

From Green Schools in California to Green Buildings in Kansas City With Sara Greenwood | Transcript

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

Welcome to Green 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](#)):

Be sure to check out the green building matters community where you can have unlimited exam prep for any of the professional credential exams. You're tackling next as well as putting your continued education on autopilot, saving time with GBS reporting your hours on your behalf. Check it out. [Gbes.Com/Join](#). Now enjoy this episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast.

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

Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast, where usually each week I interview a green building professional, somewhere in the world, just to hear their story, to give you a peek into how they get to where they are, and especially get into this sustainability journey today. I've got a recently minted LEED Fellow. I've got Sara Greenwood. She's coming to us from Kansas City, Missouri. Sara, how are you doing today? Thanks for having me Charlie. I know you do a lot of green building consulting. You've got a lot of letters after your name. We'll get into that, but, 15 plus years in sustainability, but let's just go back. Where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Sara ([01:50](#)):

I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and I would say that the introduction to my environmental awareness actually started in seventh grade. I had a teacher in seventh grade at Wydown Middle School who kind of introduced the whole idea of environmental stewardship and recycling. I literally took it upon myself to go door to door, to my neighbors and collect glass of all

heavy waste products and recycle them since our local waste collector wasn't collecting at the time. I actually brought those bottles to be recycled at a facility. Went on to college at the University of Vermont for undergrad, and then moved straight out to San Francisco and lived all throughout California for 14 years before now, moving to Kansas City in 2012.

Charlie ([02:33](#)):

I'm sure even Vermont had influence on you. California had influence on you, but that seventh grade teacher, I hope they know they had some influence on you too. And I think that's what everyone listening needs to realize is you have influence on those around you. You might not get that feedback that you helped Sara get into green building consulting, but we've got to be conscious about there are people watching, there are people we are influencing. Tell us a little more about that. At what point did you know about green building, So connect the dots a little bit. Sustainability ,LEED, when did that start?

Sara ([03:08](#)):

So I went to the University of Vermont where I got an undergraduate degree with a major in psychology and a double minor in environmental studies in Spanish. I loved the field of environmental studies and I spent a lot of time meeting with a professor of mine who was tremendous and just pivoted, what can I do with a degree in environmental studies? We would just dream of what could you do but never did I dream of what I currently am doing as a profession. It really didn't exist when I was in school, which is kind of phenomenal. When I look back, I moved out to San Francisco with just a basic liberal arts degree, not exactly knowing what I wanted to do. I was pretty involved as an undergraduate with the Rainforest Action Network and other grassroots organizations. They happen to be based in San Francisco.

Sara ([03:59](#)):

So I think that was part of my draw about San Francisco. I had also lived abroad for a semester and met a friend who was at the University of San Francisco who said, come sublet my apartment and you're going to want to stay here. I'm going to travel in South America for a while and so it kind of worked out beautifully. My first few jobs out of college were not what I'm doing now. They were purely just get your feet on the ground and, and then

figure out what you want to do. But long story short, I ended up landing a job working for the collaborative for high-performance schools, which at the time had just established its criteria to help school districts, design, sustainable school buildings and I was hired to launch that program. The organization was founded by California state agencies involved with public school construction and all the major public utility partners and that was really what propelled me into my career of environmental consulting. I really had to learn how to articulate the benefits of sustainable schools to school district officials and design teams. I sat through a lot of design seminars. I advocated for sustainable schools at a state level and helped facilitate the significant bond measure that got passed. I helped over 12 school districts around the state of California, formally adopt a resolution to build sustainable schools. So needless to say, I really had a great introduction to the world of building sustainable buildings and had great initial mentors at the time. While working there, I got my LEED accreditation. So that was back in 2005 that I got my LEED AP.

Charlie ([05:49](#)):

For those listening that don't know about the CHPS program, they might know a little bit about LEED for schools K through 12 schools. But can you tell a little more about this, this California program that you were there early in and one thing people don't know is you can actually use it in other States, right? It's not just California, it's a framework. So can you tell us a little about CHPS.

