

Portland federal building gets \$133M green upgrade

US: Greening federal properties is key to recovery

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PORLAND, Ore. -- The largest stimulus-funded project in Oregon will create about 3,250 new jobs at a price tag of about \$133 million.

Downtown Portland's 18-story Edith Green/Wendell Wyatt Federal Building has been awarded a green makeover and could become a national model for large scale, environmentally conscious construction, according to the federal government.



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Green Wendell Building will be a lot greener with \$133 million stimulus, the U.S. government contends.

As Ann Forest

Burns walked by it on Tuesday, though, she noted how much the renovation would cost and how that money could be better spent, in her opinion.

"I'd rather it went into housing," said the Portland tax payer. "It would seem to me that \$133 million could be used in a lot of ways that would more directly stimulate the economy."

Not so, says the federal government. The 24-year-old building's green facelift is the solution to economic recovery.

Green fins running up and down the building will help reflect or absorb light, depending on the season.

"(It's) the solution not only to the economic recovery of the United States but also to the greening and energy efficiency that this opportunity presents us," said Robin Graf with the U.S. General Services Administration.

The Green/Wyatt Building occupies a full block of downtown's business district and is named after former Oregon Reps. Edith Green and Wendell Wyatt.

Kenneth Morgan, leader for Laborers' Local 296 Union, sees it as a massive employment opportunity.

"I have a lot of people out of work and we need to work," he said.

About 30 percent of the trade union's 1,000 members are unemployed, according to Morgan.

After losing work on the halted Park Avenue West skyscraper downtown earlier this year, getting a piece of the 3,250 jobs projected for the Green/Wyatt project is crucial for laborers.

"It's going to be a big plus for our union in there if we can get some of that work," Morgan added.

The renovation will also help commercial real estate downtown. Green/Wyatt tenants like the IRS, Veterans Administration and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden must move out during the upgrades. They'll need a place to operate.

"We are looking to move into approximately 265,000 square feet of lease space in the Portland market during this project," said the GSA's Darin Frost.

The government admits \$133 million sounds like a lot of money. But it's confident the payoff for extending the life of this flagship federal building is worth that amount.

Coincidentally, a redesign of the Green/Wyatt federal building has been shelved for two years.

It was resurrected as a shovel-ready project when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was passed by Congress, federal officials said.

More than \$4 billion of stimulus funds has been slated for "high performance green building modernization and improvement," according to the GSA. Another Portland building, the Bonneville Power Administration Building, was slated to receive some \$6.6 million in stimulus funds.