



Downtown going green but city lags nationally

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By Rune Wriedt Larsen



Office buildings in Centretown have become more environmentally friendly over the last year, a new report says.

The number of business and government offices complying with green standards in Ottawa's downtown core nearly doubled from 17 in the beginning of last year to 30 by the end of September this year.

The number of green offices in the entire city grew from 51 to 62, according to the report published by real estate firm Cushman and Wakefield Ottawa.

"In the real estate sector, what we see is that occupiers in office buildings are demanding sustainability," says James McNeil, associate vice-president of Cushman and Wakefield, who was responsible for the report.

"What it really comes down to is supply and demand – if my customers say sustainability is important in their decision to occupy, then I as a building owner need to react to that."

At Ecology Ottawa, one of the largest green grassroots organizations in Ottawa, policy co-ordinator Trevor Haché says he sees "some progress" in attempts by business and government to be more sustainable.

But he doesn't think 62 green office buildings in total in Ottawa is nearly enough.

"There are some good examples of office buildings, but there is tremendous room for improvement," Haché says.

"From an economic point of view it just makes so much sense for property owners to be serious about energy conservation. We are talking about the potential to save the local economy hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars a year if we were serious about this."

According to a report published by the City of Ottawa, more than 57 per cent of the city's greenhouse gas emissions in 2008 came from buildings.

While Haché says the city has made some progress on its own buildings, he thinks the rest of the community is lagging.

"At the moment, I wouldn't say Ottawa is a leader," he says. "There's a huge potential to save home owners and businesses money, increase property values and give our fair share to fight catastrophic climate change."

McNeil says Ottawa is being outdone by the likes of Toronto, Vancouver, and Washington, D.C.

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- Sept. 7**
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“Other cities are doing a much better job, frankly,” he says. “The world is moving toward sustainability and Ottawa is being left behind.”

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As the federal government is moving offices out of the city centre, McNeil says he believes sustainable office buildings will be increasingly important in the attempt to attract new companies to fill the holes.

“We can use it to attract leading industry to this city,” says McNeil.

“But it is not only about commerce. It’s also about making a more liveable city.”

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