

Social Equity Through Green Buildings with LEED Fellow, Angi Rivera

Introduction ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to agree. Building matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals. Learn insight in green buildings as we interview today's experts in LEED and WELL. We'll learn from their career paths, war stories and all things green because green building matters and now our host and yes, he has every LEED and WELL credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti.

Charlie ([00:33](#)):

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Charlie ([01:01](#)):

Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the green building matters podcast. I have a ton of fun every week interviewing green building professionals from all over the world. Today, we have Angi Rivera, she's the managing director and a senior project manager with Green Shape, we'll learn more about the consulting firm in just a little bit. Angi, coming to us from the Seattle area. But of course, we'll learn about her time in DC, Angi, how are you doing today? , We're recording this in crazy 2020 amidst a pandemic and an election and a tree fell on my house last week with hurricane Zaida. It's okay. All things considered, let's get into the interview more about how you got into sustainability, but I always ask, where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Angi ([01:47](#)):

Well, I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri for the most part, with a short detour to LA and Charleston. But, for the most part, I was in St. Louis. I went to school, I started at LSU in Baton Rouge, and then I took a year to do a national exchange program to Virginia Tech and decided to stay there and finish out my architecture degree since it's five years, finish it out there. After working

for a couple of years in the DC area, I decided to go back to school for sustainable design and went to London with the architectural association to do environmental energy, which essentially, sustainable design and analysis degree.

Charlie ([02:35](#)):

Great schools. What first attracted you to LSU at the time.

Angi ([02:40](#)):

They had a good architecture school and I got a full ride, so it was free and I wanted to go to a big school far away from and get out of the Midwest, try something new. It provided me that opportunity and I learned a lot. I really enjoyed that architecture school, big, slightly smaller. You've got a lot of personal attention. It was a great experience.

Charlie ([03:07](#)):

Okay. So you, it sounds like you knew you might want to become an architect. So where did that influence come from?

Angi ([03:13](#)):

I think it's, since I was young, my parents, I always grew up in a house that was being perpetually renovated. My parents would buy an old house and redo it. So I never lived in a finished home until I got to college. My parents used to sit my brother and I down with graph paper in a room and say, okay, what should we do here? I always enjoyed that and also art and math were my two favorite subjects. So getting into architecture, it made complete sense. I got to use both of those.

Charlie ([03:44](#)):

That's fantastic. So LSU and then Virginia Tech went back and got an advanced degree. So what about sustainability with some of that in your coursework? Or was there a professor that influenced you? When did sustainability start popping up in your early career?

Angi ([04:01](#)):

So I've always been sort of geared towards that in my lifestyle recycling and being efficient, et cetera. So I've always had that mind per se, but in like the

first semester of third year, we had a course that we got to do the hand calculations for a design that we were doing to determine our energy demand. We also had to do different orientations and different design changes and see how that impacted our energy consumption for our proposed design that we were doing in our studio. I thought that was brilliant because I finally got to quantify how my designs were doing, how they were actually acting. It was more than just a sort of a feel good thing to do. It actually made sense.

Charlie ([04:55](#)):

Numbers. Made sense. That's a great course. Were there some other influences there early in your career, maybe some professors, someone's personal life, maybe early in your career that you might call a mentor?

Angi ([05:09](#)):

I've been incredibly lucky throughout my career. I think almost every single job I've had. I've had someone who was ready to teach and I was always open to absorbing that knowledge, but two Sheree Fellfar at Torti Gallus that was straight out of college. He always explained everything to me, why he was changing the details I did and valued my opinion to ask for my opinion at meetings and encouraged me to get my LEED AP back in 2003. So he always encouraged me, but then also my other one is Phil Garlic. When I worked in the UK for Scott Wilson, I got to help him build our sustainable construction team from three people, 12 people over about two years and just his approach to managing a team to how he dealt with tricky situations on projects or even internal politics and things. He always took the high road. He knew how to word things respectfully, which I think is missing quite often today, you can be forceful, but be respectful at the same time and he really had that. He taught me a lot. I really enjoyed that.

Charlie ([06:27](#)):

Wow, those are great mentors. I love not just the integrity there, Angi, but encouragement. I would wholeheartedly agree. I think a great mentor is always encouraging. So let's connect some of the dots on the career timeline. So you were over in the UK, tell us about some of that time with AECOM and URS. And then I guess they maybe brought you back to the

States to DC. So tell us about some of the work you were doing within the UK and then the transition back to the US.

