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- Sustainable stewardship is the term used to define construction projects that meet two general standards.
- Many studies have also looked at the local economic benefits of renovation work which is typically more labor intensive than new construction leading to greater local job creation.



**Ann K. Dilcher, AIA, LEED AP** is the Managing Principal of Quinn Evan Architects Michigan Offices located in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Ann is a founding member of the Association for Preservation Technology Eastern Great Lakes Chapter and invites tradesmen, contractors, engineers, conservators, and architects with an interest in preservation to join us at our events (<http://www.aptgreatlakes.org/>).

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## Sustainable Stewardship

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Think of your community and a time it rallied around the construction of an art center or library or housing for seniors or offices. You know the activity supported by this building will benefit your community but you are standing at a crossroads. The choice is between renovating an existing building or tearing down a structure and building new. In the back of your mind are a number of thoughts: which is financially viable in the long run? Which will best help the community? What path is best for the environment? Sustainable stewardship focuses on these questions.

Sustainable stewardship is the term used to define construction projects that meet two general standards. First, the project must involve the renovation of an existing building so its energy footprint is reduced and the construction uses materials and practices that lessen the impact on the environment. Second, the renovation must provide a use for the building that contributes back to the community.

A comparative study on the environmental value of building reuse conducted by The Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation found that it can take between 10 to 80 years for a new energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction. The conclusion of the data driven report is that, "For those concerned with climate change and other environmental impacts, reusing an existing building and upgrading it to maximum efficiency is almost always the best option regardless of building type and climate." (The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011)

Many studies have also looked at the local economic benefits of renovation work which is typically more labor intensive than new construction leading to greater local job creation (Donovan Rypkema, 1994). For more information about how renovations create jobs, Investing in Michigan's Future: The Economic Benefits of Historic

Preservation is available at [www.mhpn.org](http://www.mhpn.org) and really dives into the data. But it was published in 2002 which means current total impact numbers are significantly higher. The report details job creation, tax benefits, and specific programs that support preservation.





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To be sustainable for the community, the critical factor is the building use. The renovation work has impacts for the local economy, but to be successful the function of the building must be sustainable, and the activities within must add value to the community. Can a building be renovated back to its original use as a theater, offices or retail store?

Or can it achieve new life as an art center, a restaurant, or housing? Can it provide social service support spaces needed by local residents or does it draw tourists and their dollars to the community? It is this focus on the value of the activity in the building that adds an important dimension that makes a rehabilitation project truly sustainable.

The recent conversion of the old Coast Guard Station in Frankfort Michigan into the Oliver Arts Center exemplifies the principals of sustainable stewardship. The local arts organization was considering constructing a new building for their programs when the opportunity arose to instead renovate the vacant former Coast Guard structure. Environmentally sustainable



features of the LEED Platinum renovation include: geothermal mechanical system, energy recovery system, insulation strategy for walls and roof, building finishes having high recycled content, and environmentally sensitive construction practices. The community stewardship impact has been seen in the huge expansion of classes, events, and visitors to the facility. The main gallery space has become a community gathering space be it for art shows, musical performances, benefit events, proms, weddings and more. Rather than a new building on an empty site, the community has become environmental stewards with the green renovation and social stewards by providing a new use to the building that sustains and enriches the community.