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ENVIRONMENTAL / GREEN BUILDING

Greening the MLS

by Elizabeth DiSalvo on Mar 11, 2015 • 6:11 pm

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How much is your house worth? In many cases, the decision to “go green” is based purely on finances. As an architect who specializes in making homes more energy-efficient and sustainable, the biggest question I get is, “What is my ROI?”

Return on investment is important. Most of the things we recommend to homeowners are financially well worth it. It is true that a few things have a long payback period, but sometimes people feel these changes are worth it because of health, happiness or comfort reasons. In other words, some things are not about the money.

When people ask me what the ROI on the insulation in their walls or on their solar panels is, I tell them as best I can in quantifiable estimates, and usually the answer is between three and 10 years. But I often respond with questions of my own: “What is the ROI on your Italian granite countertop? What is the ROI on your home theater equipment? How about the wool wall-to-wall carpeting?” Often the answer is a blank stare.

There is not a quantifiable and simple answer for these luxuries. Products like this do up the resale value of your home, but it may not be a direct relationship and you certainly can’t predict the payback you will get for installing a beautiful countertop (after all, the next owner may appreciate its worth but hate the color and rip it out the day after moving in), but there is some value to these intangible items.

So if these things have resale value, shouldn’t the items that give true, quantifiable results? For many years, one of the primary goals of the green building movement has been to “green the MLS.” What does this mean? The MLS(Multiple Listing Service) is one of the primary tools of the real estate market for assessing and presenting homes for sale. Approximately 90% of homes bought and sold in America go through the MLS.

What does the MLS tell you about a home when you look at a listing? It tells you the square footage, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, size of lot, school system, taxes, and basic information about utilities.

What doesn’t the MLS tell you? It doesn’t tell you the annual heating and cooling bills or the average electric and water usage. It does not tell you the life expectancy of the paint job or the R value of the insulation. It doesn’t let you know how prone the roof is to ice dams, or if there tend to be a lot of critter infestations.

You know what taxes will be per year, but do you know the heating and cooling costs? Sometimes they add up to a lot more than the taxes. Wouldn’t you rather buy a house that costs you almost nothing to heat and cool and needs very little maintenance? Next time you’re shopping for a house, ask if there are any green ones available.



A new home in New Canaan achieves near net zero energy usage through solar panels combined with a very low electrically supplied heating and cooling load.