



Devens, Massachusetts, which received its STAR community rating in December 2017, is already signed up to be a beta city for the new LEED for Cities and Communities program.

LEED-STAR Launch Sustainability Beta

CITIES ACROSS THE WORLD now have a new community-wide framework that applies Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards to future development.

Last June, STAR Communities—a well-known environmental building assessment rating system—merged with the U.S. Green Building Council to develop a new program that aims to help cities assess sustainability on a broad scale by adding standards for social justice, emissions reductions, transportation infrastructure, and more. That new program, LEED for Cities and Communities, is now open for beta registration.

Beyond buildings

Developed by the USGBC, LEED has been the gold standard in sustainable building since its launch in 2000. With the help of STAR Communities, USGBC will expand LEED beyond buildings into a rating system that assesses large-scale sustainability policies' effectiveness in cutting emissions and improving residents' lives.

"LEED was designed to be more about performance and STAR for planning. Our new system can include both," Roger Platt, senior vice president for the USGBC.

The program functions as a scorecard for a city's overall performance in every aspect of sustainability. Eight categories—including transportation, natural resource management, energy, and water

efficiency—are scored, for an overall total of 110 "points."

The scorecard also includes a quality-of-life component that will assess emergency response, environmental justice, equitable development, poverty alleviation, and other social justice concerns. When STAR proposed partnering, LEED was thrilled, Platt says—LEED staff learned a great deal from the STAR rating system that has been integrated into the new program, including STAR's social justice assessment, which helps get past surface-level statistics like college graduation rates that can disguise inequality.

Holding cities accountable

The new program will include elements

of accountability to ensure stakeholders are taking the actions they promise. Those plans could include transportation infrastructure, conservation, or poverty alleviation (LEED's program Arc currently serves as an accountability tool and will be integrated into the new program).

Community-level certification will also allow for types of regenerative and climate-adaptive design that individual building certification cannot. It is much more effective for cities to plan for eventualities like sea-level rise than individual developers, for example.

Neil Angus, AICP, CEP, an environmental planner in Devens, Massachusetts, thinks the merger represents great opportunities for sustainable design. Registering to be assessed under the new rating system gives cities a chance to be independently verified and receive feedback that can improve their climate and sustainability initiatives.

"You can't manage what you don't measure," Angus says.

Devens, a former military base that was declared a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency superfund site in the early 1990s, was recently STAR certified. Sustainability is a key goal for community leaders, and the STAR rating helped them assess their plans. Devens is already set to be a beta city for the rating system, Angus says.

"The STAR integration into LEED incorporates the best elements of the STAR Certification program and will allow the new rating system to reach out to a broader audience," he says.

Because the program is international, it will raise the profile of communities prioritizing environmental protection and climate adaptation and connect leaders in sustainability worldwide. The program will serve as a universal language for environmental assessment that can be applied even to vastly different cities. ■

—Casey O'Brien

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