

A look at the green building trend

Developers, business owners and realtors are all recognizing that environmentally-conscious actions are the way of the future. The following article gives individuals an introductory lesson on the changes shaping commercial development today.

Catch phrases such as "Green Buildings", "Going Green" and "Greening Your Building" are becoming more and more common place as awareness of the damage we are causing to the environment grows. While environmental issues affect us all in many different ways, their impact is perhaps most greatly reflected by the "green" transformations taking place in the building and construction industries.

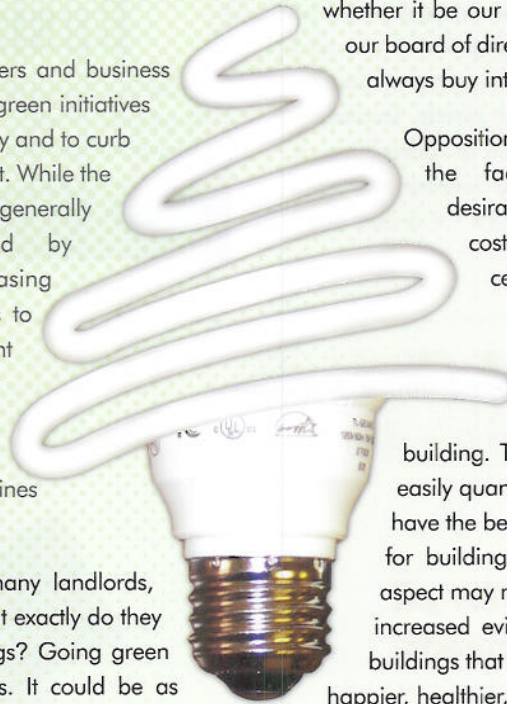
An increasing number of developers and business owners are turning their minds to green initiatives in an effort to promote sustainability and to curb damage caused to the environment. While the issue of greening buildings is, generally speaking, not yet regulated by government, the ever increasing attention by governing authorities to issues relating to the environment leaves little doubt that government will eventually step in and regulate green development by imposing standards and guidelines on builders and owners.

The question on the minds of many landlords, developers and owners is this: what exactly do they need to do to green their buildings? Going green comes in many shapes and sizes. It could be as simple as instituting a paper recycling program within a

building (most of us have already done this), or it could be as complex as retrofitting a building to incorporate renewable or more energy efficient systems (but can most of us afford to do this?). Many times, the motivation for implementing green measures may be altruistic. After all, we all want to save the environment. The problem becomes that we all have to answer to somebody, whether it be our landlord, our boss, our partners or our board of directors, and those individuals may not always buy into altruistic motives.

Opposition to going green often stems from the fact that, while environmentally desirable, it usually translates into extra costs. These costs may be offset by certain financial and other benefits. A green roof, for example, could increase the life expectancy of the roof membrane and provide better climate control within the building. These types of financial benefits are easily quantifiable. But, a green roof could also have the benefit of serving as an outdoor retreat for building occupants. The benefits from this aspect may not be so easily quantifiable. There is increased evidence that tenants or occupiers of buildings that meet certain green standards will be happier, healthier, and more productive. Improved air quality, improved lighting and improved thermal control all lead to increased productivity as employees make fewer errors, get more work done, and take less time off. This leads to a higher profit margin for the business owner. As such, tenants or business owners should be willing to pay higher rent and/or higher development costs or capital expenditures in order to be green.

Whether or not developers, landlords and business owners voluntarily choose to take advantage of the many benefits, financial and otherwise, that building green has to offer, the government may soon mandate it. One sure sign of government's interest in implementing "green"



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measures is the numerous initiatives various municipalities have undertaken in recent years. For example, City of Toronto has approved the *Green Development Standard*, which contains performance guidelines that relate to site and building design to promote better environmental sustainability of development. The GDS is currently only mandatory for city owned buildings, but will become mandatory for all buildings in the future. City of Mississauga does not currently have any formal green building criteria that developers and owners must follow; however, the City is actively working on a strategy to promote green development that will involve policies akin to GDS, incentive programs and educational information.

As members of our community, we can be ahead of the game and we can use the green building trend for our own benefit or as a whole new level of being a good corporate citizen. Either way, the Green Age is coming - we should embrace it, plan for it, and flaunt it.

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