MAKING THE GARAGE GREEN IN EVERY WAY

By Brian Shaw, CAPP

I recently started working for Stanford University as its director of parking and transportation services. Stanford is known as one of the leading sustainable universities in the country, and a number of ranking and recognition programs have given the university high marks for its sustainability programs and initiatives. But what is not well understood or known is that Stanford has achieved so much in the sustainable realm by including all three Ps of sustainability: people, planet, and profit.

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For example, Stanford is spending millions of dollars on a new energy distribution system for the campus that will, over time, save the institution money while helping make greater use of renewable energy sources. The project, known as Stanford Energy System Innovations (SESI), will facilitate the continued growth of the campus while minimizing the environmental effects and reducing energy costs.

The recently released Green Garage Certification provides the parking industry a much-needed way to account and be recognized for the growing use of sustainable parking practices. Those of us who have practiced sustainability for some time know that for a program or project to be truly sustainable, it must benefit people, planet, and the bottom line (profit) for the organization or institution.

In reviewing the certification criteria as part of a new garage being developed at Stanford, the project team found that without having to change much of the garage's design (or adding costs to the project), it should qualify for at least a silver level of certification. There are certain items in the certification that would earn the project more points that we will not consider, but other things we've done for years (campus transit system, carpool parking, bike storage, using sustainable cleaning products) can be included in the certification at no additional cost.

Motivation

This got me thinking: Is the green garage "green" because of sustainability or because it makes business sense to the owner? In our case, we will build this new facility to be certified as a green garage because it makes good business sense. In fact, the garage would not be able to be certified if Stanford had to include elements that were costly, unusual, or counter to current operational practices and norms. For example, the garage will have LED lights because our analysis showed this was the most cost-effective way to light the garage. The energy savings, along with the reduced maintenance costs from needing to replace fixtures less often, made the LEDs the way to go. The fact that we got points for this in the certification is a nice added value.

However, when we looked at trying to get points for locally sourcing materials and labor, that element was tossed out because in our region, labor and material come from far and wide due to housing prices and the high cost of land. It simply did not make sense from a business standpoint to insist on building the garage under those conditions. Likewise, this garage will not earn points for how any occupied space is managed because it will not feature that use. It will have a green roof but primarily to deal with stormwater runoff and replace the loss of open space the garage will occupy**.** A green roof is therefore a more cost-effective solution to the runoff and open space issues than building a cistern or retention basin and needing to replace the open space somewhere else.

By not spending money needlessly in the pursuit of certification points, Stanford demonstrates how new parking garages can be built to meet all aspects of sustainability: people, planet, and profit. Perhaps as the Green Garage Certification program evolves, points could be earned for projects that show fiscal responsibility while also employing sustainable practices. What could be more green than that?