

## **Summer Minchew, LEED Fellow and Managing Partner at Ecoimpact Consulting**

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

Welcome to Green Building Matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals. Learn insights in green building 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. 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 build matters podcast. I've got another green building guru with us this time. We've got Summer Minchew, coming to us from Charlotte, North Carolina. She is managing partner at Eco Impact Consulting. Can't wait to talk about some green building projects, but I always like to just say, Hey, welcome. Thanks for sharing some time, Summer. How are you doing today? Doing well, Charlie, thanks for having me. We're recording this in some crazy times, still in the middle of a pandemic, but let's really focus. If we can set that aside and talk about you and your green building career. Where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Summer ([01:37](#)):

I grew up in Kansas city, actually. I grew up in and around the building industry. My dad is an architect and for a long time, his specialty was sports. He did some stadiums and arenas. We had a drafting table in our basement when I was a kid and I grew up drawing designs for buildings so it was kind of a no brainer when I went to Kansas State University. I attended the college of architecture, planning and design and I graduated in 2003 with a

degree in interior architecture and product design. I was recruited right out of school to work for a firm here in Charlotte, North Carolina. When I graduated and then started my new job in a new city I spent my early days as a designer working on some sports projects and kind of morphing into corporate commercial and municipal workplace projects.

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

It's amazing to have that influence and you must have really had that exposure and said, "Okay, this is what I want to do. I can tell some kids, maybe it turns them off. You don't want to do that career path and some are I do. It sounds like for you, you knew that something you really wanted to pursue it. Tell us about that move to Charlotte. I mean, for those that have been to Charlotte, I'm based in Atlanta and I've worked on some pretty cool construction projects in Charlotte. It's a growing city, they kind of say it's like the little Atlanta and stuff like that, but it sounds like you've really enjoyed time in Charlotte.

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

Yeah. So I spent about five years in Charlotte and then my husband and I moved to DC for about three years which is kind of really where my sustainability mindset kind of really kicked off. When I graduated from school, I knew I wanted to become a LEED AP as soon as possible.

Summer ([03:17](#)):

It was a goal for me even in college and just the idea that I could do something with sustainability in my career. As soon as I heard about it, I was like, this is for me. I got my LEED AP in 2004, but while I was in Charlotte, I didn't really have a chance to work on any LEED projects. When we moved to DC in 2008, that's when I really got a chance to just dive in and kind of that awkward moment for me was working at a firm called Envision Design, which has since merged with Perkins and Will. When I joined, I was assigned to the design team for the US Green Building Council's headquarters at 2101 L street. Of course their space had to be LEED platinum.

Summer ([04:05](#)):

We were working on the project before the LEED version in 2009 was technically available or was even really published. High pressure but just a

truly transformational experience for me, working on a project where the sustainability charge was client and mission driven. It really pushed the team to maximize the project's performance. Obviously it's a beautiful project and beautiful design and just a great experience. I was hooked. I was the LEED administrator on that project and kind of in those late nights of documenting credits and uploading to LEED online, I like to find my home and my happy place. I just love the process and strangely enough, like the technical requirements and all of that. I just knew it was for me and I kind of never looked back.

Charlie ([04:56](#)):

What a fun story too. Yeah. That's a great space. I've been able to go there. Of course it had to be platinum and water reclaimed materials were added in there too. Right. So then you came back to Charlotte. Connect the dots on the rest of that career journey so far?

Summer ([05:11](#)):

Yes. My husband was actually in DC for business school and he worked outside of the district for a time, but then he took a job back in Charlotte. We moved back right before my son was born, my first child. It was hard for me because I truly loved living in DC and I loved working at Envision Design, but fortunately I was able to continue consulting on some Envision projects at the time and Eco Impact projects. Eco Impact was actually formed by the principles of envision Ken Wilson and Diana Horta and Penny Bhandra. The intent of Eco Impact was really to be a consulting firm that really focused on sustainable strategies for business. Penny was doing a lot of really cool, just environmental consulting and communications. The part that obviously I kind of played the biggest role in was the facilitation of green building certifications.

