

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability Squared

by Michael J. Crosbie, PhD
Contributing Editor

Summary: Here's a challenge: Define where the built environment's "sustainability" ends and where something else (building as usual?) begins. It's not easy to do, and it shouldn't be, because what we design and build has far-reaching consequences and interconnections.

A drawback of the current growing interest in sustainable design and construction is that architects and designers who are "just not into it" can easily write it off as a fad. They're not gaa-gaa about sustainability, signing up for workshops, and registering for the next conference to hear the latest pronouncements from green gurus. But the true believers in green architecture potentially do it a disservice by putting it in a specialty box and categorizing it as a unique way to create architecture that is something different than other kinds of design. The key here is to stop seeing the built environment as parts and pieces (green or not green) and begin to think about it in a holistic way.

Shift toward holistic . . .

There's evidence that such a shift in thinking is afoot. "Growing Beyond Green" is the theme of the next AIA National Convention, in San Antonio this May 2007, and it promises to broaden the discussion about how architects should design and build responsibly. It's an idea that has been promoted by such groups as the Sustainable Buildings Industry Council (disclosure: SBIC is managed by Steven Winter Associates, Inc., the firm I

practice with), which has worked with the AIA (a founding member organization of SBIC) to sharpen the focus of going beyond sustainability.

Whole building design extends past construction, through commissioning, and assists the client with ongoing building systems operation, maintenance, and renewal.



What is "beyond green"? It's a conceptual framework about architecture that sees sustainability as just one component of "whole building design" or "high-performance building." It's an idea that clients can easily appreciate because their facilities must respond to myriad demands. It starts with helping clients choose the best site to serve their needs (it might even include examining the client's business structure and current deployment of exist-

ing facilities to consider how changes in current space use and practices might limit the amount of new building necessary). Whole building design extends past construction, through commissioning, and assists the client with ongoing building systems operation, maintenance, and renewal.

. . . and ultimately Universal Design

Whole building design considers accessibility in as broad a way as possible—not just as special accommodation for persons with disabilities. We all fall into that category one way or another, so a more comprehensive approach is Universal Design, which results in a dynamic and responsive environment that anyone can use. Going past green considers security and safety as integral to the whole building design (inside and out) to get beyond the idea of security as the result of tack-on technology. Whole building design attempts to anticipate how the building might change over its lifetime and to configure it and construct it in ways that allow flexibility of use and renovation, extending to disassembly and recycling. There's even an aesthetic dimension to whole building design: How can the art of design and construction help to reveal the built environment's high-performance attributes, extend beyond the trendy, and accommodate a range of changing tastes to be a thing of timeless beauty?

Universal Design results in a dynamic and responsive environment that

FACE OF THE AIA

anyone can use.

No one believes that high-performance, whole building design is easy. Even thinking about the built environment in such a holistic way is challenging in a world where specialties abound. But architects have always coveted the role of generalists, and whole building design needs the talents of the architectural community to keep the whole of the built environment—and its reverberations throughout the natural environment—constantly in sight. And there's help on the Web. The Whole Building Design Guide, [www.wbdg.org/] conceptualized by SBIC and administered by the National Institute of Building Sciences, might be your first stop in going beyond green.

Architect Michael J. Crosbie, Ph.D., a senior associate at Steven Winter Associates, Inc., can be reached at mcrosbie@swinter.com.

Reference:

Visit the Whole Building Design Guide site now for a fresh set of definitive articles on facilities operations and maintenance, construction waste management, acoustic comfort, elementary and secondary school design, archives and record storage buildings, building information modeling, and more.

www.wbdg.org

Pictured is NAVFAC Building 33, Washington, D.C., by Ewing Cole Cherry Brott, one of the case studies featured on the Whole Building Design guide Web site. Photo © the architect.