

Title: Greensburg plans to build to highest green standards
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GREENSBURG, Kan._Greensburg officials have officially voted to rebuild the town's tornado-ravaged city buildings using the highest national environmental standards for construction.

The Greensburg City Council voted Monday to build all city buildings to LEED Platinum standards, which is the top level of certification available from the U.S. Green Building Council.

LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a point-based building rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council in 2000. The projects use such features as using recycled building materials, alternative energy sources and water-conserving fixtures.

The small western Kansas town, which was mostly destroyed by a tornado on May 4, is believed to be the first town in the country to set that goal.

"We're not trying to make a statement to the world as much as to our citizens that, 'We guarantee you, we're going to build the best buildings we can to create a better quality of life for you,'" City Administrator Steve Hewitt said.

The LEED standards award points for projects that meet criteria in six categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality and innovation in design. The number of points the project earns determines whether the certification is certified, silver, gold or platinum.

It costs more to build LEED certified buildings, but they are generally cheaper to operate and maintain, while also being more energy- and water-efficient, healthier and safer for occupants, advocates say.

"I think it's a responsibility we have to our future generations as we build a better community," Hewitt said. "So that when the next generation and the generation after that comes, these facilities will be here and be strong."

San Jose, Calif., and Asheville, N.C., have passed resolutions requiring LEED certification for municipal projects larger than a certain square footage but did not require certification at the platinum level.

And in July, the governor of Florida issued an executive order requiring all new state buildings to strive for LEED platinum certification, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

Many green building advocates applauded Greensburg's decision.

Emily Andrews, coordinator for the St. Louis Regional Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, said many small towns don't think they have enough money for the initial costs of building or that there is too much to learn about environmentally friendly construction.

"There are a million excuses not to build green," Andrews said. "So, to see a smaller and rural municipality take that leadership position, it's indicative of the way we should all be thinking."

The resolution was Hewitt's idea but was supported from BNIM Architects, the firm hired to create Greensburg's Master Plan. The National Renewable Energy Lab also encouraged the city to pass the resolution.

The first project to be constructed to platinum standards will be the city's Business Incubator. Hewitt said state funds will help achieve the LEED certification.

Future LEED platinum city building projects include City Hall, the Big Well gift shop and tourism center and such community buildings as public works or parks facilities, said Stacy Barnes, Hewitt's administrative assistant.