

## LEED-ND Workshop Summary

### OVERVIEW:

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 the City conducted a workshop to apply the LEED-ND rating system to the South Downtown Subarea and the MLK Neighborhood Subarea. This hands-on workshop produced informal sustainability "scorecards" for each subarea. The Community and Economic Development Department (CEDD) gathered about 20 staff and community members with a range of technical expertise, for two half-day workshops facilitated by nationally recognized LEED-ND expert Eliot Allen, *Principal, Criterion Planners Inc.* The event was made possible by Smart Growth America (SGA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The workshop participants completed preliminary LEED-ND scorecards for both subareas. Both did well, achieving a "Gold" rating (the second highest). Both subareas have infrastructure, development patterns, location, public institutions and other assets that make them score well on the ND scorecard. In addition, the City and region have committed to a range of sustainability-related initiatives, some specific to these subareas, which also contribute to the strong showing. The preliminary LEED-ND "Gold" rating shows that these areas are among the most sustainable locations for development in the region, and reaffirms the reasons for and significance of the subarea planning efforts.

A summary of background, the workshop discussion, potential next steps is included below.

### BACKGROUND:

SGA selected the City of Tacoma from a national pool of applicants to receive a free smart growth technical assistance workshop titled "Using LEED-ND to Accelerate the Development of Sustainable Communities". The program is sponsored by SGA, in partnership with the U.S. EPA's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program. It is intended to promote smart growth principles at the local level.

The LEED-ND rating system is a set of measures for judging and certifying the sustainability of a neighborhood, similar to LEED certification of a green building, but at the neighborhood scale. LEED-ND provides a promising tool to consider how smart growth, new urbanism and green construction can be incorporated into planning efforts. Local governments around the country are using the LEED-ND system in a variety of ways, from plan-making guidance to development standard-setting to certification of community plans and projects.

CEDD proposed to link the LEED-ND workshop to two planning initiatives already underway—the South Downtown and Martin Luther King, Jr (MLK) Subarea Plans. The outcome of the workshop is not binding nor is it an official LEED-ND score. Rather, the workshop provided an opportunity to try out the LEED-ND system, and to consider how it might support the planning efforts for the two subareas, as well as other initiatives.

The LEED-ND Scorecard assesses both existing conditions and planned growth and change over the next 20 years. For this preliminary scoring, the participants sought to make reasonable assumptions about existing conditions and the amount and type of growth likely to occur over the next 20 years. Assumptions about future outcomes were speculative, but grounded in our understanding of current City, regional and state policy direction and initiatives.

#### WORKSHOP OVERVIEW:

The group determined that both subareas meet (or will meet within 20 years) all of the LEED-ND Prerequisites, possibly with one exception (described below). If all the Prerequisites can be met, then both subareas would likely score well. Generally, both subareas scored better in the Smart Location and Linkage, and the Neighborhood Pattern and Design categories than they did in the Green Building and Infrastructure category.

The group was skeptical that either subarea will meet GIB Prerequisite 3: Minimum Building Water Efficiency (which requires new and major renovations to average 20% less water use than a national baseline). While Tacoma Public Utilities has programs to encourage water conservation (see [www.tacomawater.com/smart](http://www.tacomawater.com/smart)), the group felt that this Prerequisite likely will not be met without some additional action. This issue would need to be addressed should the City pursue formal LEED-ND certification.

#### South Downtown Subarea scores:

Smart Location and Linkage: 23 out of 27 points  
Neighborhood Pattern and Design: 32 out of 44  
Green Building and Infrastructure: 10 out of 29  
Innovation and Design Process: 5 out of 6  
Regional Priority Credit: 4 out of 4  
TOTAL: 74, Gold (80+ for Platinum)

#### MLK Subarea scores:

Smart Location and Linkage: 23 out of 27  
Neighborhood Pattern and Design: 30 out of 44  
Green Building and Infrastructure: 8 out of 29  
Innovation and Design Process: 5 out of 6  
Regional Priority Credit: 4 out of 4  
TOTAL: 70, Gold (80+ for Platinum)

#### Workshop discussion summary:

- The LEED-ND system is a promising tool to foster and measure sustainability and the City should explore options for pursuing it.
  - Consider how the framework might be tailored to better reflect Tacoma's priorities
  - It seems to undervalue some of our progress – e.g., innovative Low Impact Development stormwater projects
  - The system should incorporate more qualitative standards (not just yes/no but what condition or type of a given feature is present). This could give direction for what improvements are needed.
- Barriers within the City organization – need for advocacy

*SGA/EPA-sponsored 2012 LEED-ND Workshop*

- Resource scarcity and concerns about dampening development through more stringent requirements
- Life cycle costs versus up-front costs
- Impacts/benefits to current residents (such as gentrification)
- These subareas have deficit of green space/open space/food security

WHAT NEXT?

The workshop participants reached consensus that the following actions should be taken:

- Report out on results
  - Inform the Senior Management Team of the workshop outcomes to raise awareness of opportunities to promote sustainability through the subarea plans and other efforts
  - Carry sustainability message to the City Council and the public
  - Communicate the intrinsic value of these neighborhoods
- Incorporate sustainability as a key policy direction in the subarea plans
  - Provide this summary to key plan stakeholders
  - Consider options for incorporating LEED-ND (or selected ND criteria) into the plans
- Disseminate sustainability as core principle within the City of Tacoma
  - Identify a staff champion to move this issue forward
  - Develop a multi-disciplinary team to broaden and sustain the effort
- Consider options for how to utilize LEED-ND

These subareas score very well—LEED-ND certification could be a real option. In addition, there is a range of other options for utilizing the system. The options are outlined below (more detail is provided in the attached Criterion Planners memorandum):

  - Use the ND scorecard for informal input to the subarea planning process
  - Re-apply the ND scorecard at the preliminary draft plan stage
  - Re-apply the ND scorecard at the conclusion of the plan process
  - Seek certification of the subarea plans
  - Assist developers in certifying projects within the subareas
  - Consider applying LEED-ND criteria to other planning processes
- Consider opportunities to improve scores
  - Engage with Tacoma Public Utilities regarding the Water Conservation prerequisite, which needs to be met in order to consider official LEED-ND certification
  - Consider new policy initiatives that could make the areas more sustainable (and perhaps achieve LEED-ND “Platinum”)

Attachments:

LEED-ND Scorecards for South Downtown and MLK Subareas

Criterion Planners Suggested Next Steps as Outcome of Technical Assistance Memo