

## LEED standards expanded with neighborhood development pilot program

### Quarry Falls project selected

By **JENNIFER CORNELIUS**, Special to the Daily Transcript  
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As concerns about the environment remain front and center among leaders and citizens in all walks of life, the building community continues to make great strides in establishing achievable and lasting standards for environmentally conscious design and construction practices.

With Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards becoming more common in new construction and revitalizing older buildings, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) recently expanded its principles to include neighborhood development (LEED-ND). Conceived in partnership with the Congress for New Urbanism and the Natural Resources Defense Council, the new system integrates the principles of smart growth, new urbanism and green building into the first national standards for neighborhood design.

"The LEED Neighborhood Development program was a logical outgrowth of the building rating systems," said Ruth Stafford, landscape designer with **Wallace Roberts & Todd**. "It considers land use issues, addresses impacts associated with project location and larger scale projects, and integrates smart growth and new urbanism."

Both relatively new terms, smart growth advocates concentrated development and infill within cities, transit-oriented development and environmental preservation, while new urbanism focuses more on neighborhood design, diverse housing and creating a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Using the framework of other LEED rating systems, LEED-ND recognizes projects that successfully protect and enhance the overall health, natural environment and quality of life of our communities. The system encourages smart growth and new urbanist best practices, promoting the location and design of neighborhoods that reduce vehicle miles traveled and communities where jobs and services are accessible by foot or public transit. It promotes more efficient energy and water use -- especially in urban areas where infrastructure is overtaxed. To create these standards, the USGBC examined which characteristics of the built environment impact citizens' health. Among them were the location of a development, population and employment density, land use mix, access to transit and the diversity of population/income in the community.

"Building a LEED-ND certified neighborhood benefits the community, tenants and the environment," Stafford said. "With infill development and increased density, you reduce land consumption and resource use. With mixed-use development, multi-modal transportation and pedestrian-friendly environment, you reduce auto use and increase exercise. And with green construction, you reduce the environmental impacts by lowering water and energy use, reducing storm water runoff impacts and creating wildlife habitats."

The call for pilot projects took place in early 2007 and a total of 238 projects from 39 states and six countries were accepted into the pilot program, including three in San Diego County. The information gathered during the pilot program, which will last through 2008, will be used to refine the rating system so that standards can be finalized. The USGBC is aiming to launch the system in early 2009.

One of those pilot projects is the mixed-use infill community of Quarry Falls in Mission Valley. The proposed project will transform a declining gravel quarry in the heart of San Diego into a 230-acre community that will benefit Mission Valley, the San Diego River, the city, residents and commuters in the region. **Westfield's** UTC revitalization and the Eastern Urban Center in Chula Vista were the other county projects selected.

Designed to be completely walkable in every direction, Quarry Falls aims to reduce dependency on cars by providing residents everything they need to live, work and play within the neighborhood or nearby. Quarry Falls also includes massive sustainable design features geared to preserve and enhance the environment.

According to Stafford, who assisted developer **Sudberry Properties** with Quarry Falls' LEED-ND application, some features that helped it qualify included its infill location, efficient land use, pedestrian-friendly design, multimodal transportation options and its plans to incorporate green building practices to improve energy efficiency, lower resource use, reduce stormwater impacts and reduce waste of materials.

"Quarry Falls brings progressive ideas about infill development to San Diego, which has a history of leadership in innovation," Stafford said. "As the city grows, it must embrace new approaches to preserve resources and create vibrant communities. Quarry Falls can be a model for this."

Through years of research as part of the Active Living Research program, San Diego State University professor Dr. Jim Sallis concludes there is significant evidence to support a connection between the built environment and people's health. Sallis has been working with planners and city officials nationwide, including those that established the LEED-ND standards, to influence how communities are built so that we can incorporate activity back into our daily lives.

"The LEED-ND program could have a strong effect on developers," Sallis said. "It could encourage policymakers and be a guide for zoning reform. The more a development is based on these principles, the healthier it should be."

Given the lack of land in major cities, integration of these standards is likely. With access to more efficient and affordable materials, more developers and builders are able to design to LEED standards. It may be slightly more costly up front, but the long-term return in investment will be significant. Projects such as Quarry Falls will enable researchers to determine just how influential these features can be on quality of life.

"In a very short time LEED has become a model for evaluating and advocating green building practices," Stafford said. "Many cities require public buildings constructed to LEED standards. More people are seeing the multiple benefits of green building -- environmental, social and economic, and LEED has helped this recognition."

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