

Shelters Go Green

LEED-Certified Facilities Care for Animals and the Earth

SANDRA MURPHY



Municipal managers are realizing that going green is the right thing to do. In many areas, new municipal construction is required to be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified to reduce operating costs, conserve resources and provide a healthier work environment. Older municipal buildings slated for remodeling also can be transformed. Buildings may even qualify for incentives from local utilities in some states. As a result, animal shelters are now joining the move to green.

Good for the Environment

“Our goal was to reduce our carbon paw print,” says Dave Dickinson, interim director of Sacramento County Animal Care, regarding the California capital’s LEED Gold-certified shelter. “The Silicon Valley architect incorporated natural light, a beneficial air circulation system and numerous energy and resource-saving elements to create an extraordinary environment for both the animals and employees.”

The LEED rating system, developed by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), signifies levels of silver, gold or platinum status, based on eco-business practices. Swatt | Miers Architects chose polished concrete for the Sacramento shelter floors. “Tile is nice, but grout harbors bacteria,” says George Miers, a principal of the firm. “Concrete is a sustainable material and when sealed, can withstand a lot of mopping. We used a local quarry for materials.” At least 10 percent of the building materials were sourced within 500 miles of the site and the project contains more than 10 percent pre and post-consumer recycled content.

Good for the Animals

“Use of natural light reduces the cost of electricity,” explains Dr. Amber Andersen, a Los Angeles-based veterinarian. “Lights can be programmed to dim gradually and provide the animals with a regular sleep cycle. It’s stressful for them to be in bright light all the time.”

In addition, strategic placement of the dog runs and decorative potted plants to block their view of one another tends to reduce canine stress and barking. “Calmer dogs are more likely to be adopted,” Andersen notes. The facility operates a similar homey setup for cats with room to run around, climb carpeted furnishings and play.

In Denver, Colorado, a new LEED Platinum-certified, 36,000-square-foot shelter is twice the size of the former facility. Particular attention was paid to air circulation to help prevent the spread of canine flu, kennel cough and staph infections, and to maintain a healthy operating room while regulating temperatures throughout the facility.



“The city of Denver consistently chose the best options for the animals and the environment, while being mindful of the budget,” remarks Scott Jones, of Denver’s Air Purification Company. “This is the benchmark for future designs; on a larger scale, this model can be used for hospitals.”

Good for Business

The Plano, Texas, animal shelter, which was due for a comprehensive remodeling, is now LEED Silver certified. “We learned that the addition of a new wing could be done according to LEED standards, but we also had to make improvements to the existing structure, so that the entire building was improved,” says Melinda Haggerty, the city’s sustainability and communications coordinator. “This was a learning experience on all levels. We saw firsthand that you don’t need to sacrifice aesthetics for function. You can have a comfortable place to work while saving money.”

LEED certification criteria include site selection, pollution prevention during demolition and building, protection and restoration of habitat, water use reduction indoors and out, green power, and use of regional materials to cut transportation fuel, road wear and air pollution.



The USGBC reports that buildings of all types consume an average of 72 percent of the electricity generated worldwide. That can be reduced by 24 to 50 percent with green building practices. “It’s always important to emphasize the return on investment. It might cost a bit more on the front end, but the benefits far outweigh the costs,” Haggerty advises. “Reduced energy costs, better water usage and healthy air quality contribute to a comfortable work space. Employees have pride in the facility, and that makes them more productive.”

In Middletown, Rhode Island, Christie Smith, executive director of the Potter League for Animals, remarks that after their old building was demolished, 75 per cent of the materials were recycled, repurposed or reused. Their new, LEED Gold-certified animal shelter was the first in the nation to be certified.

Bringing Benefits to Life

“There’s a conceptual moment when the dream comes together as a design idea. From that moment on, the question is: How much of the dream can you keep?” queries Myers. “These cities made LEED a priority, even when animal control projects may be at the bottom of the list. They recognize the synergy between caring for animals and caring about the planet; green design underscores the caring.”

Sandra Murphy writes about pets and more for Natural Awakenings.

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