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ON THE COVER: RTKL Associates, Washington, D.C. PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAXWELL MACKENZIE

The year 2009 is one that will live in infamy, as it surfaced baggage from previous years of excess and deregulation. As for 2010 (and the next decade), it will be easy to blame the economy for anything that goes awry—from business uncertainty to stringent budgets and a de-emphasis on sustainable projects. While there may be some cause for this, educating clients can help build a foundation for sustainable design among clients based in knowledge, and help them connect efficiency and better building practices directly to cost savings.

Fortunately, more and more data is emerging to support this effort. The International Energy Agency (IEA) found that “on average, an additional \$1 invested in more efficient electrical equipment and appliances avoids more than \$2 in investment in power generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure.”¹

We have witnessed local and nonprofit organizations such as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) taking thoughtful and immediate actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prove the IEA’s findings. Recently, the USGBC moved toward changing the LEED Rating System to a weighted scorecard that rewards measures taken proportionately so as to place emphasis on the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by assigning further points for energy efficiency.

Globally, the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in late 2009 and adopted a new, controversial agreement: the Copenhagen Accord. This accord was drawn up by leaders representing the United States, China, India, Brazil and South Africa, and was formally accepted by COP 15. At a minimum, the accord endorses the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol. Additionally, it sets standards for mitigating global temperature increases to below 2° Celsius. To achieve this, agreements were made with a framework of sustainable development and a goal

BUILDING A Solid FOUNDATION FOR Sustainable DESIGN

Economic recovery for the A&D industry will warrant a new approach—one that takes the everyday office project and connects it to a global economy.

was set by the world to raise \$100 billion per year by 2020 to help developing nations in carbon reduction.²

The movement and push for change is proving necessary. Four years after “An Inconvenient Truth,” studies point more and more to a point of no return, as overall environmental statistics are not improving. In Al Gore’s new book, *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve Climate Crisis*, he cites mounting evidence that is propelling action across all industries on global and local levels. “There is good news and bad news about CO₂. If we stopped producing excess CO₂ tomorrow, about half of the manmade CO₂ would

fall out of the atmosphere (to be half absorbed by the ocean and by plants and trees) within 30 years. Here is the bad news: the remainder would fall out much more slowly, and as much as 20 percent of what we put into the atmosphere this year, will remain there for 1,000 years from now. And we are putting 90 million tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere every day. The only meaningful and effective solutions to the climate crisis involve massive changes in human behavior and thinking.”

Great opportunity exists in continuing the transformation in the role of both existing and future architects and designers to regard sustainable design as an essential built-in practice rather than as a special add-on or afterthought. The great architect, Eero Saarinen, once said “Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context—a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan.”⁵

As the industry’s awareness to global issues is heightened, there is evidence that these practices are becoming more commonplace. Along with this evolved delivery method, benchmarked studies and results will continue to rise in demand. Living in extraordinary times and climbing out of the recession will warrant a new approach that takes the everyday office project and connects it to a global economy.

ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

History is already finding names for the current economic challenges with one label becoming the most prominent: “The Great Recession.”

We all know that history repeats itself. Today, we can learn from the economic crises that preceded World War II. Resurgence in the older wisdom is beginning to help rebuild our current economy.



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Conservation is a transcendent concept that relates to adages like “waste not, want not” or “a penny saved is a penny earned” and provides a direct connection to the environment. We have learned that in many areas, recycling construction waste has become less expensive in comparison to dumping waste into a landfill and high tipping fees. As Americans scale back, burdens on landfills and public health are being eased as less waste is being disposed.

As sustainable demands and systems evolve, so too must traditional economic models. One such example that aims to provide a new measure of wealth is “The Happy Planet Index [HPI] 2.0: Why Good Lives Don’t Have to Cost the Earth.” This index was expertly created by the new economics foundation (nef)—an independent think-and-do tank that inspires and demonstrates real economic well-being, building on the principle of “economics as if people and the planet mattered.” Contained in the body of the work, is a new ratio for sustainable development:³

$$\text{Living Better} = \frac{\text{Long Healthy x Satisfied Lives}}{\text{Resources Consumed}}$$

