

## **AIA Materials Matter Just Do It: Strategies for Projects Session 4 write-up, by Louisa Gaylord**

AIA Seattle's continuing education series Materials Matters introduces a new approach to sustainable building, one that is necessary to creating better built environments from the ground up. A net zero energy is only the first step in a built community that will grow and depend on each other like a thriving ecosystem. "You can't be healthy until there is complete social wellbeing," says Max Richter, co-director of the Materials Performance Lab at Perkins + Will. "You can't be an island of health." The building industry is still exploring what's possible – structurally, aesthetically and financially – when it comes to planning, constructing and operating a truly sustainable project. The fourth session of Materials Matters focuses on how to apply the practices we've learned on a much larger scale.

How can we determine something is healthy by looking at it? By taking a critical look at what it's made of, the materials and parts that go into constructing it. Max Richter emphasizes that our actions now will have a critical impact on the future of climate change and our planet. "We can't do 'less bad,' we have to have a positive impact." Technology and manufacturing from the industrial revolution, particularly plastics, are still being widely used without knowing the full health impacts. It's estimated that people in North America spend 90% of their time indoors – if we put nutrition labels on food because we eat it, why shouldn't we put chemical labels on building materials because we breathe it?

The format of "Strategies for Projects" differed from the previous three sessions: a panel of six industry professionals, representing various perspectives of a building's stakeholders, was assembled to answer questions and spark discussion. The topic of health product declarations (HPD) came up, and whether manufacturers would be reluctant to disclose their secret ingredients to the public and their competition. "As much as there is competition, we are all working in the same space," says Jacob Boyer, regional manager of PROSOCO. HPDs benefit everyone, and industry demand plays a large part. When collaborating with manufacturers to get a materials list, "be agile and persistent," recommends Stacy Smedley, Director of Sustainability at Skanska.

David Walsh of Sellen Construction explained how to make the most impact on a project with the resources you have. When Sellen worked with Sound Transit on the ST3 expansion, the smallest changes in the process could have a big impact in the final outcome. "The test data in the lab and the test data onsite are very different," David says. "Don't be aspirational, incent it and make it happen."

The Materials Matters attendees left with manageable everyday ways to practice ensuring that their buildings are healthy and environmentally responsible in both the short- and long-term. Brad Benke, AIA says that he plans to implement what he's learned "Through various office presentations and work sessions," as well as "starting a group in our office for continuing development of materials research." Chris Helstern of Miller Hull sums it up nicely: "We all have a dialogue together, and we share the information we've found with each other."