

The U.S. Green Building Council (USBGC) was founded in 1993 to promote sustainability in the way buildings are designed, built, and operated. It developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system and professional credentials and hosts the annual Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, billed as the world's largest such event dedicated to sustainable building.

Brendan Owens is vice president of LEED technical development for the USBGC and the organization's top LEED expert and chief engineer. In this role, he represents USBGC to other standards organizations and collaborates with volunteer technical committees to advance the technical content of the LEED Green Building Rating System.

Before joining the USBGC, Owens worked designing, implementing, and verifying performance contract-based energy conservation projects in existing buildings.

He recently talked with *The Parking Professional* about green building and design, transportation, and how parking can make a difference in an increasing sustainability-focused society.





TRANSFORMING GREEN

USGBC Vice President Brendan Owens
on ratings, trends, and where
parking fits in an increasingly
green society.



The Parking Professional: The USGBC has experienced a tremendous period of growth and expansion.

How did you manage that kind of change? How are you leveraging it for future growth?

BRENDAN OWENS: It's been an amazing ride! We haven't been perfect, but overall I think the global emergence of LEED (10 billion square feet in 150 countries) is evidence that we got most of the big decisions right. The emergence of the global green building movement during the past 20 years is a model that we're hoping can be replicated by other industries looking to transform. It might not be based on a rating system in every, or even most, cases but the way USGBC has created a new sense of purpose for the buildings industry certainly is.

TPP: How do you really feel about parking?

BO: I think it's a necessary part of the way our cities have evolved, but it's a very inefficiently used and allocated resource. I have been somewhat disheartened by the studies that suggest we have far more parking than we need but that we still struggle to deal with it well. I'm not sure what Donald Shoup's reputation is with your readership, but many of his ideas make sense to me.

TPP: How does the USGBC see parking as part of the entire picture?

BO: From a LEED perspective, we try to be integrated in the way we encourage project teams to look at decisions. Obviously, we encourage location of projects in dense, diverse, transit-connected places, but not all LEED projects will fit that ideal, and while we prioritize credits related to those issues, we recognize the reality. Where a project team is responsible for parking and/or it's necessary, we try to encourage optimization of the parking footprint across a variety of issues: minimizing the total amount, providing structured or covered parking, controlling rainwater runoff, heat island reduction, and provision of preferred parking for carpools and alternative-fueled vehicles. Parking decisions are interwoven through half a dozen or more LEED credits.

TPP: What's been your best parking experience?

BO: Ideally, not having to. I really like to get around via bike and public transit. But some of the integrated wayfinding technology I've seen in Europe and at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall (BWI) Airport really makes the experience much less frustrating. There was also a time when I lost my ticket and the guy at the booth just let me through. That was pretty great, but probably not a sustainable business model in the long run.

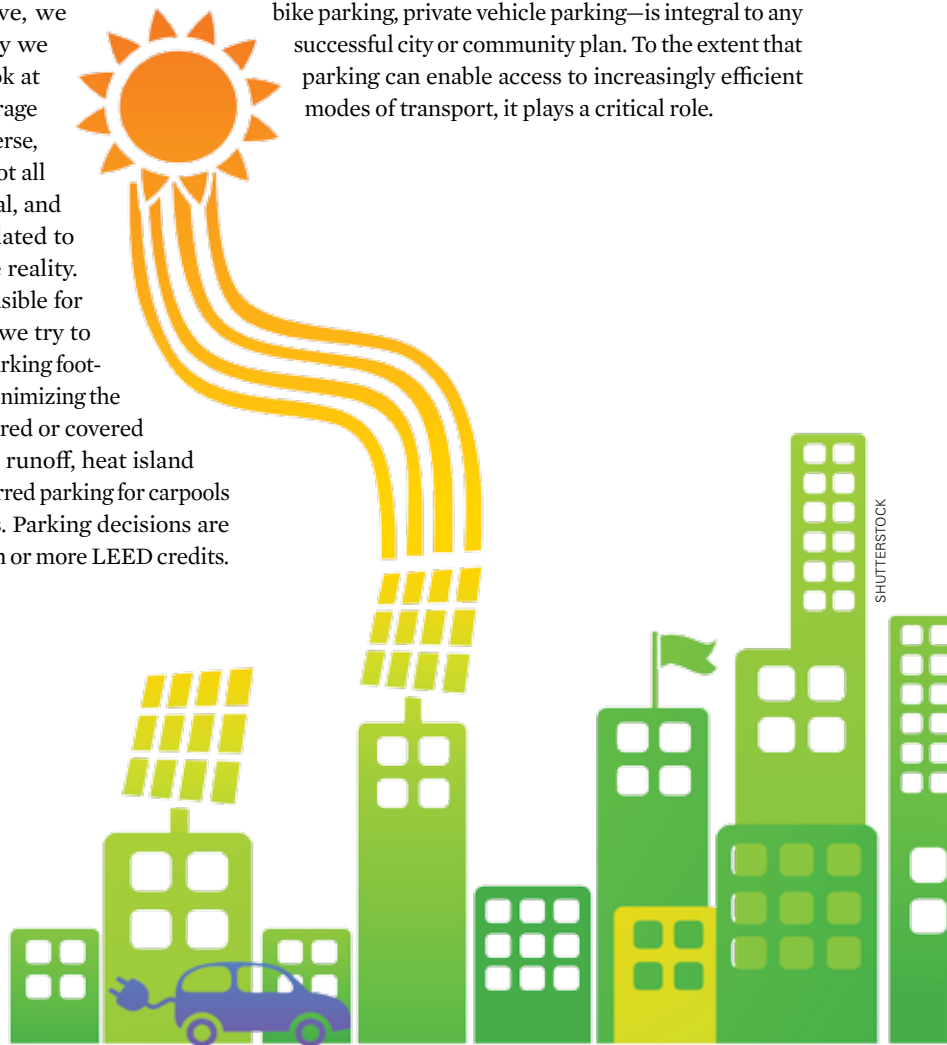
TPP: Your worst?

