

The Greening of New York City

By Donald Capoccia, ABO Vice President

Building “green” is a nice idea: it wins accolades from the press for contributing to the health of the environment and makes a developer proud. But it’s simply too expensive, right?

Not anymore. Installing energy-conserving systems into a building saves money in the long run, and with the support of environmental agencies formed to aid developers, these savings are easy to document and sell to tenants. Plus, with the tax credits recently instituted to encourage such development, green construction is an idea whose time has come.

One New York City project serves as an example of the potential for savings. The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority worked with Steven Winter Associates on an environmentally sensitive renovation of the Children’s Services Center at 492 First Avenue. The Center will use 33 percent less energy than a code-compliant building – saving more than \$99,500 per year – and eliminate 500 tons of carbon dioxide. And the air quality inside the building will be much improved.

The cost of energy-saving systems in the Center are said to have increased construction costs by just 0.5 percent, which will be returned in 3.6 years. The improvements include: clear, argon-filled double pane windows; daylight dimming controls; modular electric chillers and utility steam for heating, cooling and hot water; and a variable-air volume system with carbon dioxide sensors for proper ventilation.

Other projects abound. Indeed, New York is among the pioneers in green development. The Durst Organization’s monumental 4 Times Square, offering 1.6 million square

feet of environmentally responsible office space, is said to be the first project of its size to adopt state-of-the-art standards for energy conservation, indoor air quality, recycling systems, and the use of sustainable manufacturing processes. The air delivery system provides 50 percent more fresh air than industry codes allow.

The building’s prime tenant, Conde Nast, was attracted not only by energy cost savings, but also by the potential benefit for its greatest resource, its people. The company likes the idea of occupying a green building for the sake of the health and well being of its staff.

According to building scientist Asher Derman, a consultant for Fox & Fowle, the Durst building’s architects, the environmental strategies in place at the Conde Nast building could cure problems associated with poor circulation, often called “sick-building syndrome.” He expects to see increased productivity and lower absenteeism.

Another first for New York City is the Solaire, which will be the world’s most environmentally responsible residential high-rise. Scheduled for completion in the fall of 2003, the 27-story Albanese Development Corp. building will use 35 percent less energy than a conventional building of its size and will generate 5% of its own electricity through photovoltaic solar panels.

Standing on the waterfront in Battery Park in downtown Manhattan, the 293-apartment complex will conserve 50 percent more water than similar-sized projects. And using natural gas for its air-conditioning and heating will reduce gas emissions and help to avoid sharply increased summertime electricity costs. Electricity demand will be reduced by 67 percent during peak periods.

The air and water in every apartment in the Solaire are filtered. Such an amenity is bound to give the building an advantage in this highly competitive rental market. And Albanese benefited from an incentive enacted in January 2001, by New York State, which allows developers to claim some of the costs of work and materials in a green building against their state taxes.

At the ground-breaking ceremony for the Solaire, Battery Park City Authority’s chairman James F. Gill said, “While the first cost of a green building is higher than the first cost of a conventional building, we intend to demonstrate to the construction world that such a cost will be offset by energy savings within a relatively short period of time.”

As they become confident that environmentally sensitive buildings cost the same to construct and maintain as conventional buildings – and that they are highly attractive to tenants – developers, and all New Yorkers, are bound to start seeing a great deal of green in their future. ■

