

What will green building cost?

The cost of green building can vary from project to project. The good news is that many green construction techniques are already part of the building code and therefore part of the basic costs of construction. Overall, as long as the green elements are incorporated from the very beginning, you have control over how much money you want to budget into your project.

Project Certification

If you choose to follow a certification program such as LEED for Homes, there will be a cost to register and certify your project, and a fee for the 3rd party verification. The amount varies for each program.

Most programs are points based which means there is some flexibility on which points you choose to pursue. For example, the costs associated with pursuing the points for waste management are minimal because the cost of taking materials to a recycling facility is comparable to the landfill. However, the cost for pursuing the points for using FSC certified wood is more significant because of the cost of the wood. Therefore you may choose to pursue waste management points but not FSC wood points. This strategy can be planned out before the project begins which is why it is so important to get the entire team (architect, contractor, subcontractors) on board from the start.

There may also be additional project management cost required by the contractor to complete the requirements of the program.

Testing

Tests or inspections (in addition to those required by the city or county) may be required. These tests measure things such as duct leakage or the tightness of the building envelope. Inspections by 3rd party raters ensure that program requirements are being met or that equipment is properly installed. If you are remodeling an existing home, you may want to have tests done before the construction begins to be able to accurately measure the amount of improvement. These tests are typically required when following a certification program, and recommended but not required otherwise.

Energy Systems and Equipment

If you choose to install a system such as solar panels, geothermal HVAC system, or water collection and storage, this will increase your design and construction budget as compared to a traditional system. However, these systems do offer some paybacks in long-term utility costs and possibly tax credits. It is up to you as the homeowner to weight the costs and benefits.

Product selection

There is an ever growing selection of green products and materials available. It is important to plan before construction begins which materials you will use. The costs vary as widely as the products. Some may be comparable in cost. For example, green countertop materials average around what granite would normally cost. However, we have found that in general, green products tend to be more expensive. For example, FSC wood tends to run \$3-4 more per piece than non-FSC wood.

The above guidelines are not all-inclusive, but should give you a fairly good idea of the cost analysis that goes into green building. The earlier the green strategy is mapped out, the better you will be able to budget the costs.