

## Environment

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November 17, 2009

### Living Building Challenge goes broader and deeper

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The Cascadia Region Green Building Council and the International Living Building Institute have launched a new version of the Living Building Challenge. The new standard applies to more types of projects and has new requirements.

The challenge is a set of standards that were released in 2006 and require buildings to be self-sustaining. It was created by Jason McLennan, now CEO of Cascadia and ILBI.

Living buildings must meet a number of stringent requirements, such as creating all the energy they need and treating all the water they use. The new version was unveiled at the U.S. Green Building Council's annual Greenbuild conference in Phoenix last week.



Photo courtesy of Ann and Gord Bair [\[enlarge\]](#)

**Ann and Gord Bair, developers and residents of the Eco-Sense project in Victoria, B.C., are awaiting a living building certification for their cob house, which is made of clay, straw and sand.**

Originally, only buildings could pursue the challenge. Now, the challenge can be applied to anything from a kitchen to a street to an entire neighborhood. The change, McLennan said, completes his vision for the tool.

“The word building changes from a noun to a verb,” he said. “It’s broader and deeper. It addresses the range of issues that we need to address.”

McLennan said the latest version moves beyond energy use and building footprint and begins to look at bigger issues like food, transportation and social justice.

To date, there are about 70 projects in North America that are pursuing earlier versions of the challenge. About nine of them are in Washington, including a new headquarters for The Bullitt Foundation and improvements at the Phinney Neighborhood Center. Projects that have already registered can meet the latest version of the challenge if they choose.

No building has been certified under the program yet. Because the challenge is performance-based, a building must operate for at least 12 months before being certified. Three projects are in the operations phase: the Tyson Living Learning Center in Eureka, Mo.; the Omega Center for Sustainable Living in Rhinebeck, N.Y.; and Eco-Sense, a private residence in Victoria, B.C. A fourth project, a preparatory academy in Hawaii, is almost done, McLennan said. Any of these could be the world’s first living building.

Version 2.0 has some major physical changes. Before, the challenge had 16 “prerequisites” each project had to achieve that were organized into six categories like water and site. Now, there are 20 “imperatives” in seven categories. Projects must achieve most of the imperatives, though not all apply to every type of project. For example, a landscape and infrastructure project does not have to meet healthy air requirements because it is not enclosed.

There is a new category of imperatives: equity. McLennan said it was important for the new version to address social equity. “That’s obviously something that we have felt has been missing

from the green building debate for a long time,” he said.

There are multiple items a project must address in the equity category. For example, projects must provide access for those in wheelchairs or with physical impediments. The U.S., McLennan said, already does a good job in this area but the challenge is international and some countries need to do a better job in addressing the issue. The challenge bans things like gated communities, and requires unrestricted access to rivers, lakes and shorelines, as well as other natural elements, even when located on private property.

The new standard addresses urban agriculture, community impacts, car-free living and biophilia. Most projects will be required to have a portion of the site dedicated to food production, except those in the densest urban environments. The biophilia imperative, McLennan said, is meant to ensure that projects connect to nature.

McLennan said the changes are important but they don't make the challenge more difficult. “The building tool is about as challenging as before. It's not really harder, it's not really easier, but some of the things don't apply at all scales.”

A number of changes reflect feedback from people in the design community who have worked on living building projects over the past three years. McLennan said the “appropriate radius” imperative, which says all project materials must be gathered within a small radius of a project, has changed the most. Under the old requirement, it was often difficult if not impossible to find materials within the radius, so the distances have been modified. “That one has probably gotten a little easier.”

Because the challenge encompasses so many pieces, McLennan said it will always be changing. He said he does not expect another major revamp for quite some time, though he said ILBI will probably issue version 2.1 within a year, with some minor changes. “It's a living document, it's not intended to be static.”

McLennan said a couple of projects signed up to pursue the new version of the challenge at Greenbuild. For more information visit [www.ilbi.org](http://www.ilbi.org).

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