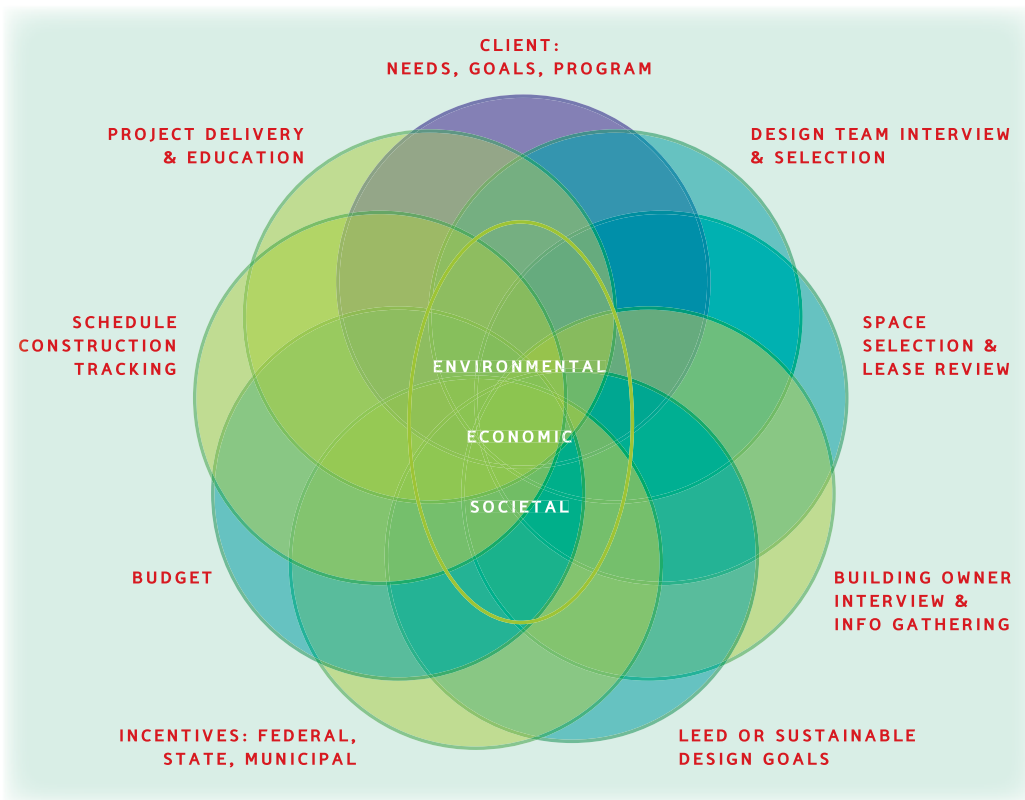
This economic model sews together three objectives to achieve such balance:

1. To promote longer, happier lives
2. To promote fulfilled and satisfied lives
3. To reduce resource consumption

So, what makes the HPI relevant to the day-to-day business of architecture and interior design? Demand for reusing building materials and modernizing existing buildings will continue to grow over demand for new construction as the world climbs out of the global recession. Architects and designers will continue to be challenged to do more with less.

The executive summary of the HPI demonstrates a paradigm shift as a solution to current and future economic challenges being faced. “The results turn our idea of progress on its head. Whilst the HPI confirms that the countries where people enjoy the happiest and healthiest lives are mostly richer developed countries, it shows the unsustainable ecological price we pay. It also reveals some notable exceptions—less wealthy countries, with significantly smaller ecological footprints per head, having high levels of life expectancy and life satisfaction. In other words, it shows that a good life is possible without costing the Earth.”³

Referencing a new holistic benchmark for economic measurement such as HPI provides a balanced look at what the future of a changing workspace looks like and how it will be created.



Offering solutions to mitigate negative impacts on societies and upcoming generations can serve as a strong foundation that will make change a reality.

SOCIAL FOUNDATION

The impact of the environmental crises will disproportionately affect future generations in unimaginable ways. History will show that the decision-makers of today were able to take action to protect the world of tomorrow.

The HPI supports this concern with a valid assessment: “Not since World War II has society globally been faced with so many threats. In the last few years, we have driven into the wall of the biggest economic downturn since The Great Depression of 1929, whilst mainstream culture has, at last, been rudely awoken to the ever growing threats of climate change and the exhaustion of our natural resources.”³

The changing priorities, values and culture of young professionals entering the workplace is already impacting the way designers shape and build out workspaces. As commercial interior designers and architects program the workplaces of tomorrow, generational profiling will continue to gain momentum as an important factor in design.

As baby boomers plan transition into retirement, Generation X (1965-1980) is beginning to take their place, with Generation Y (aka Millennials) entering the workforce. Numerous studies have been

and continue to be conducted on the differences between age groups. The studies are fast becoming indispensable resources to workplace planning and design. One study in particular, “Gen Y’s and the Workplace,” points to some very clear findings that demonstrates sustainability is a high priority to Generation Y.⁴

1. “Sustainable—95 percent want an environmentally aware workplace, with 96 percent aspiring to work in a greener office.”⁴
2. “Unconventional—20 percent would prefer taking public transportation, 18 percent walking.”⁴

The study also found that along with these factors, “having a life-long learning experience—centered on quality of life—was an important component to a sense of balance, thus making economic models such as the HPI more relevant.”³

A SUSTAINABLE PLAN

Careful listening and thoughtful questions on the project needs, requirements, corporate brand, policies and challenges are critical in creating a sustainable design plan. Assembling a scouting party as early as possible in reviewing potential spaces and weighing cost benefit ratios is equally important. More often than not, professionals are

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faced with an existing tenant space within an older building that in most cases was not built around the context of sustainability.

