

## Wondering What the Future Holds?

The World Future Society recently published an article in *The Futurist* (November-December 2011) that provides possible glimpses at the answer to this question. Below I have recapped a portion, focusing on areas important to firms serving the built environment.

### Current state of the future:

- Food prices are at their highest point in history, and likely to continue to rise without major innovations in production
- More data went through the internet in 2010 than in all the previous years combined
- Amazon.com sold more electronic than paper books for the first time
- The world economy grew 4.9% in 2010, while the population grew 1.2%
- The gap between rich and poor - both within cultures and among countries - continues to widen
- China surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest economy 2010
- India is expected to pass China as the most populous country in the world by 2030; together, these countries account for nearly 40% of humanity

### Outlook for the decade ahead:

- Computers will manage our money for us, perhaps warding off a lot of would-be recessions and market crashes
- The internet will automatically search itself so you don't have to (Google is learning about you with each search you currently do)
- A diverse portfolio of energy technologies will replace our reliance on fossil fuels
- We will use our water more wisely – or else water shortages will increase dangerously
- Future buildings may be more responsive to weather fluctuations
- Cities will use geographic information systems to collect real-time data from citizens to improve services
- It's a boom market for medical tourism
- Learning will become more social and game-based, and online gaming may soon replace textbooks in schools
- Future libraries will be valued more for services than for book collections
- Human relationships won't die, but interactions will become more virtual
- We will design more devices to gradually degrade back into the parts stream
- Cheap electricity and clean water may soon be possible for remote areas using a new technologies being developed using nanotechnology and hydrogen fuel cells
- With more work being done by freelancers, organizations will need full-time professionals to supervise them
- The Arctic regions will be hotspots for industrial and demographic growth