

'Green' builders like tax break

Downtown condo project plans to become first to apply for environmentally friendly incentive

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Cincinnati's new tax cut for "green" buildings has created a buzz in the development community, which officials hope means the trend of environmentally friendly construction will take off here.

Today, developers and City Council members plan to announce that The Edge condos, starting soon downtown, will be the first to seek the new 100 percent, 15-year tax abatement offered to owners of new and significantly rehabbed residential properties that meet national LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards. The incentive extends to properties worth as much as \$500,000.

That means that while building green can cost more, now there's a better tax incentive to do so. The city's traditional tax abatement on new development and rehab, through the federal Community Reinvestment Act, includes work up to \$275,000 in improved value and lasts 10 years.

"Not every developer will want to do it," said Councilman Chris Bortz, who began looking months ago with Councilwoman Laketa Cole into incentives the city might offer. "But there is a buyer out there who wants this. There's definitely a market. We're hoping this encourages these pioneers to explore the technology."

To achieve LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, a project must earn a certain amount of points, which are granted for anything from types of carpeting and paint to heating design.

At The Edge, a \$36 million project where the 77 units will range in cost from \$165,000 to \$650,000, developers Andy Radin and architect Denis Back plan to apply for points for a long list of things. Among them: recycling brick and concrete block from the original building; using a white roof that reflects heat; and the quantity of natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows. The river and city views can count as well.

Back has been a Cincinnati architect for 30 years, but this is his first green project.

"This ordinance that the city passed is so good," he said. "The word is really getting around. You're going to see so much green development."



Ryan Thelen (left) shows his cousin Michelle Keilen; her husband, Mark; and their dog Ivan around a model condo in The Edge downtown. The developer of the condos will be the first to apply for a city tax break for environmentally friendly construction.

Representatives of the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, which develops LEED standards, did not return calls and e-mails for comment to put Cincinnati's financial incentives into perspective nationally.



Real estate agent Amber Hrovat looks out a window in a model condo at The Edge development downtown while waiting for people to arrive for an open house Sunday.

But Greg Hutzel, an architect and president of the Cincinnati green building chapter; Bortz; and Cole aide T.J. White said their research turned up no other metropolitan cities offering the same benefit.

LEED standards for commercial buildings came out first. Developers are awaiting the final ones for residential buildings, said Bill Fischer, business development manager for the city Department of Community Development and Planning. Single-family houses under construction soon in Northside, Mount Lookout and Hyde Park will be built as part of a LEED residential pilot project. The new fire station being built

in Avondale also will meet LEED criteria, city spokeswoman Meg Olberding said.

The city's tax incentive, passed last month, also included changes for LEED commercial construction. Commercial projects no longer will have to wait for the city to do an analysis of the developer's cost estimates to determine whether the project should be granted a tax incentive. Now, Fischer said, if a developer proves enrollment with the U.S. Green Building Council, the project gets credit for 75 percent of its improved value - for 10 years, if a rehab, 15 if new.

More environmentally friendly changes are on the way, too, promises city spokeswoman Meg Olberding, as the city's new environmental quality director and energy management team get moving. Bortz, Cole and colleague David Crowley pushed a proposal through council that asks the administration to try to figure out a way to go green with stormwater runoff.

While Hutzel said he appreciates any financial incentives available to his clients, his reason for designing green is simpler: "I just see it as the responsible way to do building."

Learn more

Here are some places to find out more about "green" building here and elsewhere:

- The U.S. Green Building Council, <http://www.usgbc.org/>.
- The Edge project, <http://www.edgecondo.com/>.
- The city's Department of Community Development and Planning is working on a Web site officials hope to have up soon. Access it through <http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/>.

Becoming green

To get green certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, commercial and residential projects earn points in categories from sustainable sites and water efficiency to materials and resources and innovation in design. Among the ways to earn points:

- Redeveloping a brownfield.
- Including shower facilities and bicycle parking so people don't have to drive to the building.
- Underground parking.
- Recycling rain water for landscaping.
- Using local and regional materials.