

Smart Growth America

Technical Assistance

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

Community: Tacoma, WA
Tool: Using LEED-ND to accelerate the development of sustainable communities

Date: April 5, 2012

TO: City of Tacoma

FROM: Criterion Planners

DATE: May 15, 2012

RE: Suggested Next Steps as Outcome of Technical Assistance

Overview

Criterion conducted a LEED-ND workshop for the City of Tacoma on April 5, 2012. Approximately 20 City staff members attended the full-day, two-part workshop. The workshop was organized to apply the LEED-ND rating system to two City subarea plans currently under preparation: the South Downtown subarea in one session and the Martin Luther King Jr subarea in a second session. Criterion led the City staff group through an explanation of each ND credit, its applicability to a subarea, and, if applicable, a likely credit score. The objective was preparation of preliminary ND scorecards for each subarea.

At the conclusion of the workshop, both subarea plans scored in the Gold range of ND certification, indicating favorable conditions for achieving superior levels of smart growth, new urbanism, and green construction through the subarea plans.

Suggested actions to address policies/strategies discussed during the workshops

City staff are preparing a summary of the workshop and ND scores for the two subareas. This will be transmitted to the City's Senior Management Team (SMT) as an information item, and a request will be made for a follow-up briefing of the SMT. The intent is to make department heads aware of the ND subarea results, and the opportunity to elevate sustainability issues in upcoming subarea planning processes.

As the staff and SMT consider future prospects for leveraging LEED-ND to accomplish local sustainability goals, there is a continuum of ND actions that can be taken, ranging from informal voluntary measures up to formal mandatory code requirements. The suitability of these choices will be the subject of further assessment and evaluation that may be directed by the SMT. The options include:

- Informally provide input to the subarea processes. This option would rely on staff to informally use general ND requirements to inform stakeholder discussions and work products about sustainability principles and best practices. ND becomes one of several technical references

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used in the planning process.

- Re-apply the ND scorecard at the preliminary draft plan stage. A second scorecard workshop can be held when each subarea has a preliminary draft plan ready, to confirm that early concepts remain valid, and to identify new features that can be added to improve subarea scores. This option offers a “check-in” opportunity that keeps sustainability topics in the mix of public discussion.

- Re-apply the ND scorecard at the conclusion of the subarea plan process. This option affords a chance to “book-end” the process by comparing the initial April 5 ND scores with those attainable using the finished subarea plans. This option gives insight into how ND measures are assessed and ranked over the course of subarea work, and which ones are vetted for final inclusion.

- Seek certification of the subarea plans. Once complete, the subarea plans can be officially submitted by the City to GBCI for formal ND certification. This option will require a high level of specificity and commitment in the subarea plans in order to meet ND certification criteria. It also carries the burden of 200-400 hours of labor to assemble each submission, and GBCI certification fees of approximately \$25,000 for each subarea. An alternative would be certification of only one subarea.

- Assist developers in certifying smaller projects within the subareas. Rather than certify the subarea plans, the City could instead help developers certify smaller development projects within the subareas. ND certification relies heavily on conditions in the vicinity of a project, and by preparing superior subarea plans, the City will, in effect, be bolstering the potential ND scores of projects located in the subareas. Providing technical assistance to developers assembling submissions could be a lower cost path than certifying the entire subareas.

- Consider applying ND criteria to planning processes throughout the City. Beyond the South Downtown and MLK Jr subareas, the City can apply ND measures to a wide variety of geographic areas and planning processes, including other subarea plans, project reviews, capital improvement programs, and environmental impact reports. Consideration of ND in these processes can be accomplished informally or formally, with gradations of assessment that range from quick checklists to certification-equivalent documentation.

Additional information about ways in which LEED-ND can be integrated into municipal plan-making is given in Attachment A, including a model ordinance that positions ND as a major, formal framework for fostering and verifying sustainable community development.

For greater City staff convenience in reviewing and selecting ND measures suitable for Tacoma, Attachment B provides a catalog of ND credits restated in a local government plan and code framework.

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