Introduction: Allison Johnson, Project Architect and sustainability team leader at HOK. I have been with HOK since August of last year and though at my previous firm I worked on all aspects of project development, some of my focus has been in Sustainable design. My last project in Colorado was a project pursuing Living Building Challenge.
HOK moved into our current offices in February 2015. I won’t go into a lot of detail about the space since this was highlighted last year. HOK chose the location and designed our office space with employee wellness in mind, but the WELL Building Standard was not on our radar. In choosing the location at 10 S. Broadway the following goals were accomplished:

• Priority given to employee wellness
• Celebrate gathering
• Establish a strong connection to outdoors + city
Shortly after I joined HOK, we announced our partnership with Delos. Delos™, a wellness real estate and technology firm, has announced a partnership with HOK to accelerate the organization’s mission to integrate health and wellness into the built environment. Delos™, a wellness real estate and technology firm, has announced a partnership with HOK to accelerate the organization’s mission to integrate health and wellness into the built environment. Delos developed the WELL Building Standard. Along with doctors and sustainability activists (like Leonardo DiCaprio) our President and CEO, Bill Hellmuth, serves on the advisory board.
Let’s start with a 60 second primer on the WELL Building Standard: Launched in 2014. Relaunched 2016. Where LEED is focused on buildings, WELL focuses on people. There is some overlap with LEED, but the categories are: Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Fitness, Comfort and Mind.
There are 102 preconditions and optimizations, similar to LEED credits. But all the language has been changed a bit. All of these are based on body systems. It is important to understand that the WELL Building Standard is a holistic approach but that it brings together and references many other studies, and codes that optimize human health. Though this is the first standard of its kind, the research and individual approach is not new, category by category.
The design of our space includes many WELL features: locker rooms, prominent stairs (and elevators that are tucked away). Space to eat away from our desks and a kitchen for employees to use.
Motivated by our relationship DELOS, and to help us understand the WELL Building standard and the certification process to better help our clients, most of the HOK offices have preformed a gap analysis. So we have looked at our spaces, and office policies to compare where we are today and what we would need to do in order to certify our space. Our space falls under WELL for building Interiors.
My first step was to become fluent with the WELL standard. I’m now a WELL AP, so studying for that test, and getting to know the standard was the beginning of the process. In some ways it is more complicated than the LEED scorecard, but the process mirrors getting a building certified. The difference is that you need much more owner buy-in.
For the gap analysis, we focused on preconditions (WELL Silver) that would have to be met in order to achieve WELL. 40% of the optimizations would get us to gold. 80% would get us to platinum. Also, note that the project needs to be recertified every 3 years.
Because I was new to HOK, a big part of the process was understanding what our policies were, and what systems were in place. This would be the point at which we would assemble the team, and the owner would be on this team.
Easy items: Site verification: measuring faucet heights, verifying drinking fountain distances, measuring plates.
I scheduled “interviews” with: Lighting designer (which we have in house), office manager, mechanical engineer and our Director of Sustainability, and LEED AP pursuing V4 certification on our space. We also got an estimate from a testing facility to do air and water testing per the WELL standard. If we do go after certification in the future, the WELL assessor will complete verification testing, but it will be important to understand what is in the air and water in order to know what filtering system might need to be in place ahead of the verification tests.
We then developed a spreadsheet for tracking. Like we do for LEED, we tracked “Yes” (preconditions and optimizations), “Maybe”, “pending performance verification” and “No”. Other data we added to our spreadsheet is the verification type required, action items, which path we are taking for compliance, and who is responsible. Note: one of the complications in the WELL standard is the paths to compliance. Sometimes all of them are required, and sometimes you have 2 of 5 or one option.
We quickly learned that air was our biggest challenge and “gap.”

12 Preconditions and 16 optimizations. Important to have a mechanical engineer on board from the beginning, and if you are evaluating existing spaces for WELL compliance for clients, imperative to bring along an engineer.
Though we do have bottle fillers and more water fountains than required by code, we do not meet the minimum distance (100’) to drinking fountains. Some would have to be added to meet this. Additional filters might need to be added pending testing results.
Because we do not have food service in house, this is relatively each to achieve. We are currently investigating some healthier options to meet the vending requirements, but our outdoor area and indoor gathering space meet the requirements for the “Mindful Eating”. Food served at lunch and learns, etc., does not have to comply with WELL Standards, but our team is considering writing some guidelines for these vendors.
We have the benefit lighting designers in house. When designing our lighting team considered the following:
• Put light where it’s needed
• LED technology
• Advanced lighting controls to fine – tune light levels
To achieve the circadian rhythm requirements, the easiest method is to provide task lights that meet these color temperature requirements.

Also, added daylighting control on the north side of the space would be required, and added task lights could address the circadian rhythm requirements. Surprisingly this is an issue, because of the glare off of the courthouse at certain times of the year.
Plans were already in the works to turn our annex into a fitness facility free for employee use. This was recently completed. But we did use the WELL standards in purchasing equipment.
Comfort includes issues like sound, thermal comfort and flexible seating. The biggest challenge we have is thermal comfort in some of the spaces during the coldest months of the winter. We are providing standing height desks as requested. Last year we got new adjustable seats that meet the requirements. We also installed a standing height desk that is similar to the free address optimization in the WELL Standard. This is open for people who would like to work standing for an afternoon.
Mind includes items like health care programs, stress management, beauty, biophilia, and even material transparency— all focused on effecting the nervous system. Many of these policies are already in place. However, the challenge here is that HOK is 23 offices and 1700 employees. Policy changes for offices have a large impact. Changing things like limiting access to emails after midnight is counter cultural to architecture.
LESSONS LEARNED:

• Become well acquainted with the standard.
• Understand which applies to which standard (New and Existing building vs Interiors vs Core and Shell). I was chasing some solutions that only applied to the New Construction and our project falls under Interiors and the vestibule I thought we needed wasn’t required.
• Challenges are associated with our space that might have chosen a different space).
• Air is really restrictive in existing spaces. If you are designing new systems, this is not as big of an issue, because the systems can be designed for the correct filters and velocities required for them.
• Challenge as a designer to facilitate operational and policy items. We can easily control design, but WELL philosophy must be adopted from the top in order to make changes. A bigger piece of the pie are policy vs. design items.
Thank you!