

Green strategies hit real estate, construction

by James M. Connolly | Friday, June 12, 2009

In the real estate and construction sector, “going green” initially brings up thoughts of LEED-certified buildings, but the benefits of a green strategy can extend well beyond LEED for construction management companies, and for their clients, subcontractors and architects.

Milford-based Consigli Construction Co. Inc. is among the firms that have seen more client requests for U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified buildings and clients who may not opt for a full LEED package, but want to include at least some of the sustainable elements outlined by USGBC.

“It seems like all of the clients we talk to want to integrate LEED elements into their building. They are very interested in saving money and having occupants who are happier in more efficient buildings. But LEED doesn’t fit every client,” said Todd McCabe, project executive with Consigli, which last month was honored by the Boston Business Journal in its Sustainable Boston awards program.

Consigli plays a consulting role when it comes to client decisions on LEED, helping the clients to define the return on investment for systems or materials that may be somewhat expensive upfront but bring long-term savings.

But LEED is only one piece of a green strategy that has a direct impact on Consigli’s bottom line.

“In the 10 years I’ve been with Consigli I’ve seen significant changes not only in construction but in how we run projects.

Construction has moved toward sustainability. When you boil it down, it’s just better, more efficient systems. It’s being smarter in how we build things, and taking the environment into consideration,” said McCabe.

Just having Internet access allows project teams to stay at job sites while having the same access to plans and suppliers that they would have working from offices in Milford, Portland, Maine, and Enfield, Conn., said McCabe.

Collaboration tools have brought change in terms of savings on cost and environmental impact.

Consigli’s IT team built Project Gateway, based on Microsoft Corp.’s Sharepoint. “Typically, we would have tons of paper-based information going back and forth. It allows more collaboration and decreased decision making time,” said McCabe, noting that sharing drawings and product information with architects, clients and subcontractors has gone from taking weeks to minutes.

Winston Grey, director of information technology for Consigli, said Project Gateway saves the company “tons of money” once spent on paper and toner cartridges, while making everyone more productive. “Implementation was a big project because it was changing some of the culture in the company. We had to get people out of the habit of faxing or e-mailing everything,” he said.

A second application, On Screen Takeoff, is an estimator tool that allows subcontractors to look at drawings online and make



decisions without having to use large-format printers and ship drawings overnight.

The two applications have helped the company pare its overnight shipping costs from \$16,000 to \$20,000 per month to almost nothing, according to Grey.

Mike Burns, assistant manager real estate, construction and leasing at office park developer Hobbs Brook Management LLC in Waltham, said Consigli’s strategy is the way construction companies have to go.

“Construction companies feel the need to become green in order to stay competitive,” said **Burns**. “Businesses are looking to landlords for green space. Big construction companies are getting more involved in projects that are able to be certified, and their construction methods are being modified to follow the LEED guidelines.”

Burns added, “We are benefiting from these strategies. Many of the tenants are starting their own green programs. If the base building is already certified, the process becomes more efficient and effective.”