n a down economy, any addition or renovation to your community’s property should be one which demonstrates solid, fast return on investment. Enhancements that improve your community’s profile and create opportunities for energy savings down the road are ideal and will have the most appeal to your homeowners and board members. After all, renovation funds are hard to come by; everyone wants to make the most fiscally-sound decisions possible.

Arguably one of the most efficient, aesthetically pleasing ways to improve your community’s value tomorrow, while avoiding a crippling investment today, is the addition of designer hardscape elements—from driveways and pool decks to retaining walls and courtyards. Addition of
hardscape elements or renovation of existing concrete surfaces can bring specific benefits in terms of salability, sustainability, and safety.

Curb Appeal

The price of a hardscape renovation or addition can certainly vary, with costs for simple pavers starting around $5 per square foot and costs for elegant natural stone approaching $25–$30 per square foot. Installation costs for a wide range of materials may range from $10–$30 per square foot. But overall, the impact of a new driveway, entryway, or common area on your community’s value cannot be understated. Communities that feature updated entryways or courtyards, or that offer elegant seating areas, fire pits, or pathways, are more likely to stand out in a competitive real estate environment that must woo residents with every bell and whistle. Outdated pools and pool decks are especially detrimental and can be unsightly to existing and prospective residents. An update to your community’s pool (including new coping, stairs, or decorative elements) or pool deck can be a smart, strategic, and cost-effective way to boost the wow factor without breaking the bank.

And the cost benefits can be even more tangible than simple aesthetics: the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute has issued a report which demonstrates that in both low-volume and high-volume traffic situations, costs of interlocking concrete pavements and asphalt are within five to ten percent of each other over the same 40 year lifetime. This is true even though asphalt has a lower initial construction cost. The comparable costs are due to the increased need for additional maintenance on asphalt, as compared to the relative ease of maintenance on concrete pavers. The bottom line, then, is that beautifying your space with pavers and hardscapes actually saves maintenance costs down the road.

These cost-benefit analyses should have a positive effect on helping to generate buy-in among members of your homeowners association or board who may feel reluctant to invest in renovation projects with less-than-clear returns or who may worry about potential disruption. The impact of renovation and installation can be minimized, in fact, by scheduling a paver renovation during times of less anticipated community traffic. The Crescent Arms Condominiums in Siesta Key, Florida, for example, planned its installation of 50,000 square feet of new pavers in roadway and parking areas to occur in late summer in order to avoid the winter tourist season. The result was a strategically effective renovation that enhanced value, minimized risk, and downplayed disruption.

Going Green

An added benefit of renovation or addition with hardscapes and pavers is increased sustainability for your community. The Leadership

The visual appeal of new pavers, natural stone, retaining walls, or driveways is hard to deny, and everyone—from homeowners to board members—wants to maintain a community that makes them proud.

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in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system, originally developed for the U.S. Department of Energy, provides a point rating system to recognize sustainable site and building design. The system aims to improve environmental and economic performance of buildings and sites, and complying with the rating system is voluntary.

Concrete pavers and permeable interlocking concrete pavers can earn points or credits in the LEED rating system. Credits are earned under several categories of use, including stormwater management, local/regional materials, and exterior design to reduce heat islands. Many local governments have developed incentive programs to encourage communities to seek accreditation within the LEED system.

**Safety and Stability**

Renovating your community’s pool or common areas with concrete pavers can provide improved safety and skid resistance for both foot and vehicular traffic, which is important for existing and new residents.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) places guidelines on walking surfaces that require firmness, stability, and slip resistance. Interlocking paver systems consistently offer these characteristics. ADA recommends that the static coefficient of friction for flat surfaces along accessible routes be 0.6 and 0.8 for ramps. ADA advisory material recommends various test methods to assess surface slip resistance, and interlocking pavements consistently pass these tests with flying colors. Also, many paver products offer additional specialty surfaces for the visually impaired.

**Making the Sell**

Because a small change in hardscaping and pavement designs can have such an enormously pleasing effect in changing the profile of your community, the decision to embark on a hardscape renovation should be easy. And convincing your homeowners and board members to make the investment will be even easier if you focus on the three “s” benefits: savings, sustainability, and safety.

It helps, also, to arm your presentation to homeowners and board members with plenty of visual references and photographs so that constituents see just how striking a hardscape renovation can be. The visual appeal of new pavers, natural stone, retaining walls, or driveways is hard to deny, and everyone—from homeowners to board members—wants to maintain a community that makes them proud.

Jim Boedeker is sales manager with Tremron Group. For more information, visit www.tremron.com.