

Green, Green...What Does it Mean?

Building green positively affects our environment, health, community, and the economy. Right now, it may seem like a fad, but building green may become a standard business practice if energy and water quality protection costs continue to escalate.

Several, sometimes confusing, terms are commonly used to describe development that is protective of the environment. In order to begin understanding what building green means, it is helpful to review some definitions provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency:

- ❖ **Better Site Design/Conservation Design** – An approach to development that can simultaneously reduce pollutant loads, conserve natural areas, save money, and increase property values by promoting reduced impervious cover, preserved natural lands, and on-site integration of storm water management systems.
- ❖ **Green Infrastructure** – an array of products, technologies, and practices that use natural systems, or engineered systems that mimic natural processes, to enhance overall environmental quality and provide utility services.
- ❖ **Low Impact Development (LID)** – Creating a site design that mimics pre-development hydrologic conditions by infiltrating, filtering, evaporating, and storing runoff close to its source.
- ❖ **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)** – This is a quantitative rating system with credible standards that is administered by the US Green Building Council. It benchmarks the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings and developments utilizing a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. [Similarly, **Minnesota GreenStar** is a green building standard and certification program created specifically to address Minnesota’s climate extremes and natural resources, for both existing and new homes, which promotes healthy, durable, high performance homes.]
- ❖ **Smart Growth** – A range of development and conservation strategies intended to protect the environment while making our communities more attractive, economically stronger, and more socially diverse. This is accomplished by developing in ways that protect the environment and reduce urban sprawl by reusing developed land, reinvesting in infrastructure, reclaiming historic buildings, and creating pedestrian-accessible communities.
- ❖ **Sustainable Infrastructure** – Policies, approaches, and planned expenditures that provide for consistently effective drinking water, wastewater, and storm water systems over the long term.

Despite the subtle differences, all these terms have a common goal: using alternative design approaches and construction methods to improve our environment, health, community, and economy.