Project Spotlight: ECOModern Flats

Published on **25 Apr 2013** Posted in **LEED**

Photo by Adaptive Creative

ECO Modern Flats is sustainable living made attainable. The project not only transformed a formerly dilapidated property, but also changed the way that people in the region think about multi-family property. “ECO Modern Flats raised the bar for what people expect of a multi-family development in Northwest Arkansas,” said Linda K. Smith, the Executive Director of the U.S. Green Building Council—Arkansas Chapter. “It has energy and water conservation, but also unique architecture and interior design. It is an outstanding project.”

Congratulations to Specialized Real Estate Group and modus studio for their work on Eco Modern Flats - earning them the 2012 LEED for Homes Award for Outstanding MultiFamily Project!

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What saved you the most time, money, or helped you avoid an obstacle during the LEED process? What one thing cost you the most?

Jeremy Hudson

Owner, CEO Specialized Real Estate Group

When we were in the planning stages, I sought out an energy efficiency consultant and found a LEED advisor. That's how this became a LEED project. Having the LEED roadmap in place from the very start, before design, really helped.

The biggest cost saver, both in terms of construction and operations, was the fact that we reused a concrete building. We furred out the walls and added insulation; added minimum four inch insulation on the roof plus a white TPO roof; and installed new, efficient windows.

We took a very solid building with great thermal mass and made improvements to the envelope, and the result is incredible savings in utilities -- our monthly utility costs are half the pre-renovation costs.

Adaptive reuse was an important part of our strategy in selecting this site and while reusing an existing building was one of our biggest advantages, it was also the biggest challenge. The continued maintenance of the steel stairs, bridges, and beams that have been in place and exposed to the elements since the 70's has been a challenge and probably the biggest surprise. The building is virtually all concrete and steel, that's a big benefit, but in our climate those steel elements require frequent treatment, cleaning, painting. In some cases rust has made certain sections of stairs or stringers dangerous and we've had to selectively replace and/or repair components of the original structure.

About a year after the completion of the project we've replaced everything that required maintenance, but it will continue to be an ongoing requirement. You wouldn't have any of those problems building a new project on a previously undeveloped site, but the benefits of this renovation far outweighed those costs.

For other projects I would recommend two ways to minimize the risks of adaptive reuse, particularly for older buildings

- Assemble a strong design team.
- Thorough due diligence to uncover all surprises ahead of time.

ECO Modern Flats - Jeremy Hudson from U.S. Green Building Council on Vimeo.

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