Angi ([06:54](#)):

Yeah. So it was actually completely independent. Ironically enough, I started working, I got the job with Scott Wilson in the UK and I was a BREEME assessor or BREEME consultant. So BREEM is the sort of forerunner to LEED. It was the precursor to LEED and they were kind of ahead from the States as far as implementing a certification tool in their local authorities. They also redid their part L which is our ashtray equivalent. So that was with Scott Wilson. And then I moved back to the US and independently, got a job from URS. URS about eight months later purchased Scott Wilson. So I was now a part of my old team again, somewhat and got to work with them again. But yeah, so that was Scott Wilson. And then I worked with URS and then URS was purchased by AECOM a few years later.

Charlie ([07:53](#)):

Oh, thanks for connecting those dots tell me some more about AECOM and working at a really large firm. What was that like?

Angi ([08:04](#)):

Every size there's positives and negatives, I think I kind of got the best of both worlds in that I had the resources of a large global company. If we needed an expert, it was there. Like I could find that person I could search for that person. I could find them anywhere in the world and that was amazing. We got to work on some very large projects that don't always come to smaller firms, but then I had my team, which was part of the architecture team in a somewhat smaller office of about a hundred people. So my world wasn't overly corporate all the time, which was nice. Didn't always feel just like a number which can be intimidating in a large company like that.

Charlie ([08:51](#)):

Yeah, no, absolutely. I've worked with a pretty large medium and small, and now my own small businesses entrepreneurship. I want to talk about that with you in a minute, but tell us about Washington DC. The US Green Building Council is based there. I believe on your LinkedIn bio, you're pretty

active with the national capital region and probably also the national US GBC. So it was probably the right place to be connected with all the LEED movement.

Angi ([09:17](#)):

Oh, definitely. I mean, our office was two blocks from the headquarters, which was very convenient. It was easy to go in for a meeting or whatever as needed and really getting to know people at USGBC was sort of invaluable to both implementing projects and career wise. Rewarding doing the NCR community board, being able to really sort of wholeheartedly get involved in my local sustainability movement. I hadn't had that so much before in the UK. So that was a new experience and it was really beneficial.

Charlie ([09:57](#)):

No, it's all the listeners, it's just so important to get involved with your local chapter. Now tell us a little more about Green Shape and DC, and I believe a recent relocation to Seattle. Tell us about your company here.

Angi ([10:11](#)):

Sure. Yeah. So Green Shape, a woman owned. Iris Amdur started the company back in 2004. It was one of the first niche sustainability consultancy firms in the DC area and did the first platinum project in DC. The first platinum schools project globally will sort of a lot of firsts involved. She was very integral in the early on sustainability movement in DC, even at one point sort of sharing an office with US GBC before it was really big. So I've worked with Iris funnily enough. She was actually a subcontractor for me when I worked with URS and AECOM. I worked with her, we basically integrated our teams on several larger projects, like the architect of the capital's sustainability plan. We did Marsai sort of a whole new military base with Lee buildings together. And so we worked really well together. And then I joined Iris in 2016.

Charlie ([11:14](#)):

Okay. What are some of the projects you work on today at Green Shape?

Angi ([11:21](#)):

We started on an exciting project, the Yards Parcel F sort of this year, which has been really rewarding. They've been an amazing group, very ambitious sustainability goals and doing every level of analysis and sort of number crunching of impacts of daylight analysis and envelope and all the energy modeling you could possibly do for all the all different options, which has been very refreshing. We have a couple of projects that I first started when I just joined Green Shape, Our first, B4 project that we were contracted for at the Naval Academy, a cybersecurity, teaching facility, which has been fun. I enjoy doing buildings like these larger buildings, especially that have a lot of process loads and are complicated on campuses. Often in my past life at AECOM with Proctor and Gamble, doing international projects as well. Those complexities that we have, I like that we have those at Green Shape, even though we're a small company, we have a lot of different projects with all those different demands.

Charlie ([12:30](#)):

Can tell you like the technical side of it too. If you look back on your personal and career, I guess I should say, what's on the highlight reel, what really stands out. I should note to the audience here, you're a LEED Fellow. Congratulations on that. About five years ago, that's a huge deal, but tell us what that means for you and then what else is on the highlight reel when you look back?

