

Mohave County takes the LEED with Green, Energy Star buildings

KINGMAN – Even children know it's not easy being green, but Mohave County has proven it can be done.

The Mohave County Board of Supervisors will join staff and a representative from OPUS, the company that designed and built the County Administration Building, in celebrating the designation of that facility as a LEED Certified Green Building Monday, April 21.

As reported in a county news release in the summer of 2005, during the construction of the Administration Building, Opus West Construction Corp. Senior Project Manager Michael Herman discussed the energy savings designs, materials, systems and landscaping to “save money while fulfilling the standards needed for LEED certification as a ‘Green Building.’”

In that release, County Manager Ron Walker said, “The biggest building cost in the long term ends up being operation and maintenance. It is a matter of efficiency to design for a wise conservation of energy.”

Now, close to three years later, that planning and a consistent environmental approach to all facility construction and improvements has paid off not only with a LEED designation of the County Administration Building as a Green Building, but also with a designation as an Energy Star Building from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In fact, four other Mohave County structures have also been awarded Energy Stars within the last month.



Photo Courtesy Mohave County Chairman of the Mohave County Board of Supervisors Pete Byers shows the plaque from the U.S. Green Building Council designating the County Administration Building as a LEED Certified Green Building.

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building designation comes from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), a non-profit organization that is “dedicated to expanding green building practices and education,” according to the USGBC website. “The LEED Green Building Rating System is a voluntary consensus-based national rating system for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings...addresses all building types and emphasizes state-of-the-art strategies in five areas: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials and resources selection and indoor environmental quality.”

“It does take a long time to get” a LEED Green Building designation, Mohave County Finance Director John Timko said. “We started the process when we began the RFP (Request for Proposals) process for this building back in 2003 indicating our desire for the proposers to include in their estimates those things necessary to have us LEED certified as a Green Building. Through the selection process, OPUS was selected. They provided us with the project checklist of the various things one can do during a construction process to get a LEED Green Building certification, and which areas they thought we could get points in and which areas they thought were out of reach.

“There are several categories for which the USGBC awards points,” Timko said, “such as how we deal with the site we build on and how water efficient we are in designing and operating the building. There are points given for energy consumption and air quality. There are also points given during construction for the materials and resources used. Using materials with high recycled content is beneficial and how we handle the construction waste product is a big part of a project. There are significant points available for the indoor environmental quality. That is where significant amounts of money get spent in the design and construction process because it requires certain monitoring equipment to monitor things like carbon dioxide and air freshness to make sure we have a safe environment in which to work. There are also some innovative design areas in which to gain some points.

“To become certified, you have to have at least 26 points,” he said. “We have 28. There aren’t very many LEED Green Buildings in rural Arizona and our Administration Building is the only one in Mohave County. This process requires commitment. It was important for us to set an example.”

Timko said one of the reasons the process takes so long is “there is a tremendous amount of record keeping. Things like the recycled content of materials and construction waste management need to be recorded” and LEED committees need to review all records.

“Opus designed and built this facility and they deserve credit for their quality work,” Walker said. “Good planning and doing things right the first time always pays off in the long run.”

County Office of Management and Budget Manager Gene Hepler explained the Energy Star designations Wednesday, April 17.

“About two years ago,” Hepler said, “NACo (National Association of Counties) started an energy conservation push for courthouses. We joined in on that and part of it meant we became an Energy Star partner.”

Hepler explained that with Energy Star, the EPA looks at buildings the way other energy rating organizations look at appliances. They look for energy efficiency.

“There is a software involved that compares buildings nationwide for energy efficiency,” he said. “We worked with NACo and the EPA and put 34 of our buildings into this system. It takes a lot of information such as square footage, natural gas usage, how many people use a building, number of computers, kilowatt usage and parking information. That information is compared with similar buildings across the country and a score is issued.

“We got a 90 percent score for the County Administration Building as compared to other buildings nationwide,” Hepler said. “This month, we received information that five of our buildings have received Energy Star designations. Besides the Administration

Building, our Agricultural Extension Building, Kingman/Cerbat Court Building and County Attorney's Office in Kingman and our County Complex in Lake Havasu City have all received Energy Stars."

On Jan. 1, 2008, Mohave County launched a recycling program that not only saves the county money by not having to haul away waste paper, it will eventually lead to earnings into the General Fund.

"I commend our Public Works Department and Procurement Division for moving forward on this recycling program," Hepler said. "A couple of counties from outside Arizona have contacted Procurement to look at our recycling program for their possible use. Right now we are recycling paper but we have discussed expanding to other areas. In the process, we are saving money."

"These environmental honors from LEED and Energy Star aren't just out of the blue," Walker said. "Conservation and energy efficiency have been part of our planning for years. Our Mohave County General Plan (http://resource.co.mohave.az.us/File/PlanningAndZoning/Mohave_County_General_Plan.pdf) has a large section on conservation which includes planning for air quality, water quantity and quality, energy and natural and scenic resource protection. And, our long-term business goals include being 'proactive in preserving and protecting natural resources.'

"I applaud Chairman of the Board Pete Byers and Supervisor Tom Sockwell for their wise and conservative oversight of our capital expenditures by building for energy efficiency and conservation of our natural resources," Walker said. "I've said it before. These investments pay off year after year. Conservation design is just a smart way to do business."

The Mohave County Board of Supervisors public meeting will be held Monday, April 21, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the County Administration Building, 700 West Beale Street, in Kingman.