Sara ([06:09](#)):

Sure. So CHPS is a nonprofit and when it was established, it was intended specifically for California schools. In the time I was there, we actually licensed to about five other States. Eventually, I think now there's 12 to 15 other States that have adopted the CHPS criteria, meaning they've formalized it for their States and truly it's a free resource. Anyone around the country has access to this rating system. It is similar in certain ways to LEED for schools, but I would say it's pretty comprehensive. It works, it addresses new buildings as well as existing buildings, there's criteria, even for portable classrooms, which particularly in the state of California is a real reality. There's a database of environmentally preferable products that you may have seen on certain manufacturers data sheets referenced to the CHPS

compliance. So it's a great organization and I was pretty proud to be part of it for five years. When I left, they hired several people to take my place, so that was kind of nice. Now I work as an advisor, I'm on their technical committee and I help certify schools that pursue CHPS certifications.

Charlie ([07:30](#)):

Still involved there. Let's connect the dots. Okay, California, you made the move. How did you get to where you are now? So, fill in a little more of that timeline.

Sara ([07:39](#)):

Sure. So funny how things happen in working for CHPS. I was sitting through a lot of design seminars, as I mentioned, many of which were taught by CTG ,Energetics based out of Irvine. For folks out there who might know CHPS or knew Malcolm Lewis, he was a tremendous leader in our community, truly a brilliant human being. I went to work for Malcolm and CTG in Irvine in 2007, when my husband took a job in Southern California. It was shortly after I'd gotten my LEED accreditation and it was really interested in other building types. I knew this was a reputable firm, but little did I know it was truly what has propelled me into my career that I do today. So working at CTG, I really had the best mentors I think I could have ever wanted. I worked very closely with Malcolm who led the LEED steering committee.

Sara ([08:38](#)):

We were in a firm that reviewed projects that pursued LEED certification. We were reviewing the body so to speak before GBCI existed. We also helped to inform updates to the LEED rating system and codes and standards in California. I also had experience, not only learning how to manage projects, that pursued green building certification, but also carbon emissions reporting for higher ed institutions and municipalities and corporations. I really had a tremendous, I'd say broad reaching breadth of experience working there. When Malcolm unfortunately fell ill the company was acquired by Cadmus group and I made my way back to Kansas City in 2012 for family reasons and upon doing so started my own LLC. And that is how I landed where I am today. Today there's five of us at Greenwood Consulting Group based out of Kansas City, located around the country. We are still continuing to manage projects that pursue green building certification and

provide support in corporate sustainability reporting for different buildings and clients nationwide and different rating systems. It's exactly what I'd want to be doing right now. I love the work that I do, and I'm proud of it.

Charlie ([10:16](#)):

A lot of entrepreneurship grants over eight years there with your business going tell us a little bit Sara, about the types of projects you work on, actually one close to where I'm at in Atlanta, aquarium expansion. So tell us about some of these cool projects you're working on.

Sara ([10:32](#)):

The Georgia aquarium Charlie is one of my more, I'd say fun products right now. They are building a million gallon shark tank expansion onto the Georgia aquarium, downtown Atlanta. It's been a dynamic project from start to now, it's nearly complete. Hopefully, we'll achieve its certification targets here in the next few months and that's been really fun. I recently completed probably my most iconic project of my career, maybe not, but so far is the Kennedy Center Kennedy Performing Arts Center, the Reach Building in Washington, DC, that was tremendous treat to be able to work, not only on the Kennedy center, but with a credible project team, including BNIM Architects Ed Hollander landscaping and, Steven Hall Architects. So, just a tremendous project in DC. Beyond that, I'm currently working on the Kansas City Airport, which is a huge undertaking right now. It is big and glamorous as some of these projects sound. I'm also really proud of the work I'm doing with local school districts and helping with affordable housing projects and other projects that might not be as shiny, but are as equally important and just as serving to our community. So it's different things.

