

# WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE HOMEBUILDER?



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There is no doubt that given a choice most consumers prefer environmentally friendly products. There are even independent polls that testify a homebuyer will pay more for green homes and amenities. What remains to be seen is whether consumers will put their money behind their polling.

It's still too early in the market transformation curve to know how much more the public will actually pay for green homes. Across the boards, the price for everything that goes into building a home is escalating. This trend makes it problematic for builders to take on the potential, additional costs of building green. The good news is there are many benefits from green development that can offset additional expenses and overall cost. The major benefits green homebuilding can bring to the homebuilding industry include:

- Preemptive government control
- Improved Public Relations
- Early entrance into the learning curve
- Reduction of increasingly expensive waste removal
- Marketing differentiation
- Shortened municipality approval period
- Reduced liability exposure

The return on investments provided by each of these points is difficult to qualify, however the benefits are undeniable.

**Government controls:** These can critically affect the efficiencies inherent to the private sector. It is imperative that the HBA develops private sector green standards that will benefit the environment and pre-empt potentially crippling government management of the homebuilding industry.

**Public relations:** While public perception does not affect cost, it is important to business development. Generally, builders are viewed as enemies of the environment gobbling up farm and forest to pump out profit. The public needs to understand that developers live within their communities too and want a clean, safe environment for ourselves, and more importantly, our children.

**Learning curve:** Many states and the Federal governments are now requiring green building. It's better to get on board now and learn the various systems before the competition gets a "leg up" and takes away the local market share.

**Waste removal reduction:** There is no land left to expand landfills and tipping fees are skyrocketing. Because of this many disposal firms have seen the light and entered the green industry from the commercial side. They will end up taking most, if not all of the work out of residential site waste separation. The homebuilder will only need to contact the correct waste vendor who will supply a 'green' roll-off. The vendor then takes care of the rest.

**Marketing differentiation:** Green homes are actually High Performance Homes. High Performance connotes better quality and better quality produces bigger profits. Builders that market their homes as High Performance will find themselves at the top of the food chain, right where they want to be.

**Shortened approval process:** Municipality reviews can take years. Green designed communities address many of the issues that slow this process such as increased open space, reduced storm water runoff, and minimized utility loads. In addition, green design techniques appeal to the neighbors and individuals that make up the various municipal review boards. Less resistance at hearings and reviews is always a good thing.

**Reduced liability:** One major focus of green design is indoor air quality. Many of the design and construction techniques provide a safer indoor environment by reducing moisture infiltration and the potential for mold. Ultimately, risk reduction translates to lower costs and secured profits.

The benefits of building green can be achieved through the creation of a residential green guidelines program that will make it simple for a builder to follow. To that end, the Bucks-Mont HBA is currently developing its own BuiltGreen program based upon a set of criteria issued by the NAHB (National Association of Homebuilders). The challenge for the HBA is to establish a comprehensive program that has high standards and yet is relatively easy to understand, follow, and fulfill. The program must have real "teeth" if it is to be taken seriously by the public and municipal leaders.

The demand for green is here. It's time to meet the challenge with the right leadership, motivation, and tools.



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