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Taking Stock: How to Grow the Green Building Industry

By: [Jessica Woolliams](#)

For a decade now, the Cascadia Region Green Building Council has pushed the boundaries of green building by providing technical support for building professionals who are pursuing existing strategies for sustainable design, and by helping the industry leap ahead and imagine buildings and communities that are truly restorative and responsible.

Cascadia in 2009 is a thought leader, known around North America and the world for the Living Building Challenge, for LEED education, for workshops, tours, and conferences like the Living Future conference this May 5 – 7 in Seattle. Last year's Living Future conference hosted a sold-out crowd of the movement's leading thinkers and practitioners at The Nines in Portland. Keynotes by Biomimicry creator Janine Benyus, Earth Day founder and president of the Bullitt Foundation Dennis Hayes, Cascadia CEO Jason F. McLennan, and conflictresolution expert Thomas Crum set the tone for the conference: cultivating leadership by telling the truth and offering an inspiring, ambitious, and achievable vision for the future. Participants left with a deepened connection to the green building movement, new strategies for transforming the built environment, and strengthened relationships with leading edge green building professionals from across the region and beyond.

Living Future '09 was also the occasion for a major announcement: the launch of the International Living Building Institute. This new entity, associated closely with Cascadia, is dedicated to encouraging the creation of Living Buildings, Sites, and Communities in countries around the world, while inspiring, educating, and motivating a global audience about the need for fundamental and transformative changes in the way we build and live. The International Living Building Institute will help push the Living Building Challenge into the public eye in North America and beyond, providing a model for true sustainability on any scale.

The timing for this new Institute couldn't be better: there are now several projects in North America aiming for the Living Building Challenge. We anticipate celebrating the first Certified Living Buildings in the summer of 2010. This is a huge accomplishment, not for Cascadia or the International Living Building Institute, but for anyone who cares about the core issues that buildings impact: climate change, species extinction, persistent toxic chemicals, and others.

Living Building Financial Study

Cascadia also recently released the Living Building Financial Study, which has proven the viability of deep green buildings that eliminate energy and water bills, and which use 'red list ready' materials. Cascadia's study finds that the most financially responsible design approach to new construction in the mid- to long-term is a "Living Building," a building that generates its own power, as well as cleans and reuses its water. In fact, a building that only incorporates a few green features may end up costing more (even within ten years) than a Living Building. These buildings offer significantly larger savings in water and energy costs, and cost less to construct than previously believed. Given the rising cost of energy and water, Living Buildings, as defined by the Cascadia Region Green Building Council, are the smartest financial option in today's economy.

While initial costs are higher, the bottom-line finding is that investing in Living Buildings will have significant economic impact – with less than a ten-year payback in several instances. The study finds that Living Buildings can cost as little as five per cent up to 49 percent more depending on the building type and location, representing paybacks for many buildings that are well within the 7-15 yrs range for any institution, corporation, or homeowner looking at holding onto their asset for a few years.

Taking Stock

Taking stock, I am not just answering the question of how we are moving the industry forward; I am also thinking of my daughter. By the time my two-year-old is six, 80 per cent of BC's pine forests will be dead. By the time she is 92, New York City (where two of her aunts live) could be six feet under water. That is climate change.

Cascadia is doing a lot, but it needs your help. If you are interested in getting involved in what we do, in helping us grow the green building industry to where it needs to be, please check out our website <www.cascadiagbc.org>, learn how to volunteer for your local Branch, or give me a call directly. JW

Jessica Woolliams has been working to mainstream sustainable buildings through advancing critical policy, programs, and training with municipalities and other institutions for almost a decade. It was almost 10 years ago that she brought back green building policy recommendations from New York City to present to the City of Vancouver, and she hasn't stopped since. Jessica comes to Cascadia from Light House Sustainable Building Centre, where she was a founding director, and she brings extensive green building consulting experience in both the public and non-profit realms. Through her work at Harvard University she managed the design and implementation of Harvard's first GHG Inventory, Harvard's first LEED certification, and Harvard's first renewable energy purchases that brought Harvard to being the 2nd largest higher-educational purchaser of green power in North America. As a consultant, Jessica helped establish Green Buildings BC, Canada's first green building program in 2000.

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