Charlie ([12:07](#)):

Great list of projects. Now I totally understand the path to where you are today. Look back on the highlight reel, Sara, I like to give my guests permission to look back. What else stands out? What else are you really proud of when you look back at your career? Personally, I get the LEED Fellow that's validating.

Sara ([12:28](#)):

Yeah, I've been proud of the fact that I've, in time, overcome some initial, I guess, hesitation to present publicly. I remember when I first started off my career, that really intimidated me and now I tend to do them all the time and it doesn't bother me at all. So I think for listeners that are maybe starting off their career, know that with practice, you do get better and you do get stronger. I'm proud of the fact that I've presented to audiences as far reaching as globally and the presentations that have covered even just on a local level, I've been able to kind of see the repercussions of promoting environmental sustainability awareness in our community that's, I think, led to market shifts and that's, that's wonderful. I love to see the kinds of impacts in our community.

Sara ([13:26](#)):

Other areas that I've been proud of other projects or other achievements. I worked on MGM City Center, which was one of the largest at the time. It was the largest LEED certified project in North America, five buildings combined as part of MGM City Center in Las Vegas. I also worked on the Oakland downtown complex, which was a middle school and high school in Oakland for Oakland Unified School District. It was the highest CHPS achieving project. CHPS verified leader, and that was kind of fun to see my career kind of come full circle and then to work on the highest achieving CHPS project. So that was a treat.

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

Amazing projects. These rating systems, these certifications, that's a big part of what you do, obviously. Let's look and build on those. We've got a healthy building movement that's really growing. It already was before the pandemic, but now we see that really taking shape. If you could speak to healthy buildings a little bit, are you starting to see some activity around that? And then just really, if you had a crystal ball, Sara, what else should we be reading up on what's what's down the road in the green building journey?

Sara ([14:40](#)):

I think that's an important question. First of all, I got my WELL accreditation about three years ago. And since then I've seen a real spike in interest. I've been asked to present on the WELL building standard, probably eight times

to different audiences of different trade associations well beyond just our USGBC or LEED community and throughout the region. Being in the Midwest things do tend to, I think, evolve a little slower here compared to the coast, so there's been a real interest in, WELL, even before COVID. I've been proud of the ability to present on WELL and also manage projects that pursue WELL, I think it is an exciting rating system that we're going to see more of in the industry more and more projects I think are interested in learning.

Sara ([15:39](#)):

If they've pursued, say LEED, how can they also either pursue WELL or adapt elements of the WELL rating system to their project? And I think that's important for people to know that you can still pull from the WELL standard. It is free to download the standard and actually review the criteria and you can use it as a resource, use it as a tool. I encourage people to check that out. I think the future of buildings will continue to be focused around health and wellbeing. It is really important. If you do dive into the WELL standard and it is predominantly performance-based, meaning a third party assessor actually comes out and does air quality testing, water, quality testing, acoustic testing, lighting, light readings. I have a feeling, my sense is that the future of buildings will be more performance-based. I think people are going to demand you don't just design a building, you actually meter and monitor and verify ongoing performance of a building so that their continued management and performance is upheld.

Sara ([16:54](#)):

I'm seeing this from clients that are requesting that I now come back and help them explore ARC and other existing building performance metrics. I've also seen in the last four or five years, a real shift in terms of building markets. More of my client base has been in healthcare more than it was in years past, and also in warehouses. So if you think about it, right, we get a lot of shipments. Amazon's making a killing. I mean, there's just a lot of warehouses being built out there. I also think this is a testament to those organizations that have public commitments to the apartment disclosure project and others that really does have a trickle down effect. So to their supply chains and others that need to report their emissions, their warehouses and other buildings that support their production are all part of

that process. I think all buildings will play a part and I think distribution channels as well. So that's a long answer to your question.

Charlie ([18:01](#)):

You're right. We've got to think back to the supply chain and I think you're right with the pandemic too. I think we have a better view on everything it takes to really make our normal lives, just to operate. We've seen where the pinch points have been, but healthy buildings. I concur really starting to take off more. Anything else that you're really tracking that's really exciting maybe about the green building movement and what's next.

