



Seattle 2030 District: The NEXT Big Thing in Green Building

Published on 16 Dec 2011 | Posted in [Advocacy and policy](#)

The green building movement has made great strides in recent years, but it's not enough. In order to put up a good fight against ever-increasing environmental and economic pressures, we need a united front of the public and private sector, and to approach issues at the city — or district — scale.

District sustainability currently experiences the same limited level of awareness that individual green buildings did a decade ago, when the U.S. Green Building Council announced its first 12 LEED Certified projects, of which there are now over 11,000.

Get ready for a paradigm shift.

The [Seattle 2030 District](#) is an innovative, private-sector led project attempting to create a groundbreaking high performance building district in downtown Seattle. The project is already gaining national attention; earlier this year, the 2030 District was selected by the U.S. Department of Energy to represent Seattle — along with the cities of Los Angeles and Atlanta — as a "Place-Based Ally" to launch President Obama's [Better Buildings Challenge](#). By 2020, this program aims to reduce commercial building energy consumption by 20 percent nationwide.

The 2030 District model of private-sector engagement and aggregated goals is unique among the three selected cities, and will serve as a guide for other cities to follow. The District has key support and partnership from the City of Seattle and King County, but is being led largely by the private sector: property owners, managers, developers, engineers and design professionals who believe that setting aggressive energy performance targets at the district level is the key to elevating our region's economic and environmental potential.

Working together, civic leaders adopted the goals from the [2030 Challenge for Planners](#), which adds reductions in water consumption and vehicle miles traveled, to the energy and fossil fuel building reduction targets of the 2030 Challenge. These goals, to be met by 2030, include aggregated district-wide reduction targets of 60% reduction in energy from new construction, 50 % reduction in energy from existing buildings, 50% reduction in water, and 50% reduction in carbon emissions from auto and freight.

These voluntary commitments are not empty promises. District members are required to share, under proprietary agreements, building energy, water, and transportation data, join the Seattle Climate Partnership, enlist in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, and submit LEED buildings to USGBC's [Building Performance Partnership](#). In return, the Seattle 2030 District is delivering innovative financing vehicles, sharing critical industry tools and best practices, and creating joint education opportunities to participating property owners and developers.

Improvement districts are not new — but the Seattle 2030 District takes a novel approach to the concept. District-wide reduction goals for energy use, water use, and CO2 emissions translates directly to using less power, water and fuel. While this may be hard to conceptualize, it yields tangible results: less traffic, better indoor and outdoor air quality, a more pleasant and desirable urban environment, a healthier Puget Sound and greater economic activity. These are the changes that Seattle and other growing urban areas must make in order to maintain vibrant and competitive cities in an era of population growth and resource overconsumption.

But don't environmental priorities run counter to economic ones? Not always.

Take energy use, for example. Buildings use approximately half of all energy consumed in this country. Reducing that use will take **human energy**: conservation managers, building auditors, manufacturers and installers of more efficient equipment — in other words the green jobs we've all been hearing about.

For decades, it's been cheaper to displace human labor with fossil fuel energy in the U.S., and we've followed that trend to its logical economic conclusion: high unemployment and rising energy prices. Yet thanks to those rising energy prices, projects to make buildings resource-efficient can more convincingly provide faster financial paybacks and higher asset values for building owners and investors. These conditions, paired with the right partnerships, technologies and financing solutions increases our ability to scale efficiency projects more broadly. The Seattle 2030 District aims to be the catalyst to make that scale reality.

There is no one-size-fits-all prescription to achieve the performance goals necessary to survive and thrive. Property owners and managers should be free to pursue the most innovative solutions to generate the best financial returns or other desired benefits for their property.

The bottom line is that the private sector must take the lead in transforming our economy away from fossil fuel dependency. More than 60 organizations, and over 23 million square feet of building space (30 percent of downtown Seattle) are participating in the Seattle 2030 District, a model that can lead the country in that transformation. It's time to join forces; 2030 is right around the corner.

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