Summer ([06:15](#)):

When I moved back to Charlotte, I was consulting on Eco Impact projects through that move and then through the addition of my two kids and pretty quickly I came to manage all of the firm's green building certification projects. I was made partner in 2012 and then I became managing partner in 2017 when Penny retired. I'm still close with Penny, she was on my nominating committee for LEED Fellow. She was truly an amazing mentor

and has really been a big advocate for my career as well as just a huge advocate for great interiors and healthy indoor environments. She's really just a fantastic person to be around. I feel very fortunate that our paths crossed and I certainly would not be where I am today without her guidance and influence.

Charlie ([07:09](#)):

It's inspiring. I love to learn more about those mentors and those that have influenced maybe opened the door or just showed some interest and really been in your corner. What a good story there with Penny. Any anyone else that maybe you would call a mentor, give a shout out to that maybe helped along the way, or maybe had some influence?

Summer ([07:28](#)):

Yeah, certainly, Ken Wilson, who was the principal at Envision while I worked there. It really just gave me the opportunity to work on projects like the USGBC headquarters and other cool projects, like the office of former VP Al Gore, which is LEED CI platinum in Nashville. Really it's because of Ken that I met and became partners with Penny. So, That influence and that advocacy is critical. It's so important in this business or any business to have folks who are looking out for you and lifting you up and are willing to kind of take that initiative to say, "Hey, maybe you should do that. Or, Hey, maybe this award would be great for you. Can I nominate you for it?" I try to learn from the mentors that I've had and continue to pay that forward as well.

Summer ([08:24](#)):

I think it's just really important. Lisa Spritz is great. She's a colleague and just a fantastic human being. She's the SVP of environmental business and engagement at Bank of America. We've worked together on a lot of green buildings. She shares my love of volunteering and perhaps just shares my over engagement in volunteerism and green building enthusiasm. I think it's interesting, in our careers where we can talk about mentors and we can talk about colleagues and sometimes my colleagues and my compatriots are also my mentor or those colleagues that we consult with on a regular basis about LEED issues. Those are for me, Shane Nault of Building Energetics and Sarah Omera of Cho Construction and Alison Crossly and Bina Indelicato. These are the rock stars that I reach out to when I have a

question about LEED that I can't find on LEED users. I don't really know the answer to. Having these networks of really smart advisors that I also think is just really critical to success in this industry. So those folks are mentors and colleagues and have just been exceptional in providing that support network and that feedback.

Charlie ([09:50](#)):

It is good to give them all a shout out because I've had several mentors, too. It's so important. Let's look back on this green building journey here. What are some other accomplishments that stand out what's on the highlight reel?

Summer ([10:02](#)):

Well, I do win some awards which always made me proud. I was a Charlotte Business Journal, 40 under 40 winner in 2018 locally, I was named Sustain Charlotte's Most Inspiring Individual of 2019, which was a big surprise and just a really nice honor. In 2020, I was awarded a Charlotte Business Journal, women in business award. Along with obviously being named LEED fellow in 2020, which is pretty much the best thing to come out of 2020 for me personally, the joys of work from home and remote learning facilitation aside. I think project-wise, it's important to know that we're a small firm and since Penny's retirement, it's really just been me and a few select outstanding contract partners that support our entire workload. When we're awarded and we complete big projects, it's a really a proud day for me.

Summer ([10:59](#)):

I always like to talk about sports projects because I think venues present such an amazing opportunity to educate huge volumes of people about sustainable building. When we could convene the huge volumes of people. I was the LEED administrator to Audi Field in DC, which is home of DC United and that was LEED gold certified. We contracted with a local architect Michael Marshall Design and worked closely with some great people from my hometown of Kansas City. It's populace and Turner was, was the contractor on that project and also the LEED administrator to the Washington DC entertainment and sports arena, which is home to the Washington Mystics and the Wizards practice facility. This was an acre project to the St. Elizabeth East campus development. I now have three other projects right in that area.

