since its inception, the benefits to owning a LEED-certified home extend even further. “In parts of the country, you have folks looking at it from a lower utility bills angle—so bills not just for tomorrow, but for folks on fixed income, or near retirement age, having consistent bills for foreseeable future is important,” Foss explained. For Foss, though, a sustainable approach to building and living yields its greatest benefit in the form of improved health and wellness. “So for last five or so years, [consistent bills] are not really the driver for the majority of people anymore—it’s the quality of life, it’s the better health. Can you put a dollar amount on your health or that of your family?” Overall, Foss emphasizes the importance of prioritizing installation of one’s home systems—“things get installed poorly all the time, and if you’re the owner/architect/developer, you’re not getting what you paid for”—and making sure those systems perform at an optimal level. LEED certification achieves just that. “It’s one of those things where it just makes sense no matter what your angle or priority is,” said Foss.