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New Streamlined LEED Emphasizes Energy Efficiency and Local Priorities

Last month the U.S. Green Building Council launched a new version of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). LEED version 3 (v3) emphasizes more than ever the role of building and site design in achieving energy efficiency and mitigating climate change. Commercial developers can expect to find both opportunities and challenges, depending on the specific project.

LEED v3 incorporates several major changes. The most substantive component, called LEED 2009, involves revisions to the technical aspects of commercial and institutional LEED rating systems (Figure 1). The main elements of LEED 2009 fall into three categories, each with its own implications for commercial and mixed-use development:

- (1) harmonization;
- (2) credit weighting; and
- (3) regionalization.

Figure 1. Rating Systems Affected by LEED 2009

- New Construction
- Core & Shell
- Schools
- Existing Buildings
- Commercial Interiors

The **harmonization** of LEED 2009 is part of an overall effort to streamline the LEED process. With rapid expansion over the past ten years, LEED rating systems have diverged and become difficult to use in concert. Credits and prerequisites have now been made consistent across all the LEED 2009 rating systems. Consequently, a developer seeking Core & Shell certification for a new speculative office building can work more efficiently with tenants who would like to pursue Commercial Interiors certification for their space.

Credit weighting involves a greater emphasis on credits that have the highest impact on key environmental and human health issues: namely, energy efficiency and reduced CO₂ emissions. While the credits themselves did not change under LEED 2009, some are now worth more points. For instance, projects that are located in densely developed areas or near public transportation benefit from additional points for achieving those credits. An increased number of points is also achieved for water efficient landscaping and water use reduction. Projects that earn weighted credits may thus find it easier to earn enough points for certification, while other projects might now find certification more difficult.



The **regionalization** of LEED 2009 recognizes that environmental issues are prioritized differently across the country. Regional priority credits provide bonus points for achieving certain credits that emphasize local priorities, which vary depending on the project's zip code. In the greater Twin Cities metro area, for example, a project could achieve extra points for minimizing stormwater runoff and improving water quality, something it may already be doing to meet local regulatory requirements. In many parts of outstate Minnesota, by contrast, a project could earn regional priority credits for protecting habitat and maintaining open space. As with credit weighting, the implications of regionalization for commercial and mixed-use developers will vary by project.

Current projects registered under a previous rating system can continue using their existing rating system or upgrade to LEED 2009. After June 27, 2009, new projects will be required to register for LEED 2009. Commercial developers interested in using LEED v3 either for design guidance or to pursue project certification should discuss with their project team the options provided by the new version.



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