

## GREEN BUILDINGS

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# Is Blue the new “Green?”

## Blue Roofs gaining ground

By this point in time, it’s safe to say most people are somewhat familiar with many of the “green” construction technologies that have become de rigueur in today’s development climate. A few years back, a developer looking to incorporate green technologies into a construction project



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could anticipate a certain level of push back from a municipality. (“You want to plant what on your roof?”). Today, municipalities are actively seeking to incorporate green technologies into their ordinances and – with each new iteration – the International Building Codes step ever closer to mandating a certain level of “green” in new construction projects. Add to that the newest stormwater regulations being discussed at state and federal levels – with their focus on eliminating stormwater discharge via mandatory low impact development, passive infiltration, and bio-filtration – and the message is clear: “green” is not going

anywhere.

And, despite a lot of initial worry that the “green revolution” was going to generate a flood of litigation as untested technologies failed and reality fell short of promises, by and large, these new technologies have been incorporated into traditional construction projects without too much angst. So, just as everyone was finally getting comfortable with “green,” along comes BLUE.

Blue roofs are steadily gaining ground as a creative way to address the ever-expanding plethora of stormwater mitigation requirements being imposed upon development projects. So, what exactly is a blue roof? A “blue roof” is any rooftop system which collects and stores rainwater on the roof, for controlled release at some later point in time. Blue roof systems vary widely (cisterns, open storage on the roof surface, storage within a cellular system built into the roof decking...if you can imagine it, someone can design and construct it). In addition to mitigating runoff, blue roofs can also serve dual purposes by irrigating green roofs and other vegetation, cooling the build-

ing/reducing hvac loads, and providing recreation opportunities.

For most designers, contractors, and owners, holding standing water on a roof is usually something to be avoided rather than encouraged. So, the concept of intentionally encouraging roof-top water retention is bound to give a lot of those same folks pause. In a “new construction” setting, the design, installation – and all important assignment of liability should these systems fail – should be relatively easy to manage. However, where these systems are proposed for retrofit of existing buildings to help meet new stormwater regulations (think, for example, redevelopment of the myriad of largely vacant shopping centers and office buildings smattering the landscape), designers, contractors, and owners would be advised to tread carefully and purposefully, lest they find themselves on the wrong end of this tidal wave.

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