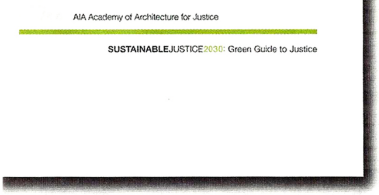
Sustainable Justice: A Systemic Approach

A Summary of the "Green Guide to Justice"



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Within justice facilities, issues such as 24-hr secure operations, specialized circulation patterns, technology constraints, and regulatory requirements present both a challenge and opportunity in the development and implementation of sustainable design, construction and operations practices. The justice system is implementing many innovations leading to a sustainable, effective, and relevant delivery of service, but progress is incremental and uncoordinated.

The Sustainable Justice Committee of the AIA Academy of Architecture for Justice (AAJ) developed the "Green Guide to Justice," (GGJ) which defines a vision for a comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable justice system and reached out to industry partners such as the National Association for Court Management (NACM) and the American Correctional Association (ACA), and the USGBC for engagement.

Similar to other green guides for education and health care facilities, the GGJ is designed to serve as a voluntary educational guide for early adopters of sustainable design, construction, and operations practices, and to encourage continuous improvement in the justice sector, continued leadership and higher levels of rigor associated with creating high performance justice environments.

A Systems Approach

The three primary areas where the justice system interacts with the citizens include: Law Enforcement; Courts; and Detention/Corrections. The fundamental principles of the sustainable justice mission and operational protocols for the justice system is to coordinate in a complementary way to serve a sustainable society in three scales:

- Scale of community: The purpose of the justice system is defined as protecting public safety by channeling deviant behavior into acceptable norms so that all citizens can have meaningful roles in their communities.
- Scale of building: The structures that house the justice system are sited, constructed, and operated to minimize resource consumption, and ultimately to create a net-positive impact on the community and the environment.
- Scale of individual experience: The physical needs, health, dignity, and human potential of all who come in contact with the justice system are respected and given the opportunity to flourish. This applies equally to staff, visitors, service providers and detainees.

Achieving sustainability requires "whole-systems thinking," meaning that individual pieces of the system cannot be optimized in isolation from one another. Each of these scales interacts and balances each other since implementation within the building must reference the community that it supports; likewise, one cannot appreciate the building without understanding the people for whom it is intended. The white paper proposes a holistic definition of sustainability that includes the building's relationship to the community and the well-being of the occupants during the lifetime of the building.

As many observers note, "The most sustainable building is the one that never gets built." Accordingly, sustainable justice systems must strive to develop more efficient operations that optimize their square footage, using their buildings to their best potential, taking into account:

- Information technology provides an electronic provision of services, especially in areas such as records and filing, allowing the amount of built-space formerly needed for these services to shrink dramatically.
- Many public communications can also be handled electronically; for example, jury assembly or the use of alternative dispute resolution in place of trials will greatly shrink or even eliminate space needs and associated costs.
- Alternatives to detention and incarceration such as bail adjustment, remote monitoring, problem-solving courts, or restorative justice programs will allow facility planners to ask, "How small a system can we operate?" rather than, "How many beds do we need?"

- A speedy time-to-trial program is quicker to deploy and operate than a jail expansion to house people awaiting trial—but the designers and operators of the jail must recognize their position within the justice system as a whole.
- Mobile, on-the-spot booking by police can reduce space needs for detention and allow officers to spend more time in the field, making operations more efficient overall.

Turning Principles into Practice

The GGJ has established a solid foundation for the development of sustainable justice beyond a group of ideas and advocates a new culture for justice architecture. Subsequent to the white paper release, the SJ Committee pursued a LEED Rating System for Justice Facilities, as has been developed for other building types, such as health care facilities, but found more success with the development of a custom methodology or scoring system to specifically evaluate justice facilities within the context of Sustainable Justice Principles.

The developed rating system is complementary to the LEED scoring system and uniquely expands the definition of sustainable environment stewardship and to specifically define sustainable design and operational solutions that reach far beyond materials, methods, and physical and earth energy resource conservation of physical plant construction and performance standards. Desired outcomes are established with this tool using metrics, reference standards, and resources, which reinforce the unique link public facilities have with a successfully sustainable community and society and provide planners, designers, owners, and facility operators specific examples for creating their own individual response to sustainable justice.

The Committee is also developing real "nuts-and-bolts" educational material specifically geared toward facility owners and operators that focuses on viable implementation of specific sustainable principles, metrics, and measurable outcomes for design and operational solutions using precedent gleaned from successful justice facility design and operation across the country.

Each year, the sustainable justice advocacy endeavors to engage partners in the justice industry in an interactive Sustainable Justice workshop at our national AAJ conference. This year, the workshop will explore the advancement and application of sustainable principles for justice facilities with continued commitment to stakeholder education and owner out-

*See **Green Guide**, page 59* ➡