

Media Clips

Los Angeles Times

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L.A. business leans green

5:34 PM, June 29, 2009

Representatives of more than 500 businesses -- including solar panel installers, venture capitalists and green janitorial services -- crowded into the [Los Angeles Business Council's](#) Sustainability Summit at the Getty Museum today, attesting to a growing surge of corporate interest in save-the-planet issues.

Green-washing? Well, some of the interest may be attributable to image-building. But the message from business leaders on several panels was that conserving energy and conducting environmentally friendly business is good for the bottom line.

Kevin L. Ratner, president of Forest City Residential West, a unit of the \$10.9-billion Forest City development firm, acknowledged that building structures to meet the [U.S. Green Building Council's](#) standards of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) can add 1% to 2% to construction costs -- or up to 5% if one seeks the highest LEED "platinum" certification. But LEED buildings rent for 6% to 10% more, and tenants are less likely to leave, he said. Building green "enhances our public image and the image of those who occupy our buildings, and increases productivity of the occupiers.... It also saves you money."

With buildings responsible for 71% of electricity use nationwide, and 38% of planet-heating carbon dioxide emissions, it was no wonder that much of the summit focused on the built environment. Joseph Pettus, senior vice president of Safeway Inc., which owns Vons groceries, boasted that "we are putting solar panels on our roofs as fast as we can." He added that the company on Jan. 1 converted its fleet of vehicles to B20, a biodiesel fuel blend, but recently suspended the experiment "to take a look at it."

Michael Mahdesian, chairman of the Culver City janitorial firm, Servicon Systems, said using cleaning products that are less toxic, thus improving indoor air quality, can boost the points leading to a LEED certification by 26%. His firm, which cleans 70 million square feet a day in hospitals, aerospace factories and high rises, cleans "completely green," he said. "There are chemicals that are less harmful but can get the same job done.... We limit the use of water and chemicals.... We use paper that is post-consumer recycled." And even a small issue such as providing doorway mats will limit the dirt and moisture tracked into buildings, and limit inside air pollutants, he said.

Government officials and nonprofit executives were also on hand to highlight their initiatives, many of which involve creating "green jobs." Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, acknowledging that Los Angeles started "way behind" such cities as Chicago and Seattle, said the city now has "the [toughest green building ordinance](#) in the United States" (San Francisco might beg to differ), is using the same amount of water it did in 1970 and will obtain 325% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020. Larry Eisenberg, facilities director for the [Los Angeles Community College District](#), noted that the price of solar energy has dropped by half, and described how his college system is "rapidly headed toward climate neutrality."

David Nahai, chief executive and general manager of the L.A. Department of Water and Power, the nation's largest municipal utility, said [his program](#) had bestowed rebates for efficient lighting on 40,000 businesses. An office building in Century City, he said, replaced all its urinals with waterless models free because of DWP rebates, and it has saved a lot of money on water bills.

But government cuts both ways. Ken Lewis, president of the architecture firm AC Martin Partners, said the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which requires new projects to analyze their impacts, has "become an impediment to sustainable development. Anyone with \$45 can take [a project] to court" and challenge its impact statement. An Oregon firm, known for its green building and whose target is LEED gold, one of the strictest standards, won't work in California, he said, "because of the litigious nature" of California's projects, as opposed to Oregon's.

Angelenos, noted Richard Katz, a board member of the county Metropolitan Transportation Authority, want the convenience of mass transit -- say two blocks from their homes. But the irony is, they don't want it in their backyard -- and that backyard, as they see it, can extend to more than three blocks from their homes, he remarked.

Los Angeles Times



Villaraigosa sheds light on second-term plan, touts 'Solar L.A.' to business group

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Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa will officially lay out his plans for the next four years in his inaugural address Wednesday. But he dropped a few hints in his speech today at the Los Angeles Business Council's 2009 Sustainability Summit – vowing to “recreate L.A. as the CleanTech, green manufacturing center” of the world.

“This clean-tech future is ours,” said Villaraigosa, who announced last week that he would not run for governor and would instead focus on completing his agenda in Los Angeles. “It is time that we create that new economy, that we center it here in the capital city of the Pacific Rim, that we join business, labor, institutions of higher learning, city, county, all of the public institutions and really reinvent L.A., really begin to put our stamp on the future economy, the green economy here in L.A.”

The mayor said Los Angeles had been “late to the game” in its environmental agenda – chasing cities including Austin, Chicago and Seattle. Although he touted the city’s progress toward drawing more energy from renewable sources, its water conservation efforts and the retrofitting of city buildings to make them more energy efficient, he said efforts so far had been a “pittance” compared to what could be done.

Villaraigosa signaled that a major focus this year will be building public support for his plan to draw more of the city’s power from solar energy. The mayor said the narrow failure of the solar energy initiative he backed in the March election – which would have installed 400 megawatts of DWP-owned solar panels throughout the city by 2014 – had not dampened his resolve.

Speaking at the Getty Center, Villaraigosa acknowledged that the voters of Los Angeles “had some concerns.” “So we’re going back out,” he said. “We’re not going to allow an election to impede the future, to impede what we have to do in the city.”

The mayor called the “Solar L.A.” plan “a commitment to Angelenos that the Department of Water and Power will install over 1200 megawatts of solar power over the next five years, ensuring that we become a solar powerhouse.”

-- Maeve Reston at L.A. City Hall

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/06/villaraigosa-sheds-light-on-secondterm-plan-as-he-talks-to-business-group-of-a-solar-la.html>