

Green space goes to work

Beatrice Fantoni, Centretown News (www.centretownnewsonline.ca)
Friday, October 2, 2009

The latest addition to Ottawa's downtown core is bringing some green into the mostly grey landscape.

The new building at 180 Kent St. – part of the newly-inaugurated Minto Place complex – is the first multi-tenant office tower in the city to beat the construction industry's environmental standards while offering competitive rents.

"There's a lot of business reasons to go green," says Lori Gadzala, director of the Ottawa chapter of the Canada Green Building Council, which oversees the certification of new and existing buildings to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, otherwise known as LEED.

"There's a misconception out there that green buildings are more expensive [to build]. It may be initially slightly more expensive, [but] you're going to recoup that investment relatively quickly," Gadzala says, emphasizing green buildings enjoy lower than average operating costs.

The new Minto building exceeds the standards set by the LEED rating system. To achieve LEED specifications, a structure must meet certain environmental standards in its construction materials, energy and water efficiency, site development and interior fittings.

Greg Rogers, the executive vice president of Minto Development Inc., which built 180 Kent, says a LEED-certified building of this size costs about 10 per cent more to build than an ordinary one. Rogers says even though the net rent may be a few dollars higher – around \$25.00 per square foot – the low operating costs offset the difference. Plus, there's growing demand for green office spaces.

In Ottawa, the federal government holds a considerable amount of leased office space. Its growing interest in sustainability is also pushing local developers to think along green lines.

"We are starting to see more of a drive from the market for green buildings and for green leases as well," says Scott Brooker, an agent with Cushman and Wakefield LePage in Ottawa.

"If you don't build to some sort of a green standard, your building could potentially become obsolete."

Over the next 12 months, 180 Kent will be formally assessed to see whether it meets all the LEED requirements for "gold" certification. Rogers says he is confident the building will surpass these standards.

The construction materials – including drywall, glass, and ceiling tiles – were largely sourced locally, to reduce the ecological footprint of the construction process. The building is also expected to use 50 per cent less water and 55 per cent less electricity than comparable highrises.

The elevators in the 19-storey tower generate electricity when they go down the shaft and rainwater collected in a basement tank is used to wash the underground parking garage. All the tenants in the building will be required to fit their offices with LEED-standard interiors as well.

Ottawa is already home to six LEED-certified properties, and dozens more are working towards certification through retrofits, including Export Development Canada and the Ottawa Convention Centre.

Other buildings in the city are certified under different environmental guidelines, such as Building Owners and Managers Association standards.

The City of Ottawa also has regulations in place to guarantee all newly built municipal buildings are LEED certified.

“We’ve seen a significant uptake of the green building attitude especially among institutional developers,” says Chris Straka, the principal architect at Vert Design, an Ottawa firm specializing in sustainable architecture.

He says Ottawa has been slow to adopt sustainable building practices, but Minto’s recent work has helped change that attitude

“I’d be surprised if any developer in the city today isn’t considering building in a greener way.”