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Board Plan May Be First Step in Launch of Building Security Council

By Mark Fitzgerald

On April 14—less than a year after ASCE’s Building Security Council Task Committee was appointed by the Board of Direction to evaluate the viability of an auxiliary entity aimed at promoting building security and public safety—the board approved a business plan that would authorize the Society to invest approximately \$700,000 to set up what would be called the Business Security Council (BSC). The investment is contingent on establishing market feasibility for building security ventures as well as securing indemnity (as provided for in the Support Anti-terrorism by Fostering Effective Technologies Act of 2002, or SAFETY act) for technologies employed to protect buildings from terrorist attacks.

According to the business plan, which outlines the formation and development of the BSC for the first five years, “The new organization will establish rating systems for building security that model the highly-successful Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating systems for building sustainability developed by the United States Green Building Council.” And just as the Green Building Council recognizes design professionals for their adherence to the principles of sustainable design, the BSC would certify design professionals for their adherence to security criteria. Given the wide applicability of its mission to a variety of fields and disciplines, the BSC would be expected to engage numerous ASCE entities, namely, the Architectural Engineering Institute, the Construction Institute, the Structural Engineering Institute, The Infrastructure Security Partnership, Civil Engineering Certification, Incorporated, the

Critical Infrastructure Response Initiative, and the Civil Engineering Research Foundation (CERF).

“We believe that the BSC has to be a multi-disciplinary entity,” explains Michael G. Goode, P.E., the vice president and director of CERF’s Industry Programs and the interim director of the BSC initiative. “So we’ll need mechanical and electrical and chemical engineers and other specialists because we’re looking at a rating system across an expansive scope of infrastructure that will involve many disciplines.” ASCE is also in the process of soliciting assistance from numerous federal agencies and outside organizations, including, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the General Services Administration, the National Institute of Building Sciences, the American Institute of Architects, and the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers.

“We’re already starting to see cooperation,” adds Goode. “We’ve sent invitations out asking to have representatives on the task committee to work with us, and there’s been implicit endorsement through a very strong interest expressed by key individuals who we’ve targeted; so they’re in the process of just checking up the chain right now before they agree to join officially.”

Although ASCE has sought political and professional support for the BSC, the task committee has recommended that the Society establish ownership and leadership of the Council by funding it internally. The plan proposes that “the BSC be a separate entity, like Civil Engineering Certification, Inc., because of the nature of its activities. Separating it from its parent organization will protect ASCE’s c(3) status and will provide ASCE with protection against lawsuits associated with appeals from building owners applying for ratings or design professionals applying for certification. The BSC will be located at the ASCE World Headquarters in Reston, Virginia and will pay ASCE for overhead expenses such as accounting and IT support, basic legal services, office space, copies, telephones, computers, et cetera.” By 2006, the task committee estimates that the BSC operations will require one full-time director and part-time administrative support, and that by 2010 the BSC’s revenue (a projected gross return of approximately \$2.5 million) will exceed ASCE’s total investment. In addition to boosting revenue, the implementation of the BSC is expected to extend ASCE’s influence and raise its status in the building community, advance collaboration, and educate members and increase membership and activities.

Despite the BSC’s unproven marketability, such leading indicators as the apparent need for a building security rating system, the system’s simple and flexible application—which is based on the successful LEED program—and the renowned professionals involved in its development suggest that the Council, if established, will do very well.

“There are some imponderables right now,” points out Goode. “We’ve engaged a market research firm that has expertise in the building security area to provide us with an independent perspective and do some direct polling, because there’s a need to exchange a

lot of information and get cogent answers from building owners and managers. But I think a lot of people would agree that the BSC has the potential for a stratification that will be driven by ratings, and that it's very logical (as you can see with the LEED program) that owners will adopt the system and want to invest some additional funds to secure this rating."

The ultimate fate of the BSC—indeed, whether or not it is even established—will be determined after the committee presents its findings on marketability and indemnification to the Board of Direction in October at ASCE's annual conference in Los Angeles. "My gut feeling is that there is a strong market for this rating system," Goode adds. "Because of the vulnerability assessment work that's being done, consciousness about this issue is prevalent and there's been a lot of discussion, but I think we have resolved that there are certain investments that are appropriate in designing new buildings that accommodate human habitation and that can actually benefit from enhanced security against many hazards; not just terrorist attacks, but disasters like earthquakes or floods, or even more intrinsic dangers, like disgruntled employees or out-of-hand picketers."