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What's Driving Green Building Between Now and 2020?

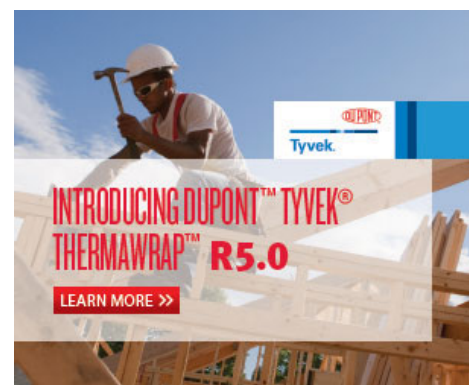
By Katie Weeks

Here are a few things we already know about green building:

- **It is good business.** Home energy use can be reduced by 30 to 60 percent over a comparable home built to code, and those savings may be helping high-performance home owners avoid mortgage default. Students and faculty in sustainable schools and universities have reported improved health, well-being, and performance, as well as satisfaction. Green infrastructure, such as parks, have been shown to increase rents and property values and potentially reduce crime.
- **It is really good business.** By 2016, green building is predicted to represent 55 percent of all commercial and institutional construction in the U.S., and up to 33 percent of the home building market. Financially, this could represent \$248 billion and \$83 billion to \$105 billion, respectively.
- **Consumers and clients dig it—if you sell it the right way.** First things first, stop calling it green building. When it comes to homes, Americans care more about comfort, health, safety, resale values, and lower utility bills. And in the commercial realm, many are willing to pay more for third-party certified spaces in order to meet corporate mandates.
- **The government is helping to drive the market.** With proposals popping up from both green building advocates and opponents, the federal government, along with a number of state governments, are looking closely at the benefits of high-performance building, from large-scale energy-efficiency proposals and federal action plans to state-level policies on which green building programs to support and city-level energy data collection and disclosure.

So what does all of this mean for the day-to-day business of architects and builders in the high-performance space? What are the market needs and opportunities at hand? Last month, we gathered the **Hanley Wood Sustainability Council**—10 industry thought leaders who are providing feedback on the future of eight critical subject areas in green building under our **Vision 2020 program**—to chat about the biggest drivers, opportunities, and challenges in their respective subject areas between now and the year 2020. Among many other things, they identified five key developments all design and building professionals should take to heart in the coming months and years:

- **Multifamily housing offers big opportunities.** Nearly all of our council members identified the multifamily market as a hot realm going forward, given that it straddles both residential and commercial construction.
- **It's time to scale up our thinking.** The majority of high-performance building has been one-off projects, but future progress requires a shift in mindset from the singular structure to the community. Designers and builders should be asking not only how they can move the needle on energy efficiency for an



individual building or home, but also for an entire block, community, or portfolio. Likewise, codes and standards must be adopted and enforced on a more consistent and widespread basis. Making every building net-zero in terms of energy and water use is a very ambitious goal for a short time frame. Perhaps we can start by asking: What would be needed to achieve moderate resource conservation with maximum participation? Buildings that will be coming on line in 2020 may already be approaching the drawing table today, so we must start thinking more about widespread performance—including opportunities for buildings to work together—now.

- **In focusing on the future, don't overlook the present.** While the development of progressive technology is important, we need to capitalize on current technologies and research. Likewise, we also need current products to offer improved performance so that high-performance building can be done in all components, from the foundation to the building envelope to the interior mechanical systems, and isn't dependent on additional technology to provide the largest reduction in resource use. Speaking of the present, we also cannot afford to overlook the suburbs. They are not as healthy, affordable, or environmentally sustainable as they were thought to be: What will you do to fix this? Consider this a tremendous opportunity for a do-over.
- **Great design means high performance and top-notch aesthetics.** We need to put to rest the misconception that there is an inherent divide between good-looking, high-quality design and high-performance design—In fact, we need to kill that perception once and for all. Great design, our council members noted, marries technical practice with creative exploration. Performance should be widely recognized as a key element of great design. It should no longer be seen as something that crimps a designer's style, but instead should be seen as an opportunity for design innovation.
- **We need more data.** Energy benchmarking legislation is just one small step in gathering the wealth of performance data the building industry really needs, and more of this research could dramatically affect design, operations, health, and financing. The definition of a green building must inherently include measurement and verification. More data, in turn, will create a need for more education: Architects and builders will need to understand the performance implications of their decisions, from building science principles to material content to active design for occupant health and well being.

What else is next? Stay tuned as Hanley Wood continues to explore the future of high-performance building between now and the year 2020 under the [Vision 2020 program](#). This year's program will culminate in an exclusive Vision 2020 Sustainability Summit in conjunction with Greenbuild in New Orleans, and with a special fall edition of ECOBUILDING REVIEW.

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