

DC Sustainable Energy Utility – Now Open for Business

by J. Michael Holland

By now everyone has become familiar with the Clean and Affordable Energy Act of 2008, the program that made benchmarking and reporting a building's energy efficiency mandatory in the District. Under this Act, all public buildings over 100,000 square feet (the final phase 50,000 square foot requirement kicks in next year) will be required to report their Energy Star scores, with the results becoming public for the first time next year on the DC-DOE website. However, a less publicized part of the Act may be of particular interest to building Owners, Designers and Contractors who are looking to make energy improvements to existing properties or who need guidance when weighing the relative merits of different MEP options for new projects.

In addition to mandating the energy benchmarking, the 2008 Act also called for the creation of a non-profit independent company, whose mission is to help District households and businesses save money and energy. This company, the District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DC SEU) is open for business and they are anxious to get the word out. Here's the best part – the services DC SEU provides, which are designed to benefit the District as a whole and thus are funded by DC ratepayers, are free to the public. They don't sell anything and they are not affiliated with any particular utility company, so the consulting advice they provide is theoretically unbiased.

So just what can the DC SEU do for you? The full answer to that question depends on your specific needs, but potentially...lots! While the company is still in its nascent stage, their goals for the future are quite ambitious. What they provide is determined as much by the needs of their clients as it is by the current programs they have in place. They have resources – both money and minds – and are looking for new and effective ways to deploy those resources. In the past year alone (their first in existence), they've completed over 5,600 energy efficiency projects, including an extensive T12 replacement program, installation of 15 photovoltaic systems and a couple of commercial solar water heating systems. While they plan to continue with a number of their existing energy efficiency retrofit programs, they are very open to new ideas, new opportunities and new partners.

One of their primary services is acting as matchmaker, connecting local contractors with customers to work on energy efficiency projects. Small District-based contractors can apply to be included as "Preferred Contractors" for certain energy upgrade and retrofit programs run by DC SEU. Owners who select contractors from DC SEU's Preferred Contractors list are eligible for rebates for certain improvements they make. Training is also available for DC contractors who are interested in expanding their project expertise to include energy efficiency retrofits.

In addition to making connections between contractors and customers, the DC SEU can help owners and contractors find funding sources, tap into the network of incentives and rebates, and occasionally even provide free funding assistance to incentivize projects that would significantly reduce energy use throughout the District. Part of the DC SEU's mandate is to spend 30% of their budget on low-income multi-family housing improvements, so there are often opportunities for projects that fulfill this priority. Although applications for funding earmarked for low-income multi-family will be closed by the time this

goes to press, new opportunities will become available, so interested contractors and owners should visit their web site regularly to stay up to date on the projects DC SEU is promoting.

In addition to working with small contractors and owners on projects designed directly by DC SEU, they also work with much larger clients - commercial owners, universities, large tenants – who are trying to evaluate different energy-saving options as they look to build or renovate. For them, the DC SEU can provide broad technical assistance and advice that is unclouded by the agendas of any specific energy provider. Want straight answers on your payback timeline for certain energy investments? Wondering if geothermal energy is an option for your building site? Having trouble understanding the Energy Star score card required for reporting your building's energy efficiency? DC SEU is ready to help.

DC SEU's stated primary goals are to help DC tenants and owners save money, to reduce the energy use (particularly peak demand) throughout the city, and to stimulate the local economy with energy-saving projects. Whether you are looking for training, for expert analysis, for funding assistance or for job opportunities, they may be able to help. And again, thanks to the funding structure of the Clean and Affordable Energy Act of 2008, these services are provided without cost to you. If you want to know more, they have a full list of employment and contracting opportunities on their website – www.dcseu.com - or they can be reached by phone at 855-MY-DCSEU.



About the Author

J. Michael Holland is Vice President, Construction at Boston Properties, and has been with the firm for 12 years. He is responsible for over 3-million square feet of construction at Boston Properties, including the company's first LEED project which delivered in 2008, and has worked on LEED-NC, LEED-EB, LEED-C&S projects. Currently he is working on construction of Block 16 in Reston, Boston Properties' first LEED-Certified (Silver target) residential project in the DC region.