

Habitat for Humanity: New, Energy-Efficient Headquarters with Bigger, Brighter Space



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MARY SCHUMACHER
Chief Operating Officer,
Habitat for Humanity

In the world of affordable housing, many decisions make good business sense. Energy efficiency is one of them.

When Habitat for Humanity, known for building and repairing more than 2,700 homes for income-qualified families over the last 25 years, needed a new office space, they knew they’d build efficiency right into it.

“Energy efficiency is a core value for us and it’s part of what makes these homes affordable for our home buyers, says Mary Schumacher, Chief Operating Officer. “We decided to shoot for LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, certification as long as we could afford it.”

They assembled a team, including the architect, general contractor and Xcel Energy, and set out to save energy, build sustainably and create a beautiful, spacious new headquarters.

Tough choices, vast improvements

It wasn’t hard to improve on the old headquarters. They previously worked from a cramped warehouse in southeast Minneapolis with little natural light, insufficient parking and poor plumbing. This time they wanted a bright, new space that welcomed both clients and volunteers who come in every day.

At the suggestion of the architect, they went through Xcel Energy’s Energy Design Assistance program which is an integrated design process that uses energy modeling to evaluate different energy efficiency strategies and predict energy savings.

They started looking at things that would cost more money upfront but ultimately save money, and then made choices based on payback terms. As part of the program, Xcel Energy offers rebates to offset the cost of the more efficient equipment.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Location	University Avenue, St. Paul
Project	Energy Design Assistance
Xcel Energy rebate	\$16,774
Estimated annual energy savings	83,237 kWh electric and 449 Dth in gas savings
Estimated annual cost savings	\$11,500

“We have a tight budget as a nonprofit, so it was nice to look at exactly how much money we could save by implementing certain things,” says Schumacher. “Plus, we had to raise the money for the building so every dollar spent was a dollar we had to go out and get. We needed a breakdown on investments to make choices.”

They chose extra insulation and got creative with the windows, using high-efficiency residential windows so the space wouldn’t look too commercial. They chose LED lighting both for efficiency and fun: it made an architectural statement and brightened up the space.

Schumacher says they were able to get funding for certain parts of the project, like the higher efficiency but higher cost HVAC system. “We could show the funder how much less energy we’d be using, how quickly it would pay for itself in savings and tangibly show what we were trying to achieve. It really helped us with funding.”

Finally, a seemingly simple measure provided significant savings. They installed motion sensors everywhere they could: in offices, conference rooms, storage areas, bathrooms, the reception area, the pantry and even in the data/server room.

With the tough choices made and the planning process over, it was time to build.

Bigger, brighter and so much better

The new 28,000 square foot, three story building is full of beautiful features. Huge windows face the street; and inside, rocking chairs and a fireplace provide a kind of living room for Habitat clients. There’s also meeting rooms for individuals, small and large groups, a kids’ play area, and plenty of space for the 125 staffers on the second and third floors.

Other fun details includes a front desk made from an oak tree that came from a Habitat property; a wall covered with donated fabric swatches arranged in quilted patches; and the fireplace brick salvaged from the low-lying building that formerly inhabited the property.

“It’s fantastic,” says Schumacher. “One of our favorite features is all of the natural light coming in the windows every day. Often times we don’t even turn on the lights so it helps us save energy.”

Schumacher says the old building was roughly the same square footage, so they can easily compare energy costs. To top it all off, they achieved their ultimate energy goal: the building achieved LEED Silver certification.

Part of the big picture

The new Habitat headquarters is a shining example of new construction along the recently completed light rail project—aptly named the “Green Line”—that runs between the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Proximity to mass transit like the light rail and city busses was key for clients who may not have a car.

It also lies along the Energy Innovation Corridor, a first-of-its-kind, clean energy and transportation model. Many energy efficiency projects and sustainable efforts are in the works within this community. Habitat for Humanity is happy to be one of them.

“This new building will help us with the ongoing training and education of our clients,” says Schumacher. “A big part of affordability in home building is energy usage and now we’re leading by example and teaching others to do the same.”

EFFICIENCY HIGHLIGHTS	
Measure	% Total Savings
Choosing energy-efficient heating and cooling systems, including CO ₂ control of outside air	Over 35%
Incorporating energy-efficient lighting design and installing occupancy sensors throughout the building	Nearly 25%
Installing additional insulation and high-efficiency windows	Nearly 20%



For more information about Xcel Energy’s efficiency and rebate programs, contact your Xcel Energy account manager or an energy efficiency specialist at the Business Solutions Center by calling 1-855-839-8862, emailing energyefficiency@xcelenergy.com or visiting xcelenergy.com/EDAMN.