Taking Sustainability Seriously in Washington, D.C.

Published on **24 Jan 2013** | Written by **Jacob Kriss** , **Jacob Kriss** | Posted in **Media**

Photo credit: iStockphoto

In April 2012, Washington, D.C., Mayor Vincent Gray made a statement that caught many people's attention: he wants the District to be "fossil-free" by 2030.

Does it sound a little crazy? Maybe. But when it comes to U.S. cities that take sustainability seriously and are putting the infrastructure in place to make such a vision a reality, you really can't beat Washington.

This week, the U.S. Green Building Council released its annual list of the top 10 states for new LEED certifications in 2012, and once again, the District topped the list, with 36.97 square feet of LEED space certified per person last year.

Admittedly, the District isn't a state, and the large number of buildings in a small area does affect the number. However, that doesn't change the fact that Washington's lead in LEED is due to the government's incredible leadership in sustainability in the built environment. Nationwide, the federal government occupies approximately 500,000 buildings, and in 2010 the U.S. General Services Administration mandated LEED Gold certification for all new federal building construction and major renovations.

At the local level, the District's success can be partly attributed to the D.C. Green Building Act of 2006 (GBA), which required, among other things, that after Jan. 1, 2012, all new non-residential construction projects of more than 50,000 square feet be LEED certified.

And in 2013, the District will also begin rolling out adoption of the 2012 International Green Construction Code.

"This is a major upgrade to the existing construction codes in the District," said Mike Babcock, chair of the USGBC National Capital Region Chapter. "As the District of Columbia looks to codify sustainable energy-efficient construction — to what extent we will see later this year — each agency is actively ramping up staff and training existing personnel to review and enforce the GBA 2006 and the new 2012 I-codes."

There's no question 2012 was a big year for the District, which now boasts 349 certified projects and approximately 69.8 million square feet of LEED-certified space. And of the 110 projects that certified in Washington in 2012, 78% were retrofits under the LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance rating system.

One notable 2012 retrofit was the U.S. Mint Building in downtown Washington, which achieved LEED Gold. The eight-story building, constructed for the U.S. Mint in 1999, saw the addition of a number of sustainable features, such as motion sensors in limited-use rooms to conserve energy, new high-efficiency lighting systems and new heaters for the fresh air intake that use about half the electrical load.

Woodrow Wilson High School was another Washington project to get a new lease on a sustainable life, achieving Gold status in September under the LEED for Schools system. New features installed through the $115 million retrofit included large windows to let in plenty of natural light, acoustic paneling for the school's music rooms, a greenhouse, a green roof and a 15,000-gallon cistern for the plumbing system, among many others.

In particular, Babcock noted the importance of green schools in Washington. "Through effective implementation, the District of Columbia can have a real impact on the next generation being fed through these schools, giving them a higher expectation of what the built environment can offer," he said.

Other significant projects in Washington in 2012 included Gold certification for

Bloomberg Government offices on K Street under the LEED for Commercial Interiors system; a LEED CI retrofit of the Natural Resources Defense Council's offices, which earned Platinum status; an EB:O&M recertification of the Westory, the first multitenant office space in the District to earn Gold status under that system; and a renovation of The George Washington University's Lafayette Hall, which earned LEED Gold.

While the District has made incredible progress in making itself a model for sustainable community, Babcock believes there's still plenty more to be done, particularly in revamping an aging and undercapacity storm water management system and coordinating interagency implementation, jurisdiction and authority when introducing new green construction codes.

"However, with overall commitment through effective top-down leadership, cross-agency participation and buy-in, and public-private partnerships, the sustainability agenda in the District can be realized," he said.

Jacob Kriss
Media Specialist
U.S. Green Building Council

0 comments

Leave a comment

Leave a comment

Don't have an account? Create one

You must be signed in to leave a comment.

Email

Password

SIGN IN

Address
2101 L Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

Within the United States:
1-800-795-1747

Outside the United States:
1-202-742-3792

© 2012-2015 U.S. Green Building Council