BO: Does 95 South Friday before a holiday weekend count?

TPP: How do you see parking and transportation as contributors to increasing sustainability?

BO: There isn't a major piece of the built environment that isn't crucial to the success of the overall system, but transportation occupies a place that's unique. The average American's carbon footprint is dominated by transportation-related fuel consumption. The best plans for new cities and communities and transformation of existing ones, in my opinion, take an integrated approach to all modes of transport—walking, cycling, buses, light rail, taxis/ride share, shared vehicles, privately owned vehicles. Parking in numerous forms—Zipcar parking, bike parking, private vehicle parking—is integral to any successful city or community plan. To the extent that parking can enable access to increasingly efficient modes of transport, it plays a critical role.

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SHUTTERSTOCK

TPP: You just hosted your annual event, Greenbuild. What was your experience?

BO: As always, it was amazing. New Orleans was an unbelievable venue for Greenbuild and the conference was, by all feedback I received, a huge success. We're in our own backyard in November 2015, and we expect Washington, D.C., to raise the ante yet again—hope you can join us!

TPP: We understand that the GBCI is going to undergo a transformation from the Green Building Certification Institute to the Green Business Certification Institute. Can you tell us more about that?

BO: During the course of the last 10 years, the market around green certifications of one kind or another grew exponentially. GBCI was established to professionalize and scale the work that USGBC was doing certifying projects with the LEED rating system and professionals with the LEED AP credential.

When GBCI was established in 2008, we invested heavily in developing infrastructure to support LEED. Our singular focus was speed-to-market transformation. We have been intentional about having core competency for certifying green buildings and communities. During the past three years, it's become apparent that there are both scale and economic efficiencies in partnering with other organizations to leverage the GBCI infrastructure further to accelerate our speed to market. Rather than have an organization whose mission is aligned with USGBC/GBCI have to go through the process of establishing its own systems, we're finding ways to partner and accelerate the rate at which work happens. Partnering is new leadership.

TPP: Now the GBCI will not only certify buildings under the LEED rating system but also other programs and rating systems. Can you share more about that? How will it work? Will parking be able to participate?

BO: We've recently formed partnerships with the International Well Building Institute to certify its WELL rating system, GRESB, and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) to leverage the infrastructure that GBCI has built over the last decade. We're helping establish project certification infrastructure that builds on GBCI's robust expertise. We've had preliminary discussions



with the parking industry that have been promising. Our goal is to deliver consistent quality and establish the highest level of integrity for green certifications in the marketplace.

TPP: And that includes the Green Parking Council (GPC). How do you see its Certified Green Garage Standard evolving with the support of the USGBC?

BO: We've known for years that LEED in its current iteration isn't the right measurement metric to assess parking structures. The emergence of the Certified Green Garage Standard is part of a larger trend we're seeing for different market sectors to leverage the market transformation template LEED established. I'd like to see the Certified Green Garage Standard begin to incorporate the environmental, social, and economic prioritization process we use to establish priorities in LEED and I'm hopeful we'll have an opportunity to collaborate with the GPC in doing exactly that.

TPP: What would you like to see happen in the parking industry?

BO: I'm hardly a parking futurist, so I think I'll leave specific answers to this question to the true professionals in this field, but more integration with the other systems the parking industry connects into seems to be a productive path.

TPP: What advice would you give to parking owners, operators, and managers who are looking to make positive changes in their operations and facilities?

BO: Eliminating parking isn't something we can do. But, if we can reduce the number of parking spaces that need to be constructed and make those as green as possible, then we can start to make an impact. 