Summer ([11:52](#)):

So that's exciting work for ESA. We were again contracted with Michael Marshall Design and worked closely with [inaudible] and Events DC on that project. It's a great opportunity really for, for marketing. I've been able to go back and actually give some tours at Audi Field to other green building professionals so that's been really fun and I hope that when this pandemic has passed us, we can all continue to do some of those tours. Again, I think that the sports projects are just a cool platform for educating folks about what green building is and can be

Charlie ([12:29](#)):

Absolutely. Those are some outstanding projects and they get you back to DC a little bit. So that's good.

Summer ([12:33](#)):

I love it.

Charlie ([12:36](#)):

Tell us a little more. Fast forward to today. What's keeping you busy? Is it some healthy building stuff? Is it hey, LEED to going strong, but only in these pockets? How's it going today?

Summer ([12:48](#)):

I mean, 90% of my work is LEED project management. I feel like LEED is really going strong. I also do some green Globes and some enterprise green communities projects within LEED. We do just about everything. I'm commercially focused, but building design and construction, interior, designing construction, operations, and maintenance. I mean, I really get excited about projects that serve the community. I'm all in on that idea about sustainable healthy buildings really should be for everyone. I think this year has highlighted a lot of those inequities and in a fortunate position to be able to very quickly kind of respond to that and make some commitments within our business to address that. And we're committed to advancing social environmental justice in our work. We all need to get there. In 2020, we actually enacted a social equity initiative that I'm really excited about.

Summer ([13:46](#)):

That includes a number of pro bono hours that we will set aside and support community based LEED initiatives. All of our folks volunteer a lot, including me. We've also included a provision of a 10% standard rate discount to support equitable housing projects which I'm really excited about. I really want to do more about work. So acting on equity is to know something that I'm really interested in. Some of my favorite projects are reflective of that. I call them hard projects because they get to the heart of why I want to do this work, like why I started in this business. If this is healthy, it's sustainable and it's equitable and, and that's what really gets me excited. We just certified the Southeast center for BREAD For the City in Washington, DC, LEED gold.

Summer ([14:39](#)):

BREAD For The City is an amazing organization that provides food, clothing, medical care, legal, and social services to reduce the burden of poverty in DC. The center has medical and dental offices, onsite community center services, food and clothing services right there on site. They're doing COVID 19 testing right now. It's a cool project. It's a great design again, this was Michael Marshall Design and we're really proud of that. Sometimes these projects go on for a long time. I've been working on this job since 2015. We certified it in December and that was a great day. Multifamily housing project, Diane's House is one that we just did to Enterprise Green Communities, and that's 42 affordable apartments in Washington DC. It's so satisfying and you really feel like the work. I mean, I always feel like the work I do is important, but when we can get those projects that really have that equity piece and really serve a need. It really brings that healthy and that sustainability mission home because everyone deserves to have a sustainable space or home or place to go and receive services. It's great for me to be able to do those kinds of projects. We also do a lot of work on city of Charlotte municipal projects. The city of Charlotte has a really robust sustainability action plan while their strategic energy action plan perhaps modeled after some work that's happening in Atlanta. It's been really cool to be involved with LEED certification on several of their new facilities based on their goals for 2040.

Charlie ([16:33](#)):

It's very important. These projects you are working on. I would say with the housing, especially in the equity side of the system, more direct impact, you can really see the people that these green building projects are supporting versus a building that maybe you're not always seeing the people, but it's there. It's just a little less direct, but I can tell you, it is very important to you. I think you're doing some great stuff with your company too, on how you shift towards that kind of work. So let's talk about the future. What's around the corner? What should we be reading up on now in this kind of green building healthy buildings?

Summer ([17:07](#)):

I can talk about this for a while. I think it's a cool time to be in sustainability because there's a lot of cool stuff that's happening now. I think also we're going to see some major shifts now happening in the future. I think the most critical, but perhaps the least flashy, if you'll forgive me, is industry-wide green building adoption. Every building is a green building, and I think that's most likely accomplished through building regulatory frameworks. We will continue to see, but like need to vote for elected officials who support adoption of rebuilding incentives and regulatory requirements because we look at cities like DC that are absolutely leading the way when it comes to transforming the built environment. I can look at a map, like [buildingrating.org](#). It's the Institute for market transformation.

