



# Selling Passive House Lab

## Insight Brief

Reimagine Buildings Collective—SUMMER 2025

## Selling Passive House Lab

### **Lab Members:**

- *Lloyd Alter (editor, adjunct professor, and author of Carbon Upfront!)*
- *Trey Farmer (architect and partner at Forge Craft Architecture)*
- *Bo Green (architect and chapter lead for Passive House DC, a chapter of Passive House Network)*
- *Paul Herron (principal and founding member of Sage Craftsmen, LLC),*
- *Silas Patlove (PA in emergency medicine and CPHC)*
- *James Turner (marketing consultant and host of the Marketing Passivhaus podcast)*

### **The best way to sell Passive House? Don't!**

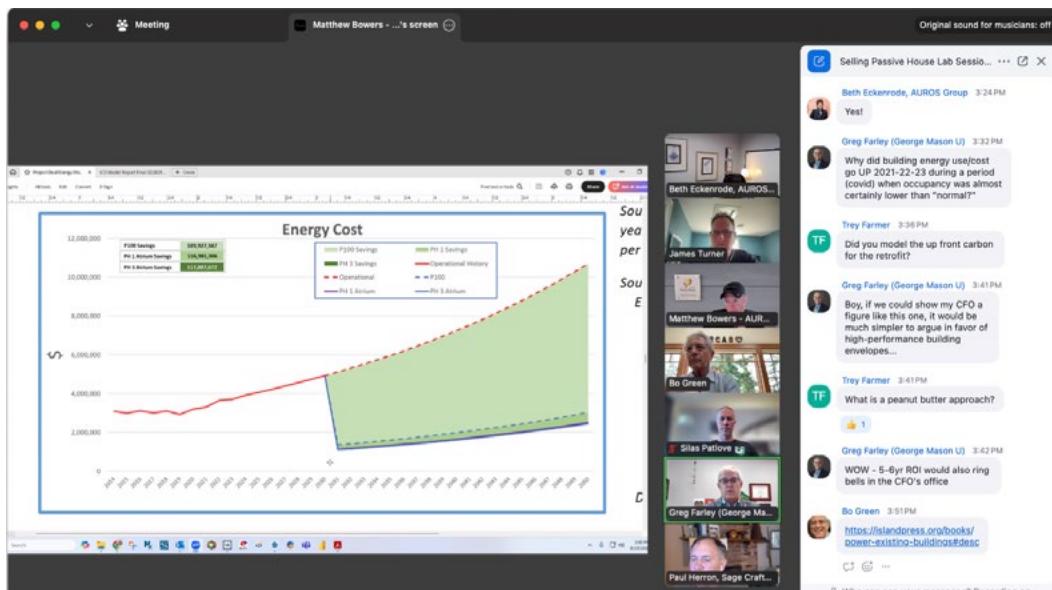
#### **The Challenge**

Forget your PHPP, don't mention thermal bridging, keep your airtightness rating in your back pocket. As the great sales leader Zig Ziglar said, "People don't buy for logical reasons. They buy for emotional reasons." And that's as true with Passive House as it is with cars, phones, and toasters.

#### **Top Takeaways**

- Whether you're selling the passive house idea at the single-family residential, multifamily, mixed-use, commercial, institutional, or legislative level, it's important to remember that each person you're dealing with has their own emotional, often irrational, version of success for their project. Your job is to ask about their pains and listen. More often than not, the solution to their pains will lead back to passive house, but that doesn't need to be part of the discussion.

- Trey has found that advertising Passive House often attracts people who can't or think they can't afford it. (The people who have the money aren't as interested/aren't doing it.) In general, if they don't have the budget to build a passive house, they probably just don't have the budget to build a house, period.
- In Lloyd's 2019 article, [\*How Do You Sell the Idea of Passive House?\*](#), he shared another Zig Ziglar quote: "People are basically the same the world over. Everybody wants the same things – to be happy, to be healthy, to be reasonably prosperous, and to be secure." He then listed the selling points of Passive House (in order of judged importance at that time): Comfort, Air Quality, Quiet, Security (aka energy security/resilience/passive habitability), Luxury, and Health. Now, based on what he's seeing, reading, and hearing, he'd change the order to put Security closer to the start.
- Bo, who has his eyes set on large-scale projects, following the thinking that they are the quickest way to convert the largest square footage to Passive House, talks of moving from the S word (Sustainability) to the C word (Cash) in his messaging. In a guest session with Beth Eckenrode and Matthew Bowers, both from AUROS Group, and Greg Farley, Director of University Sustainability at George Mason U, the following slide, showing the projected energy cost savings of making different sections of a large project Passive House wowed the crowd with its 5-6 year ROI, causing Greg to say "If we could show my CFO a figure like this one, it would be much simpler to argue in favor of high-performance building envelopes."



- Paul (and Bo) attended the PHIUS Marketing Webinar on September 9, and he shared that “many of the participants were hung up trying to figure out how to sell the data points and Passive House itself (by name) rather than identifying and solving the client’s problem.” In a chat he shared, many commented how this isn’t really working, and someone pointed out that several different entities are trying to sell consumers “lowered energy bills,” making that, also, not a point of differentiation for Passive House. In this case, most were talking about single-family residential builds, and so were not dealing with the massive savings discussed in the point above.

## **What's Next?**

The benefits and amenities sell. That it is the Passive House standard that brings those benefits is an afterthought, an interesting footnote. Whether it’s the large-scale developer looking for the best possible ROI, the multi-family builder looking for sound-isolated, high-end units to attract better buyers, or the single-family owner looking to build a home that will keep their family safe and secure, the key to helping them get what they are looking for is to listen to them talk about their pains and desires. Figure out what those are and sell them solutions that address those needs, without requiring them to care that it’s Passive House that makes it happen.