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Four Seattle high rises get LEED for existing buildings

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Photo by Chris J. Roberts Photography [\[enlarge\]](#)

Park Place is a 21-story office building, managed by Wright Runstad & Co. Transwestern was hired as LEED consultant.

Washington Real Estate Holding's Park Place building, built in 1971, last week became the first in Seattle to receive a LEED platinum certification for existing buildings. This week, Unico Properties announced three of its buildings received LEED gold for their operation and management.

Brett Phillips, Unico's sustainability project manager, said the real estate industry is moving toward making existing buildings more efficient.

“We're starting to see a transformation or a focus on existing buildings like we've never seen before,” he said. “If you're not doing something with sustainability... you're going to be obsolete in the market.”

Unico received gold for improvements to the historic Skinner Building, built in 1926; Puget Sound Plaza, built in 1960; and the IBM Building, built in 1964. All three are in the Metropolitan Tract, a 10-acre parcel of downtown land owned by the University of Washington. Unico manages seven properties on the tract, another of which was already LEED certified.

Phillips said the company plans to seek LEED EB for operations and management of the Financial Center and Rainier Square, certifying all properties in the tract.

Phillips said Unico is certifying all new development at some level and is in the process of getting LEED EB certification for operations and management of all its existing building stock, which is the majority of its portfolio.

Even in this economy, he said savvy companies know it's the right move to make. In this market, he said having a LEED building helps with market differentiation and attracts tenants. Energy savings also help: improvements to the IBM building are saving over \$80,000 per year.

LEED for existing buildings and LEED for existing buildings operation and maintenance are similar but separate programs. Only eight buildings in Seattle have been certified under LEED for existing buildings, the most recent of which is Park Place with its platinum designation.

Park Place

Park Place is a 315,000-square-foot, 21-story office building, managed by Wright Runstad & Co. Transwestern was hired as LEED consultant. To reach platinum, the team made a number of improvements such as upgrading plumbing fixtures, installing airflow measuring systems to insure high quality indoor air and increasing recycling by occupants from 45 to 70 percent.

Al Skodowski, senior vice president and director of LEED and sustainability for Transwestern, said water was a big focus at Park Place. The team added a 10,000-square-foot planted green roof, and an 8,000-square-foot green roof already covered the parking garage. Together they treat 50 percent of the water that falls on the site. Water not treated by the greenery is collected in tanks in the parking garage. Those tanks also hold condensate from the HVAC system and blow-down wastewater from the cooling tower.

The water is used for irrigation and flushing toilets and urinals. If the water system works as planned, Skodowski said the building will not use any potable water other than for faucets and drinking.

Park Place has a new online system that lets tenants, staff and the public see the building's operation in real-time, including water capture and reuse, lighting and HVAC loads. Utilities on each floor are metered, as is water use throughout the building. It also has an upgraded satellite controlled irrigation system that will track the weather.

Skodowski said the green efforts are really about educating tenants and the public about energy and water use.

Skodowski said he first started looking at how to improve Park Place in 2007, before Washington Real Estate Holdings closed on the purchase of the building. The lease was about to expire for the building's main tenant, the Environmental Protection Agency, which has 10 floors and has been in Park Place for more than 20 years.

By going for platinum, Skodowski said, the owner reasoned it might keep the EPA or at least create a marketing advantage to attract other tenants. EPA decided to stay and will remain in the building for another 11 years.

Unico buildings

Unico's three newly certified buildings are all Class A office. The Skinner Building, at 1326 Fifth Ave., is on the National Registry of Historic Places. It is an eight-story, 216,000-square-foot space that houses the Fifth Avenue Theatre, Brooks Brothers and Gucci. Improvements include increasing water efficiency by 41 percent through waterless and low-flow plumbing fixtures. The building is naturally ventilated.

The IBM Building, at 1200 Fifth Ave., began the retrofitting process in 2006. Over \$1.6 million has been invested in energy efficiency. It has lowered electricity consumption by 1.53 million kilowatts per year, representing a more than 17 percent reduction compared to prior consumption. Improvements include upgrades to the chiller plant, expansion of digital controls, lighting controls and installation of solar window film to stop heat from coming through glass.

Puget Sound Plaza, at 1325 Fourth Ave., is a 21-story, 375,000-square-foot retail and office space. Since retrofitting began at the plaza in 2006, Unico has invested more than \$500,000 to reduce energy consumption. Electricity use has been lowered by about 600,000 kilowatts per year, representing almost a 7 percent total energy reduction. Improvements include upgrades to the chiller plant and lighting controls.

Jayson Antonoff, sustainable infrastructure and energy/climate change policy advisor with the city of Seattle's Green Building Team, said owners will focus more on improving existing buildings whether or not they seek LEED EB certification.

“There's not going to be, as we all know, a huge amount of development for a while,” he said. “Getting existing buildings to a high level of sustainability is really where the action has to be.”

“I think that's the first place where money will begin to flow again,” he said, “just because it is a way to encourage people to move into an existing building at a lower expense than building a brand new project.”