One way to approach and prepare a project is implementing a process that demonstrates the symbiotic nature of sustainable design elements while peering through the lens of the environment, economy and society. Charting a way forward that illustrates how objectives and tasks overlap can do much of the work in setting an integrated tone to the project.

The heart of the diagram (located on page 12) serves as a touchstone to be used as a means of focus during the decision-making process. The outlying tasks, a brief overview of the design and construction process, cover a host of phases relative to most commercial interior projects.

Running through a couple of categories using this system begins meaningful and important dialogue that asks thoughtful questions. Take the category "client: needs, goals, program" for example. How do environmental, economic and societal issues apply to the project?

ENVIRONMENTAL:

- a. Does the client have a corporate social responsibility mandate?
- b. Are they actively engaged in a carbon reduction/measuring program?
- c. What type and size of space will they need based on current and future needs?
- d. How does location factor into sustainable design goals?
- e. What do the potentially selected building's age, energy efficiency and operations and maintenance look like?

ECONOMIC:

- a. Can the client/tenant lease be structured in a manner that augments value to the client's internal mandates and goals such as a carbon reduction/measurement program?
- b. What are the potential budget ramifications in selecting a building whose age, energy efficiency and maintenance are issues?
- c. Time is money. What is the most cost-effective way to get the client's needs met while saving time and money? Will overtime or off-hours be required for construction for a particular building selection? How will that impact the bottom line?
- d. What types of municipal/federal incentives are available for a sustainable project based on one location vs. another? Besides green related assistance, is the potential building site located in a city that will give additional incentives to attract job creation?

SOCIETAL:

- a. What are the generational demographics within the corporate structure that will occupy the space?
- b. Is the surrounding neighborhood developmentally dense?
- c. Is there access to cost-effective employee wellness amenities such as green space or bike trails?
- d. How long is the client looking to remain in the new space? Is it possible to sign a lease that is 10 years or longer to minimize churn on building stock?
- e. Is the client interested in promoting the sustainable features of the project externally as well as internally? Would the client like to share by offering educational tours or by offering ancillary spaces such as conferences and board rooms to support causes that relate to their corporate social responsibility mandates or initiatives?

The same process can be replicated from start to completion to keep the overlapping and delicate nature of these types of projects in balance by starting to cross the chart. Additional questions to consider include:

- ▶ What if the client's needs, goals and program experience a delay (such as site selection) that would keep the project from being ready for months beyond the needed move in date?
- ▶ What are the budget and schedule ramifications?
- ▶ Is it worth it for the client to extend their current lease at a costly option if waiting means moving into a highly energy-efficient space that will easily recover that cost within months?

Applying this method to a willing and communicative team can yield high success rates.

LASTING VALUE

Building a strong foundation that is forward thinking and balances environmental, economic, and societal goals serves as a strong model for new commercial architects and designers. Projects that mirror the process outlined and integrate communication and project management can be successful in executing a sustainable strategy without jeopardizing time and budget. A paradigm shift in the way spaces are programmed and designed taking into account environmental, economic and societal considerations will yield spaces that:

1. have a lasting legacy that has the ability to impact every team member's base of knowledge and pay it forward;
2. create low-impact spaces that are inspired and healthy to occupy, and that have low turnover rates, relieving pressure on resources; and
3. offer an opportunity for businesses to act as good corporate citizens by sharing their successes, educating their peers, and attracting talent.

GETTING STARTED

Selecting a team to work with begins with assessing the potential service provider's commitment to sustainability in their daily business. If a vendor does not have the experience but has a proven track record and excellent references, consider their willingness to be part of a project that could transform their practice into a leader in green building and design.

Much of the success of any project hinges on attitude and collaboration. There are countless sources available for leaders striving to foster a positive and supportive team composition. Local or national trade or green building organizations such as the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), the USGBC or the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) have virtually unlimited resources for any manager committed to building a foundation for sustainable design.

If we follow the words of Saarinen, we will "always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context—a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan."⁵

Sandra Goda Dino, director of sustainable interiors at Environetics, is a LEED Accredited Professional and is actively involved with the U.S. Green Building Council Los Angeles Chapter and the Green Building Initiative. Environetics is a full-service interior architectural and LEED consulting firm that translates the client's culture, brand and goals into sustainable workplace environments that foster productivity, communication and enhances their image. Visit www.environetics.com to learn more.

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