Sara ([18:30](#)):

Yeah, definitely. I think there's going to be a lot more emphasis on buildings that are all electric. I mean, we're seeing this as a mainstream standard in California and I think California tends to set the pace for the rest of the country. So I do think that a shift towards all electric and much more energy efficient buildings, I'm hopeful that with our next presidency, that we will re-engage in Paris, climate commitment and other commitments that will enable a greener grid if you will. So I think with that, I hope we also have more incentives for building owners and developers. I also hope that, or I'm optimistic that there'll just be a revamping of energy, no pun intended in the building community when it comes to being more transparent and really trying to optimize building performance when it comes to all systems. So zero net everything's kind of the next, I think the big buzz is zero net waste, zero net water, zero net carbon. I think that's truly going to be on the horizon here in the next five years or so.

Charlie ([19:49](#)):

Zero net, and everything. I wrote that one down. That's good. Sara, thank you. Let's talk more about you. What do you think is your specialty or gift? What are you really good at?

Sara ([19:58](#)):

I've been fortunate in my career, especially as I've launched my LLC in 2012, that I've had loyal clients that have sustained me. I've sustained them. We've just had a good working relationship. I think I do a pretty good job of managing projects and keeping understanding the owner's performance

goals and then keeping the project team on task to achieve their goals in a way that's manageable for them. I have certain tools in my tool chest that I think facilitate that and I really try to set realistic expectations upfront. I think my greatest asset is my project management capabilities and kind of like where we started in this conversation. Surely, I think it dates back to a good mentor from early on. I try to pay that forward. I try to bring on people and mentor others when I can. I think that's really important too.

Charlie ([20:58](#)):

Thanks for sharing that. Do you have any good habits, any routines or rituals?

Sara ([21:03](#)):

I try to start each day with an open mind and try to be positive no matter what best I can try not to let things bring me down. Having each project be its own personality helps with that. I can shift focus, but as far as rituals, coffee, coffee in the mornings, a good ritual coffee and get exercise when you can.

Charlie ([21:36](#)):

Take care of yourself, but also just prime yourself for the day, right? You have this kind of (inaudible) day

Sara ([21:41](#)):

Making time for yourself is important even when it's a hectic day. I've been carving it in, at 6:30 in the morning, carve it in. That's what that's, that's truly what I do.

Charlie ([21:54](#)):

With the pandemic, we're recording this at the end of 2020 and launching in early 2021. How has your work changed? Maybe we were talking earlier about less travel, but just what's changed with how you do business? Share there.

Sara ([22:10](#)):

So it's interesting. I think yes, let's travel. My products are still coast to coast, but when I first moved to Kansas City, I would say 90% of my projects were

outside of the Kansas City area. They were elsewhere. The time I've lived here and I think just getting more engaged with the local community, but also timing it when things were really I'm at a place in Kansas City that they were ready, they were just starting to kind of embrace sustainable buildings. I timed it well. Now, particularly working on the airport, but I'd say that my split between Kansas City metropolitan area projects and nationwide is 50/50. We're doing a ton of projects here and I think that speaks to Kansas City, Missouri's commitment to have all public buildings be certified. Airport being one of them. Certified at the silver level and certain school districts that are making commitments and other building owners and developers that are seeing the value. So really different building types from corn shell historic buildings, beautiful historic buildings downtown area, to class, office buildings elsewhere, and medical examiner building. That's my first one ever and that one's interesting, some really different. Another, a zoo project actually. So different, really different building types all across the Kansas City area, different and should be on the map people should know.

Charlie ([23:49](#)):

Those are some interesting buildings. One of my interesting projects is the Federal Reserve Bank here in Atlanta. They actually have a firing range in the base and so you have to have certain ventilation and this and that analysis.

Sara ([24:03](#)):

Sure. I worked on one of those in California, way back when at the port of Long Beach, we had a firing range in the basement there too. So yeah, not only the ventilation, but then the acoustics and all the padding. Yeah, those are interesting.

