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Taking LEED in OC

Developer charts a green course

BY DAVID STROUP

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The developers of a major project on Oregon City's Molalla Avenue main drag have found a greener way to do business – and they're finding that potential tenants are willing to come on board.



PHOTO BY DAVID STROUP / CLACKAMAS REVIEW
Danny McGinley

Redside Development is redeveloping an old lumber warehouse on Molalla into a 36,000-square-foot project offering retail and office space. It's one of a series of projects on the strip that are bringing new life and economic vitality to the town's commercial core.

They're building it as the first private, commercial building in the state to be certified as compliant with the standards set out under "LEED" – "Leadership in Energy Efficient Design." "You're building a building in a sustainable fashion," developer Danny McGinley said.

That includes using local materials, recycled products and design to make the building itself more energy efficient to operate over its lifetime.

McGinley said it "uses kind of a common-sense approach to make sure you're not gobbling up more than your fair share of energy and water."

McGinley said some of these techniques cost a little more up front – but they pay off.

"The competitive advantage we get comes mostly when you're talking with tenants," he said. "To operate a normal three-story office building, your operating costs are in the \$6 to \$6.50 a foot range... we're performing \$3 to \$3.50 a foot."

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“We can make an argument that the cost of tenancy here – in a green building – will be less than in a traditional building.”



Green tactics

The green building design also includes things like a “bio-swale” to handle storm-water runoff and landscaping with native plants – they’ll install an irrigation system only to get the plantings started and then remove it. All of the plants are selected to do well with Oregon’s normal climate, with no further help.




McGinley said when you look at the list of the things they’re doing at the site “it’s not earth-shattering.”

Nor are the steps prohibitively expensive.

“It is incrementally more expensive,” he said. “The bet you’re making with sustainability is that the operation of the building over the next 10 years is going to be less.”

The techniques, however, are still fairly new, and Redside is breaking new ground with the Molalla project.

“Green buildings are sort of an emerging industry,” he said. The whole concept of sustainable development is still catching on.

“I think we’re on the front end of the coming trend.”

Right now, that position at the forefront has some potential tenants lining up. They’re planning on a mix of commercial tenants – shops, restaurants – along with one big national retailer who is very interested in the site.

But the state is interested in possibly becoming a tenant for some of the office space that will be included in the building; under the “Sustainability Mandate” issued by the governor, they have to look for certain green features when seeking office space, and the LEED-certified building meets their standards.

“The state and federal agencies have been early adopters of the LEED stuff,” McGinley said.

They’re also taking steps so that people will know what they’re doing. An artist is creating fish from recycled “glue-lam” beams; recycled siding will be used to make scales. The fish will “swim” in the bio-swale outside.

McGinley said he wants people to know what they’re doing in part to spread awareness about how easy it is to take these steps.

“In an ideal world,” he said, “you would like to be able to look back on your career and say the world is a little bit better because building was done in a sustainable fashion.”