

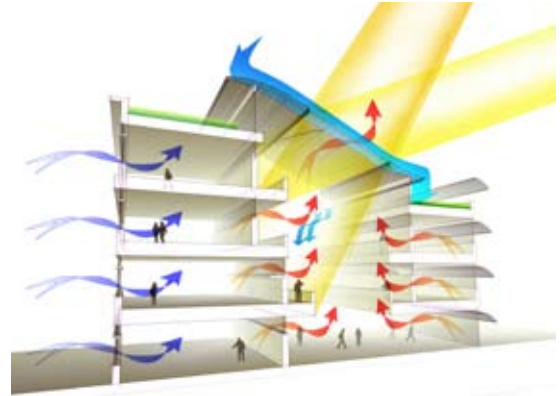
Sustainable Industries

Study digs into Living Buildings

by Charles Redell - 10.10.08

A team of experts, including Portland-based SERA Architects, Gerding/Edlen Development, New Buildings Institute and Interface Engineering Inc., asked Beaverton-based Skanska USA Building to develop a feasibility study that would outline the costs associated with designing, building and operating a Living Building.

Once completed, the study will provide usable cost information that would help jurisdictions, owners, design professionals, engineers and contractors better understand the true market limitations that challenge the pursuit of certification under the Living Building framework, Skanska says. The Living Building Financial Feasibility Study sets out to provide pricing information and strategies for nine different building types and four climate zones compared to a set of reference buildings that have all achieved, or are pursuing, the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC's) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-Gold certification.



A prototype 80,000 square foot University Classroom SERA is designing to meet the Living Building Challenge.

“As someone who is out in the marketplace, lots of people are interested in living buildings because...not using energy at all is inspiring,” says Clark Brockman, associate principal and director of sustainability resources at SERA. “People are captivated. And then the next question is, How much does it cost? And no one knows.”

Steve Clem, pre-construction director for Skanska, says the study will not be comprehensive because it would be prohibitively expensive to design and do energy analyses on 36 buildings. But Clem says it will go much deeper than any other similar study because the final product will include the soft costs of construction, such as permit fees, system development fees and even occupant furniture costs.

Choosing to design and construct a Living Building will certainly cost more, Brockman says; but at this point, this is as it should be. “It has to cost more to design a better building. That’s the way the discussion should be framed,” Brockman says. “We wouldn’t pay the same for a Maserati as we would for a Hyundai. Are we talking about added cost or added value?”