

Driving residential green certification in 2024



By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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The Green Building Council of South Africa (GBCSA) is set to spearhead the increase of green certification within South Africa's residential-property sector. This announcement emerged as a highlight from the 16th Green Building Convention, held at the Century City Conference Centre in Cape Town last week.



Source: [Pixabay](#)

It was presented by André Theys, the new Chair of GBCSA, outlining his 2024 vision for the Council.

Theys said SA's residential-property sector is currently evaluated at R7.7tn and that only a tiny fraction of that sector has GBCSA certification. He said the GBCSA sees this as a potential market to focus on as 27% of South Africa's total energy produced is consumed by the residential sector; 44% of the municipal-waste stream is household waste, and households account for almost 60% of municipal water and sanitation use.

“Clearly SA homes have an environmental impact with great room for improvement. This move is pertinent given that the built environment is responsible for one third of all global carbon emissions,” Theys noted. Theys added that this development reiterates that green certification is not only about obtaining green credentials, but also about resource efficiency.

Facing hurdles in non-listed property sector

Theys cautioned that while GBCSA has identified untapped potential in the non-listed property sector, feedback from its engagements reveals that these property owners continue to take issue with the cost of certifying.

"I think the problem is twofold; we must recognise that not everyone wants a full suite of the new existing building performance (EBP) tool. We've listened and we've heard their request for a lighter version of the tool. The GBCSA is working towards what I cautiously call Green Star Lite," Theys remarked.

He said, while it couldn't be guaranteed, he was hoping to draw approval for this from the Green Building Council of Australia.

The second challenge is that property owners and lenders are not familiar with GBCSA's objective. Theys emphasised the need for increased education on GBCSA's mission and the various green certifications available.

"We must move people away from the assumption that any certification is green. We must guard against cannibalising our existing certifications and dropping our standards. Human nature being what it is, we must simply ensure that we do not fall to the lowest common denominator."

He added that GBCSA is ensuring its training is up-to-date and remains relevant for its audience.

Commitment amidst global divides

Theys stressed that the Council's move to drive the green certification for residential homes was important if we are to achieve Net Zero. Yet, he acknowledged that the efforts and actions required for achieving net-zero are complex and involve significant adjustments:

"In the humdrum of the day to day operations: certifying, training, advocating, meeting with stakeholders and just chasing membership fees - one can easily forget the reason we exist, that we are in the business of adapting to- and mitigating against climate change. And the pressure is becoming more acute these days, as we are living in an increasingly polarised world.

“ We are incredibly proud to reveal our new logo - marking a significant step change in where GBCSA is going.

[#gbcsa2023 #greenbuilding #yourspace pic.twitter.com/LuqplToF06](https://twitter.com/LuqplToF06)— GBCSA (@GBCSA) [November 15, 2023](#)

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"Social-media platforms, designed to connect people, have inadvertently become breeding grounds for ideological divides; echo chambers for redirected content to reinforce pre-existing beliefs, creating a polarised landscape where other views are marginalised or dismissed.

"This, in turn, fosters an environment where nuance is lost, complexity is unappreciated and the unintended consequence is that everything is reduced to a bundling: You're either left wing or right wing; you're either conservative or you're liberal; so too it happens with climate change.

"You're either a climate-denier or a climate-alarmist, either of which is unhelpful, because if you follow the climate-change deniers, nothing happens and the status quo remains. If you follow the climate-alarmists then you potentially risk adopting climate-change policies that could end up with the cure being worse than the disease.

"And the majority of the voices are not heard. So you have these outliers within the proverbial bulk, constituting around 20% of the voices, with the remaining 80% in the middle where nobody is speaking. It's into that space that the GBCSA must step."

Concerns of over-correction

And yet, Theys expressed understanding of why climate scientists feel the need to raise alarm to overcome inertia regarding climate change. However, he reiterated concern about the potential for over-correction in response to this alarm.

"There are numerous examples of organisations exploiting ESG to greenwash, through to organisations and governments driving accelerated decarbonisation plans and policies - with little to no consideration given to the economic crisis - or blindly adopting decarbonisation pathways or tools developed in other countries and markets without considering the local context."

The GBCSA, however, makes a point to factor in regional circumstances, adds Theys.



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"The GBCSA has always carried out its mission very much aware of the South- and southern African context, constantly adapting and customising our rating tools. I guess the new Green Star Rating Tool V2 is testimony to that."

Looking to next year, Theys emphasised the importance of GBCSA re-evaluating the context, advocating for a realistic approach and a thorough assessment of the current macro-economic environment.

"We are at the lower end of the business cycle enduring higher than usual interest rates, and investors are likely to hold off until after next year's national elections until the political landscape has settled and there is some policy certainty.

"This, coupled with worsening socio-economic conditions, means that we are unlikely to see the flow of new bills and growth as we've experienced in the past for some time."

Driving sustainability in 2024

Theys said while the GBCSA waits for this business cycle to improve, it will nevertheless push ahead with updating its rating tools for listed- and unlisted properties in SA to ensure market alignment, and will focus on driving the existing building performance (EBP) and energy water performance (EWP) rating tools.



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He echoed Lisa Reynolds, the chief executive officer of GBCSA, in expressing the Council's commitment to driving a significant change in the country in 2024, aiming to involve all South Africans in embracing sustainability.

"The green movement has to be for everyone, because if we're going to make a difference to climate change, everyone has to embrace the concept of going green, and that's the step change. The GBCSA is not an exclusive club; it's for everyone.

"Climate change is real; it's happening and cannot be switched off. Many of the effects are already baked in and climate scientists would agree that once it's in motion, it's going to go on for decades."

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

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