

Silicon Valley Business Journal Structures Awards 2015: 415 N. Mathilda is the Gren Project of the Year Winner - Silicon Valley Business Journal

When Sharp Development Co. completed an ultra-green rehab on a decades-old tilt up in Sunnyvale last year, there was so much tenant demand that the developer decided to double down on the concept.

So Sharp snapped up a two-story, 33,750-square-foot former athletic club at 415 N. Mathilda Ave., then spent nine months transforming it into an award-winning and zero net energy Class A office space. A tenant came quickly: Payment solutions tech company Clover.



Kevin Bates, president of Sharp Development Company Inc., and Ken Huesby, president of... [more](#)

Vicki Thompson

Sharp's success is significant because it validates the notion that doing ambitious, net-zero projects can pencil out for speculative development, industry observers say. Sharp and its team's approach are already gaining attention beyond Silicon Valley, with state officials eager to learn from its experience in hopes of getting others to imitate it — the sincerest form of flattery.

The sustainable rehabilitation of 415 Mathilda dovetailed nicely with tech tenants' growing interest in sustainable spaces — something that contributed to its success in the marketplace.

The new project at 415 Mathilda is both a sequel to the initial project at 435 Indio Way, and a different animal altogether, with the team learning new things about how to best renovate a building constructed for a different era.

“There were some materials that took us six months to figure out how to integrate well with Indio that we were able to implement immediately on 415 Mathilda, but this building has a lot more structural work,” said [Kevin Bates](#), president of Sharp Development.

Similar to 435 Indio, the Mathilda project features a dynamic sensory system that monitors the environment inside and outside the building and automatically adjusts changes in temperature, air quality and sunlight. But rehabbing the existing building at 415 Mathilda posed a bigger challenge.

For starters, architects had to add 86 new windows to the formerly windowless racquetball facility. About 43 percent of the wall area is now made of glass. Sharp is using View Dynamic Glass, which automatically tints to keep heat out.

“We basically turned the building into Swiss cheese,” said [Ken Huesby](#), president and CEO of Hillhouse Construction, the general contractor on both Sharp projects. “Taking a building like this, which in comparison to a building like Indio has such architectural restrictions, can make the average retrofit twice the price.”

Still, the Mathilda project is praised as a cost-effective ZNE project by the California Energy Commission, which awarded the project a \$1.5 million grant in exchange for sharing its strategies as a model for ZNE renovation strategies. The total project cost is estimated at about \$7 million, Huesby said.

“Some buildings cost three times as much as ours and are less energy efficient,” Bates said. “The whole thing we’re doing here that I think people have missed before, is that we’re taking a holistic approach to sustainability: We’re not looking at the payback of an initial product, but rather of the whole project. The result is a net-zero project that’s economical and something you can duplicate.”

Other sustainable features on the Mathilda project include solar panels, a two-story-tall concrete “sheer wall” that provides passive cooling, a 600-square-foot living plant wall and a two-story daylight center atrium.

Though initial costs are higher, the benefits of a sustainable workplace benefit everyone involved.

“For one, it’s the right thing to do,” Bates said. “It’s also more profitable. As a developer in an environment where there is a strong demand for sustainable designs, you know this building is going to stay leased even when the market drops. And it’s what the current generation wants, both in terms of what employees want in a workplace and of what values companies want to integrate into their culture.”

415 N. Mathilda

- Developer: Sharp Development

- General contractor: Hillhouse Construction
- Architect: Studio G
- Consulting MEP: Integral Group
- Structural Engineer: SEI
- CEC Grant Facilitators: Taniguchi Landscape, VIEW Glass and Clark Street
- Living wall specialist: Habitat Horticulture
- Interior fans producer: Big Ass Solutions
- Brokers: Steve Clark of JLL represented the tenant, while Steve Horton and Kelly Yoder of Cushman & Wakefield represented the landlord.