

# COLUMNS

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# WHY LEED?

**Today, my electronic inbox included an invitation from** the U.S. Green Building Council describing its opening for public comment for the next generation of LEED and its continual improvement process. Another email was a request to participate with the City of Dallas in helping to implement Phase 2 of their Green Building initiative as they strive toward a goal to be carbon-neutral by 2030. The last email was an announcement that the world has surpassed one billion square foot of LEED-certified green building projects. This billion consisted of 36,000 commercial projects and 38,000 single-family homes. Another six billion square foot is currently in the pipeline to become registered. These events, strategies, and figures are amazing to consider when you realize USGBC was formed in 1993—just 17 years ago. Green building, and in particular LEED, has transformed the building industry like nothing seen in my lifetime.

Sure, there are other certification platforms available, and some of them are non-biased, third-party inclusive. However, I don't see the overall processes for improvement, notoriety, familiarity of the professional community, and complementary methods toward the building process in the other platforms. Furthermore, the comprehensive and wide range of products offered in LEED far outweighs its competition. Options include LEED for Commercial, Building Shell, Interiors, Homes, Retail, Healthcare, Schools, Existing Building O&M, and the newest LEED for Neighborhood Development. LEED has set the standard in defining green building. Hands down, our organization would recommend LEED to project and development teams.

Renovate and flip a building and make some cash, but if an eye for long-term hold and efficiency in operation is a factor there is no logic in not building toward a LEED certification. These certifications are valued today, and time will only continue to raise the value of a LEED certification (any commuters want to buy a muscle car?). There are still some LEED criteria that cost a little above the norm, but with support from the right professionals and the use of common sense, LEED has little to no upfront cost. Soon, home buyers will want to know the Home Energy Rating System (HERS) rating index of every house, just like they want to know the mpg of every vehicle. Beyond energy efficiency, it is just a matter of time before water consumption and clean indoor air will be at the top of the smart shopper list. As the economy improves, LEED will be one of the keys for profitability.

Look at the green products offered today. It is a chore to pick from all the items. Simply look at the plumbing system—consider the piping, the flushing, the gallons per minute delivered, the gallons per flush omitted, the way to heat the water, and the way the hot water is delivered. There was a day when the choice was only between gold and silver finishes. With

these increased products comes a great responsibility to the builder/developer to incorporate quality in the entire process. LEED crosses all the trades and really assists the project team in coordinating the decisions. LEED for Homes includes a durability planning process, which sounds like a no-brainer to most people; but go interview ten builders and ask them about their durability planning process and see how many even have one. For us, LEED has raised the quality of the construction product by its inclusion into the design-and-build process.

Apart from the statistics, LEED is the right thing to do. Recently, a school determined that LEED was costing \$20,000 extra, so it was scrapped from the project. Think about how far we have come. It seems a cardinal sin that our children's classrooms are not also the classroom where we too learn new things. It is our duty to teach sound building practices to the next generation. It is our duty to incorporate sound design into the process and not cut corners. Sustainability is creating value in the product and making our built environment a place where people want to be, a place that is safe and healthy to be, and where resources are used with thriftiness (yes – I am a Boy Scout). LEED for Neighborhood Development offers credits for habitat improvement, habitat conservation, and food production, thus expanding the ideas for outdoor classrooms and community learning. The U.S. Green Building Council is leading the way through LEED. This resource is right there—take advantage of it. There are trained professional builders, architects, engineers, and developers right here in our community, thanks to the efforts of this undertaking. Our wagon is hitched to LEED. ■

Montgomery Farms



Designed by Brad Goldberg.

**Lee Hall, P.E., is president of Sustainable Structures of Texas.**