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

They have a really good tool for comparing policies and various US jurisdictions. It surprisingly sparks in terms of voluntary and mandatory policies. We really need to do better. Leadership in the white house with a clear climate and energy goals, I hope to be a catalyst for change at all levels. I think that the local incentives or regulatory requirements are really gonna make the biggest impact on truly moving the market even starting with benchmarking requirements for existing buildings. What would really make a big impact at all levels. And then, so some of the flashier things, right? Like we can talk about advancing net zero energy, water and waste carbon negative buildings is something that I would really like to see take hold. I think we're all on the edge of our seats right now, like scrambling to sort of figure out how buildings are utilized and safely occupied. It's just an interesting time. And I think health and wellness are at the forefront of this



discussion as they should be. But let's not forgo sustainability for wellness because there is room for both at the table. And so I think it will be interesting to see how that plays out.

Charlie ([19:09](#)):

That's a very good thing right now because it's obviously still so important the pandemic response. How do we get people back to existing buildings? I think if you have late projects in the queue, you're pushing through those going, but you're right. It can't all be just wellness and healthy billings, which is so important, but it's like, I love what you said, how we get to every building is a green building, right. I like how you phrase that. I want to ask a few more things about you. What would you say you're really good at? What's your specialty or gift?

Summer ([19:41](#)):

I don't know if it's a gift, but I volunteer to excess probably if I'm honest and in many ways it has been a gift to me. I can't stop myself from pitching in and I've joked that I probably need to attend some sort of a support group for constant volunteers. In reality, I view volunteering really as an extension of my work. I guess my personal brand, if you will, but I've made just really the most fruitful connections in my business and my personal life through volunteering. All of my greatest friends are the people who are also out there doing the work and I love it. I'm in my third year as board co-chair for the US GBC Carolina's market leadership advisory board and work with some great people on that board.

Summer ([20:29](#)):

Some amazing staff from US GBC on that side are really fantastic people. I've served as a LEED user expert for like five years. I've worked with the health product declaration collaborative for almost five years now on their third party verification, technical subcommittee, which is like a really long name for a group that's working to implement the preparation and verification programs for HPDs. Really quickly HPDs are basically a list of what's in a product, a building material, but previously there has been kind of no way to verify that all of that information is accurate. So this program allows for experts to come in and review those as a third party to provide that additional level of accuracy and transparency. I'm entering my second

term, as I mentioned, working with the city of Charlotte as a volunteer on their strategic energy action plan, external content group for buildings, which is another long name for a group of appointed volunteers that are assisting the city with implementing their strategic energy action plan. Our group is working specifically with buildings. I mentioned benchmarking before working with a subgroup to kind of talk about how we can push benchmarking forward within the constraints of how Charlotte operates at this time, And I'm not even done. Right.

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

Finish that thought, what else are you making change with? But then any advice for someone listening that would like to volunteer, but maybe they're a little intimidated, where do I plug myself in? How do I put myself out there? There's probably so much capacity right now that could be volunteering. I think sometimes some people might not know where to start or be a little intimidated. If you could, what else are you volunteering on? Give us a pro tip? How do you find where you can plug yourself in and go for that ask?

Summer ([22:37](#)):

I think that a great place, and it's probably a shameless plug, but I mean, a great place is really connecting with your USGBC community. Now, if you're into green building that's where the networking happens. That's where those folks are. The ones, again, I'm a big fan of people who are doing the work and who are organizing the events virtual or otherwise. Attend some tours of green buildings but ultimately for me in my career, it's about getting that LEED GA as a start and then getting your LEED AP and working on LEED projects that's the way to do it. In terms of volunteering it's those local communities are fantastic opportunities to meet like-minded folks and do some really great work.

Charlie ([23:28](#)):

Nice, thanks for sharing that and it's a good segue to any other pro tips, routines, rituals, good habits. What helps you stay on point?

