

# Green is good

*Especially in buildings, and hopefully at CitySquare*

By Carissa Williams

By now, you've probably heard something about Worcester's new eight-year, \$563 million, 2.1 million square-foot mixed-use downtown development project better known as CitySquare. What you may not know is that there has been a push from city councilors to incorporate "green building" into the development. The developers, Berkeley Investments Inc., are weary of this suggestion, however, and do not appear to be seriously considering the options.

"Green building" is all about reducing the resources needed to build, maintain and occupy a building. A green building lowers both environmental impacts and long-term building costs by using durable, sustainably harvested or recycled materials and built-in energy and water-use efficiencies. Green buildings avoid toxic materials and are designed to minimize construction debris and indoor pollutants.

To better define "green buildings," the U.S. Green Building Council created the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, better known as LEED. LEED is a voluntary rating system based on well-founded scientific standards, and it has quickly become the national standard for green building in the United States. The basic format is a simple checklist that evaluates a project in five basic categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality. The more checklist items the building meets, the higher its score, and thus the higher its LEED certification level.

The benefits of green building accrue to both our planet and the building's owner. On the large-scale, green building is part of a move toward a more sustainable economy; for the owners, more efficient, longer-lasting materials will add 0% to 7% to the project's total cost but will save 20% of the capital cost over 20 years. These cost savings will only get better as energy costs continue to rise. Better indoor air quality, because of the lack of toxic materials, can offer significant health benefits too, and prevent "sick buildings."

It turns out that a lot of energy goes into our buildings. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, buildings consume 40 percent of the world's total energy,

25 percent of its wood harvest and 16 percent of its water. If we use less energy and materials to build and renovate, we leave that much more for future generations; we reduce our costs, we reduce our waste, and we cut air pollution and global warming emissions.

There are apparent benefits of green buildings to building owners, inhabitants, and our planet, but what are the benefits to the developer? From a business standpoint, is it profitable for Berkeley Investments to design for green building construction, given that it may increase the cost? First off, Berkeley Investments is the owner; the benefits and cost savings of green building will accrue to the company. Secondly, green building has been steadily increasing and is seen as the future of development. If Berkeley Investments wants to build up its reputation as a “state-of-the-art” builder and developer, they will need to get on board now with green building practices. The CitySquare project in Worcester is the largest development project outside of Boston in the history of Massachusetts. It will garner recognition throughout New England for both the city of Worcester and for Berkeley Investments, regardless of whether it fails miserably or is a huge success. It is in Berkeley’s best interests to use today’s best building strategies. Using green building practices is a win-win situation for everybody; the developer saves money and gains a good reputation, and the community is given a healthier environment to live, work, and shop in.

Incorporating LEED design principles into the new CitySquare development project would be consistent with the City Council’s vote to use renewable electricity for municipal buildings and consistent with a vision for making Worcester prosperous and livable as we enter an era of global resource shortages. Mayor Menino has pushed hard to make Boston a “green destination” for conventions, and a green CitySquare will help us do the same. It would be foolish, this day in age, not to consider factors such as energy costs, open space, water use, building materials, and indoor air quality in a new development; buildings without these considerations will soon be obsolete.

The new CitySquare development gives Worcester an opportunity to build something of lasting value at the city center, something that will attract people to visit downtown and that Worcester citizens will enjoy for years to come. Mr. Young Park, president of Berkeley Investments, has said himself, “We want to create something long-term with CitySquare. We don’t want to build a project that will be obsolete in five years.” Well, that is what we, as residents of Worcester, want too, and we’re ready to see it.

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