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CMAA Sustainability Workshop Explores Shift to Green Standards

Describing sustainable building as the new norm in the construction industry, Bill DeFalco, Chief Lending Officer, E3 Bank said, “We believe there’s been a cultural shift.”

Speakers at CMAA’s January Sustainability Seminar representing all facets of the construction industry agreed that sustainable building is the future of building, and that contrary to what some critics argue--it does not have to cost more. In fact, many argued that over time it costs considerably less.

“It’s not about how much building sustainably will cost you, it’s about how much it will cost you not to,” said keynote speaker Diana Horvat, AIA, IIDA, LEED AP, Principal, Envision Design, LLC. Horvat spoke of the increasing demand from clients for sustainable projects. She warned that firms unable or unwilling to meet new more energy efficient, green standards will be passed over for projects at a growing rate.

Presenters also agreed on the value of a CM in a LEED project. Iris Amdur, LEED AP, Principal, Greenshape, listed areas where a CM adds to the efficiency of a green project, including technical guidance of LEED credits, the issuing of frequent LEED progress reports, the bundling of green building systems during cost estimating, and communicating LEED requirements with subs prior to bid and during construction. Amdur emphasized the value of CMs as integrators within highly complex projects aiming to meet sustainable standards.

With an emphasis on the reach of the green standard, Karen Hobbs, First Deputy Director, City of Chicago Department of the Environment presented details of Chicago’s well known Climate Action Plan. The plan challenges residents to reduce their impact in small ways and educates the public about the effects climate change would have on them directly. It also urges businesses to join together to reduce waste. Mirroring a strategy used in England, businesses are encouraged to communicate about raw material needs and waste so that when excess materials of value to other companies accumulate, they can be recycled and used rather than sent to a landfill.

“Working together in small and large ways we can transform our city—and inspire cities around the world,” said Hobbs.

Experts on a panel agreed that legislation is moving in the direction of green building mandates as energy efficiency improvements become more and more vital to the economy.

“We need to make our industry more efficient,” said Rick Evans, President, Reynolds Energy. He pointed out that buildings today use more energy than ever before, and that sustainable building offers energy efficiency solutions that are cost saving. “I’d like to see the government mandate building energy performance ratings. If our goal were to be a certain standard of energy performance, it’d be an added incentive for the owner,” he said.

Presenters stressed the importance of taking steps, however small, in the right direction. “If we can do it in Mississippi, anyone can do it,” said Patrick Lazzari, CIE, LEED AP, Director of Sustainable Services, W.G. Yates and Sons Construction. “That perception that it’s too far out there and can’t be done needs to go. It’s something we can do, and it brings lots of benefits to the community. One step is better than nothing,” he explained.

Speakers and audience members shared perspectives on the impact the wave of sustainable building practices has had on their profession. A common view emerged of a future in which sustainable building techniques and technologies pervade the industry and become part of the standard process.

CMAA is North America's only organization dedicated exclusively to the interests of the professional Construction and Program management industry. On behalf of its 25 regional chapters and more than 5,400 public and private firms and individuals throughout the nation, CMAA promotes the Construction Management industry and provides professional resources, advocacy, professional development, certification, and business opportunities to its members. CMAA's national headquarters is located in McLean, Va. The Association’s website is www.cmaanet.org.