Angi ([12:55](#)):

Well, one of my biggest highlights is the fact that I went to the UK and worked there. That experience was invaluable to me and has shaped me and really kickstarted me to knowing that I could do this as a career I saw there was, it was already so fully fledged out in the UK that I knew it could be here more so. I think some of the work that I did, AECOM, URS with Procter and Gamble was very incredibly rewarding, helping them to implement LEED on their high process, energy projects globally and help them roll that out with all of the different international teams on all kinds of projects. That was incredibly rewarding seeing that could be done when so many teams were saying no, we can't do thi and then being able to show them how,

Charlie ([13:52](#)):

No thank you for looking back. I think we don't look back on the highlight reel enough. Thank you for sharing that. My next question is looking forward though, what's around the corner? Angie, what should we be reading up on now? What's next in this sustainability green building movement?

Angi ([14:09](#)):

Well, I think there's definitely a focus on health and wellness and buildings, for sure. I mean beyond WELL but given the whole pandemic indoor air quality will be huge. Also with the social equity issues going on, there's a lot of discussion around that. I would like all of this, hopefully all of this gets everyone to think about it though, more as sustainability. I wish it wasn't always an add on, I wish it was more how we thought, and I hope that we can get to see it as a way of thinking that helps us. It helps include everybody. It helps us stay healthy, rather a hindrance. It's always been a sort of an uphill battle trying to convince everybody to do everything good for the environment, but maybe now it can be more of a good for all in my innate positive thinking. I would like to see that happen.

Charlie ([15:10](#)):

Oh, you're right. It just needs to be a lot more commonplace. I mean, you're, you're in the green building movement. I am too, but there's so many others that you're right. It doesn't need to be that, that big choice. It's just understood. Well, thank you for that. Let's talk a little more about you. What do you think is your specialty or gift?

Angi ([15:27](#)):

Yeah, I think it's my positive outlook. Not just in life, I think, but there's always thinking the best of others and always trying to show that front and encourage that from others. I think that everyone honestly wants to do what is right and what is good. Their right may not be yours, but I think we can all have a conversation around things. I think sometimes that's missing.

Charlie ([16:00](#)):

For the best in others and kind of default into, Hey, about that person I don't know is, is a really good person. So I love it. I love the positivity so far in our interview. Thank you. It's encouraging me. Angie, you've mentioned some things that aren't going on in society. We've got the healthy building

movement, but there's the social side of ESG. Is that an area that you think the green building movement is able to help even beyond affordable housing. Is there anything else on the social side that maybe someone listening is newer to, well, where does that fit into the green building movement? Could you speak to that for a minute?

Angi ([16:41](#)):

Yeah, sure a bit. I've been trying to educate myself on it particularly recently as well. Here in Washington, there've been several sort of Pacific Region and sort of podcasts or online events about it. Basically encouraging things like right now we have the whole get out to vote initiative, but it's also trying to get people to participate. We always have those community meetings. We have the planning initiatives, but then an entire voice is not being heard because either they're not active or they think they're not invited. Whatever that reason, part of our planning and part of our input process needs to include everyone. We need to also understand how we do gentrification of areas, but we need to be more sympathetic to how our developments impact an entire population of people that are currently living there beyond giving a small percentage of them the opportunity to remain there. We displace entire groups of people and it really shouldn't happen as it does now.

Charlie ([17:57](#)):

No, absolutely. Well, thank you for answering that question. We need to go learn more multiple sources here. Okay. Let's talk about good habits. Any rituals. Do you have any pro tips, good habits or rituals that you live by?

Angi ([18:14](#)):

I'm not very good at doing rituals. I must say that I do one, one sort of good habit. I do sort of swear by trying to not send a rash email, a quick email or a quick response, or even in meetings not to speak too quickly when my blood may boil because somebody is testing my temper. I find that today we are so quick to post and to comment. Everybody wants to be heard all the time, but sometimes it's advisable to sit back, write your email and not push that button immediately. I often write an email and I'll let it sit overnight. I'll read it again and make sure that what I wanted to communicate was being communicated. You need to have your right level of force, of course, but

you can be respectful in that. I always like to do that because I find that then people understand really what you're saying and where you're coming from, rather than just reacting to a tone that you may not have intended.

Charlie ([19:25](#)):

That's fantastic advice. I think we're usually too quick just to allow the ball back to someone else's court when maybe a well thought out the wording can almost solve the problem there. And I love it. That's a great tip. You mentioned that you really have been in sustainability for a long time. Not just recycling and composting, I'm sure, even in your household, you've got a lot of green practices, but anything else like exercise or meditation or getting out to nature, hikes tell us a little more about that.

