

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Jason Hartke, VP of National Policy, U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

### **Integrating the Building Process**

The most important things that I think green building has done for the building sector is it has created a new shift in how people think about the design, the construction or the operation of a building. And that is really, really important because what was happening before is there was this very linear approach; the plans would be in the hands of the architect, they would ship it over to the engineer, the engineer would add his or her stuff, they'd then send it off to the construction team, the construction team would operate again in his or her own silo, and so on. And what green building and our rating system, the LEED green building rating system, has done is it has helped the proliferation of this integrated design thinking. And it's been really, really important because there are a whole variety of things that you need to think about from a sustainable buildings perspective. You need to think about energy, and energy efficiency, and the application of renewables; you need to think about water conservation; you need to think about storm water management; you need to think about the right type of landscaping for your city or your area.

### **Common Goals: Sustainability and Resiliency**

As Administrator Fugate, FEMA Administrator Fugate, said at an event that we had last year "being green is the first part of being resilient," so there is a wonderful synergy that we can take advantage of is the relationship between sustainability and resiliency. What does resiliency mean? I think there are some great definitions as it relates to building. There are some good definitions as it relates to the movement. I've heard Andrew Zolli came up with, I thought it was a pretty short and pithy definition, where he said it was to "recover, persist, or even thrive amid disruption." And, again, disruption I think being the right word, because some folks think of resiliency and disaster in different ways. I heard a story where the mayor of Charleston was supposedly going through all the natural disasters that hit and they said, "which one was the worst?" and he said, "really the worst thing that happened was when Congress decided one year that they were going to pull out our military base and one year later that base was gone." That was a huge economic disruption for the city. So it really does, I think, have to cover the same way that sustainability covers the full spectrum; the environmental and all the social, the economic, resiliency has to do the same.

### **How Building Green is Working Now**

We're certifying 2 million square feet of real estate a day. The good news on that is that more than half of that is in existing buildings. So we're not just getting in the new construction, which I think we've got a really good handle on. People realize that there's

a tremendous economic benefit to building green as relationship to the new construction, but we're now starting to see a big ramp-up in the existing building space, so in terms of retrofits operation and maintenance, all those types of decisions are now going green and being done in a more sustainable fashion.

It's centered on energy. It's been a confluence of energy and energy as it relates to the business case. So if you're reducing energy, that would be the primary place where you're going to end up saving money over the life of the building. But we're now seeing, again because of this integrated design thinking, a blend of where you can reduce energy through water reduction. Again, places like California where they're spending 20% of their budget moving water. So there's a blending of water and energy issues. But yes, energy I would say is a big driver because that's where the biggest bang for your buck can come in terms of reducing costs over the lifecycle of the building.

### **The LEED System: Stretching the Market Toward Sustainability**

The US Green Building Council has come to the table with a really simple model that is a market-based solution to the problem of the status quo in building construction, design, and operation. We said we're going to pull together all the experts that we can, who are doing this type of work, and we're going to work together to set the definition for what a green building is and what it means. And we did that. And the amazing thing in that process is it was the input of, you know, hundreds and thousands now of mothers and fathers who have helped create what the LEED system is today. And that becomes a leadership definition. We rode what I think is a leadership wave and people want to be leaders in the building sector. And so everyone has stepped up to the challenge, now again this is a flexible, voluntary--and that's the key word--there's a voluntary system, that now the market has embraced. But again it's been a very simple model of: we've defined the leadership, we worked with a broad constituency of businesses and non-profits and academia to set that definition of leadership, and then we challenged the market to meet it, and they have. Interestingly enough and I think this is important to note, we're very unique in our style and once the market starts to really like and use our system, we change it and make it harder. So continuing to set the bar higher so the market has to continue to stretch to do more and more and again that's the move towards sustainability.

### **How to Get Things Done**

First there's a growing political and day-to-day culture of expediency. If you look at the way we make decisions in the political arena in all in 2 to 4 to 6 year increments. and it's all "what gets me elected after 2 years or 4 years or 6 years," and so that's a very short cycle of decision making that really doesn't make us--again going back to the example of building--doesn't make us take the long view on how we make decisions about big important projects; which are infrastructure. So that's one thing. I think this expediency issue in our decision-making is a crutch and it hurts us being smarter about bigger decisions. The other thing is, and again this is kind of a policy observation, but we tend to have this fixation on the risks of policy action. So someone proposes a policy action

or an investment let's say in an infrastructure bank and you get a whole bunch of critics to step up and say, "well, this is why we shouldn't spend any money on this." They go through every dollar that could be spent on our bridges or our roads and everything else, and they'll tell you why that's not a good investment. But what we don't do a good job of is countering with the risk of inaction and I think that's very important. We're talking about an area that has had tremendous neglect and underinvestment over way too many years, as the American Society of Civil Engineers has now put out 2 successive reports on our infrastructure, both of which give us a cumulative GPA of a D. So we don't think, we don't get into enough the evidence that is the risk of inaction, which I think would propel us into making smarter decisions especially as it relates to these big important decisions. Interestingly enough I've read that the percent of GDP that we invest in infrastructure correlates with our growth. So if we put in 2, 3%; we grow 2, 3%. We put in 4%; we grow 4%. That's, to me, not coincidence.

**www.InfrastructureUSA.org**  
**212.414.9220**  
**info@infrastructureusa.org**

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