Charlie ([24:17](#)):

So let's talk about bucket lists. I'm a fan of the bucket list. Are there one or two things, if there's travel, some adventure and a book. What's on the bucket list?

Sara ([24:30](#)):

I would have to say on my bucket list, and these might sound boring, but one would be travel. I would love to travel more to several places, but the

first that came to my mind was New Zealand, I really like to get there. I've been fortunate to travel most continents, but I haven't been to that continent. I'd like to make my way down to Australia and New Zealand kind of cover that region a little bit.

Charlie ([24:55](#)):

I've not been there either yet. I'm jealous, my brother studied abroad there. I'm like, Oh man, it looks so cool.

Sara ([25:01](#)):

Yeah. My sister studied in Australia. It does. I'd love to get down there. It's like a utopian place in my mind. Where else would I like to go? I'd really like to go to Denmark actually and see the architect and Singapore, Singapore is high up on my list. I'd really like to go there. I have a very dear friend who's Thai and she and I have been talking about going back to Thailand. Of course now it's very hard to have those dreams, but one day, one day I hope to get there. It'd be surprising to know that there are cases of COVID in Thailand that are extraordinarily low. They never got anywhere near like most countries, people follow directions there to wear a mask.

Sara ([25:51](#)):

Other bucket list items. I'm embarrassed that I am not versed at an instrument. So I'd really like to learn an instrument, a little Lisa Simpson, maybe saxophone. I mean, as a child, my mom really forced the violin and I resisted. So I really don't play an instrument. One day.

Charlie ([26:13](#)):

I like it. Let's talk about books. Is there a book you would recommend that don't even have to be industry specific?

Sara ([26:20](#)):

So many good books out there? I have a great book club. It's made up of really diverse women that are kind of what keeps me going right now. They're just, they're amazing. Some books that we've read in the last year, of course, Bernay Brown. She has lots of soulful, eye-opening great books. Daring greatly is probably most widely known of hers. Of course, Michelle Obama's, Becoming, and I recommend that book on audible because she

actually reads it. It's awesome. The Glass Castle is also a pretty fascinating book. So those are my top three, I guess that come to mind.

Charlie ([27:02](#)):

Good recommendations. What I'll do is I'll put those links in the podcast show notes, so everybody can go click those books. So it's always good to just share. This was a great read and make sure you go get it. As we start to wind down here. Two more questions. Sara, is there anything you wish you'd known earlier in your career?

Sara ([27:21](#)):

Something I wish I had known earlier in my career? I think that it's important to take chances in your career and try new things and to have self confidence. It's important to ask questions. If you really don't know, it's also important to be a good listener. So I think that understanding that particularly this career path in what I do now, as far as consulting and helping project teams navigate through green building rating systems is an ever-changing industry and it's a lot to keep up. Having patients and being mindful of that and having good intentions is really the best you can do. Be honest with yourself. If there's something you want to go after, whether it's a particular accreditation and a certain area or something else, give yourself time to carve out that time. I know when I took my WELL AP, I literally had to carve out time in my calendar to study. I found a partner to study with and we carved out time each week and ultimately did it, but if I hadn't done it that way, there's no way I would've gotten through that exam. So I'm glad I did.

Charlie ([28:41](#)):

What I'm hearing is take care of yourself, but also invest in yourself, give it the right amount of time. All right, let's say there's someone listening right now. They're getting really excited to hear your story. What words of encouragement do you have for them? If they're just now jumping into Green Building.

Sara ([28:56](#)):

I would say don't be afraid to take chances and try new things. You may learn. You're really good at it.

Charlie ([29:05](#)):

Well, everyone, this has been Sara Greenwood recently mentioned LEED Fellow coming to us from Kansas City. She's traveled around doing green building work, a big influence early in schools, especially there in California. Make sure you connect with Sara on LinkedIn and also check out her company website. Sara, thanks for your time today.

Sara ([29:22](#)):

Thanks so much, Charlie. This has been fun.

Charlie ([29:26](#)):

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 the 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 projects@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.