Angi ([19:59](#)):

I always like to be outside. We try anytime it's pretty outside, we're having meals out there as a family and I try not to use air conditioning, actually the house we bought in Seattle doesn't have air conditioning, which I thought was great. Even in DC, which is difficult, it's a difficult climate to not have, your HPAC going, but I would try to open windows accordingly, things like that all the time, just as part of our daily, so that we're more in touch with nature and in touch with outside because we're working and having school all in our house. So being able to have those doors that windows open has been great.

Charlie ([20:48](#)):

Let's talk about a bucket list. I'm a big fan of a bucket list. Are there one or two things you could share that might be on your bucket list?

Angi ([20:59](#)):

Well, I'd love to travel more. India, African Safari would be the two sort of things. We used to travel quite a bit when we lived in the UK pre-kids but as the kids get older, I think we'd like to start taking them on further trips and get them to see other cultures more

Charlie ([21:17](#)):

Amazing. And how old are your kids right now? Right now? They're 6,8, and 10. Okay, great. Yeah, I think I mentioned my boys are 12, 9 and 7. So we're

on a schedule, right? Just a few more questions here. Let's talk about books and learning. You have a good book or two you'd recommend

Angi ([21:37](#)):

Professionally. It's not really new, but I like it. How culture shapes the climate change debate by Andrew Hoffman. It really goes into talking about people, other people's perspectives and understanding that when you're talking to someone else, they're not necessarily seeing the argument or the conversation from the same perspective. And in sustainability, I find that very true. You need to understand what's motivating the rest of the team to do what they're doing and bring them around to get them to do what you need them to do from a LEED perspective or sustainability perspective. I think that it also does a really good job of explaining why in the States we've been a bit reluctant to wholeheartedly accept climate change and the need for sustainability. It's a very quick read, maybe a hundred pages or so, so it's very easy to digest. Personally, I read the Last Neanderthal recently and I enjoyed that. I liked that it was just a fun read, but I liked it because it talked about two stories, one of a female Neanderthal, and then the other of a female paleontologist doing a dig of that Neanderthal. It brought in science, which I liked to see our understanding of the inner thoughts, more as people in a society than just a sort of caveman that a lot of people have an opinion.

Charlie ([23:10](#)):

A lot of fun. I'll have to check that out. What we'll do is we'll put links to the podcast, show notes to these books, Angie recommendations. We'll just have a couple more questions as we start to come to a close, to those listening, some have been doing this a long time. Some are a little newer to the green building movement. What advice do you wish you to receive earlier in your career?

Angi ([23:33](#)):

Just go for it. Don't hesitate, especially, for women. I think men are given that advice quite a lot, but women were trained told, we have to be nicer. I think that that goes a long way, but you still have to go for it.

Charlie ([23:55](#)):

Maybe just building on that though, just any words of encouragement to anyone that right now though, they're just now getting, getting involved. What else should they know about the green building now, the healthy building movement? What else would you tell them as we wrap up?

Angi ([24:10](#)):

I think now that it's so established and there's so many directions, you can find what you're passionate about, what specifically about sustainability you love, or you want to cultivate change and do that because there is somewhere that you can do that specific thing. Don't just settle for doing it generally, or something that you're not passionate about.

Charlie ([24:31](#)):

Absolutely. I know it's been a big change, DC, Washington State and Seattle, maybe that's just one final follow-up here to finish up. Is sustainability? Is it easier to have the conversation in these two markets versus some others? I'm curious, I know there's a lot of green buildings where you're at now in Seattle, but maybe what's changing as you pick up some more projects out there.

Angi ([25:04](#)):

Yeah. Well, I literally arrived here July 28th. So haven't been here that long to totally understand the market out here. But even I do have to say the people they value nature, everyone. I don't have to explain what sustainability consultant is quite as often because usually that happens quite frequently in DC. So I think just as a lifestyle and just a general understanding, it is definitely more prevalent here.

Charlie ([25:40](#)):

Easier to have the conversation, tons of encouragement, tons of positivity on the podcast today. Everyone, I just want to make sure you connect with Angie, check out her website, her LinkedIn profile, but everyone, this has been Angie Rivera, LEED Fellow, Managing Director and Senior Project Manager at Green Shape. Angie, thanks so much. All right, thanks a lot, Charlie.

Charlie ([26:04](#)):

I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the green building matters podcast. Me and the entire team were stoked. And just so glad to continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you. Thank you for listening to this episode of the green building matters podcast@gbes.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to gbes.com podcast for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode, and you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing, yes. Please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues, and if you really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much. And we'll see you next week.