Summer ([23:37](#)):

Instead of making a to do list, I block out my outlook calendar with tasks that I need to get done. Now. I often like to move around because I don't always

get to everything, but it helps me kind of focus my day especially given the many current distractions. I'm always willing to work too, which I think I can allow myself some flexibility, but also I know what needs to get done so often. You'll find me working on a weekend or early in the morning or late at night, but I'm really dedicated to my clients. I'm really dedicated to providing them the level of service that they deserve. Sometimes that means that I have to give up 110%, but I don't really know how else to do it. I think that that's probably helped me be successful.

Charlie ([24:27](#)):

I'm a fan of a bucket list, other one or two things you could share that might be on your bucket list. Maybe some adventure, some travel, maybe write a book who knows.

Summer ([24:36](#)):

Right. That sounds awesome. Doesn't it? Travel. Getting on a plane again, attending a sporting event maybe. Yeah. It's interesting. I have always wanted to go to Napa and like to ride one of those glass Vista dome trains through wine country. I'm a big wine fan and I would just love to gather my closest friends and hug them and wine tastes our way through the Valley.

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

Sounds amazing

Summer ([25:05](#)):

I'm going to put that on my bucket.

Charlie ([25:07](#)):

I love it. Let's see books. I'm not sure if you like to listen to books or take up a hard copy in your hands. I know, as a parent and as an entrepreneur and then just all this volunteering, like, Hey, life's busy, but if you were to take in a book, do you have any you'd recommend?

Summer ([25:25](#)):

I'm actually an avid reader. I usually have like four books going at once. I mean, I'm definitely a big time reader. I'm a fiction fan. I spent the better part of 2020 actually reading books that I have had on my home library shelf that

I hadn't read yet. Sometimes the pull of the library overwhelms what's kind of in front of me on my bookshelves. It's been kind of fun to go back to some of those older titles, but I would recommend *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah and I would recommend listening to that one, Trevor Noah reads that himself and it's awesome. It has some really heavy topics in it, but he's so hilarious and just a great storyteller. Definitely recommend that one. I'm currently reading the *Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and it's also really, really good. Really well-written. I read a lot with my nine-year-old. We have our own little book club. Right now we're reading *Holes* by Louis Sachar, which is a classic and I think every kid should read it.

Charlie ([26:36](#)):

I put the links to the books in the podcast show notes, but it's really cool. You do that with your nine year old a little bit. As we come to a close two questions, one, is there anything you wish you'd known a little earlier in your career?

Summer ([26:48](#)):

I would say, say yes to the opportunities, even the ones that kind of maybe make you uncomfortable or that you're not sure if you can handle, because I think that every opportunity that you're given is an opportunity to step up and to rise to perhaps the expectations that others have of you that maybe you didn't realize you could accomplish yourself. And I've said yes to a lot of opportunities that I thought of, I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I have the skills yet. And I said, yes. I think that has been really critical to my success. Surround yourself with people who see that in you and know what a good situation looks like and surround yourself with people who are also good and are on the same kind of path who have similar mindset and ideals and in green building. It's so easy to surround yourself with great people because honestly, I mean, there are just no better people than green building people. I truly believe that. We're just a good, good bunch. I'm just thrilled to be a part of it all

Charlie ([28:09](#)):

I concur and you see that at some big conferences too. We'll get back to that and the Greenbuild and just the energy there. Let's say there is someone listening though right now to this podcast and they love hearing

your story and they just need some words of encouragement as they're starting their green building career. Any words of encouragement for them?

Summer ([28:27](#)):

I would say, get the project experience that puts you on the track to do the kind of work that you want to do. There are just so many green buildings or just third-party rating systems out there. It can be very overwhelming, but research those and find the one or two that kind of gives you that spark where you have that aha moment. And you're like, wait, this is for me, this is what I want to do and really focus on that and find someone at a firm who is doing that work and reach out to them. Don't be afraid to solicit advice or request to try to get some project experience in the areas that shine for you.

Charlie ([29:14](#)):

Fantastic conversation, everyone. This has been Summer Minchew coming to us from Charlotte, North Carolina. Make sure you connect on LinkedIn and a Summer, Thanks so much for your time.

Summer ([29:23](#)):

Thanks, Charlie.

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 are stoked and just so glad you continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you.

Charlie ([29:51](#)):

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leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much. We'll see you next week.