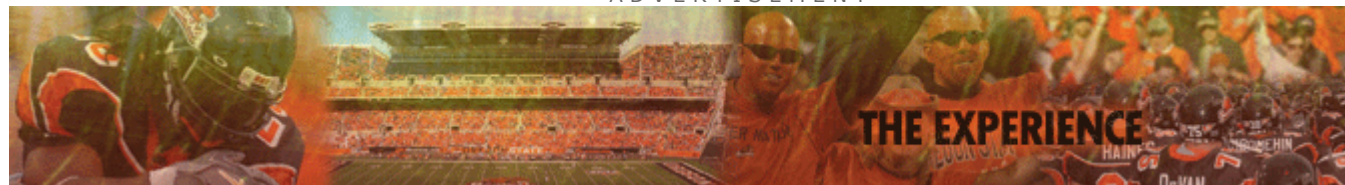


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## Green building adds to affordability

*Developers of low-income housing find energy efficiency helps save even more*

BY DAN SCHAUER

Pamplin Media Group, Mar 13, 2007

### Count developers of affordable housing among Portland's green building leaders.

Portland-area nonprofit organizations have earned national recognition for projects that demonstrate the benefits of sustainability across an economic, environmental and social spectrum.

When it comes to providing green homes for low- and moderate-income families, nonprofit housing development corporations "are on the forefront of innovation, quality design and affordability" says Kelly Caffarelli, executive director of the Home Depot Foundation.

The home improvement retailer's foundation honored nonprofits at work in Portland, Tigard and Clackamas at the Enterprise Network Conference last October.

The winning community development corporations' accomplishments show it's no longer a question of whether green building is too expensive, but whether it's too costly to ignore it.

"If you think about how to optimize green building for the most benefit, it's by building green in an affordable manner for people of low income," says Nancy Yuill, executive director of Clackamas Community Land Trust,



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At Station Place Tower, residents such as Barney Loop have to enter a lottery to get one of the 17 personal garden plots on the rooftop terrace, part of a roof system that supplies the buildings' toilets and fire sprinklers with rainwater. Hummingbird feeders catch the rain, too.

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which won first prize in homeownership for its SE Phillips Creek development. “These are the people who need it the most and who benefit the most.”

### To low-income, savings count

So does it make good business sense to pay for green-built affordable housing? Going green adds between 5 percent and 10 percent to the initial bottom line, according to Kevin Kraus, construction manager at [Reach Community Development Inc.](#)

“If you’re in it for the long run like we are, it’s worth paying for energy-efficient and sustainable components up front that reduce ongoing operations, maintenance, utility and repair costs,” Kraus says.

A specific innovation that nonprofits have adapted out of financial necessity in order to build green at a responsible cost is an integrated design process. Simply put, the contractors, architect and developer start working together earlier to identify cost savings and resolve complicated regulatory, code and permit issues.

“It’s more productive to bring the contractor and design team together early on,” says Dan VanBrabant, partner at Oregon Construction Co. and builder of six new row houses at Southeast Powell Boulevard and 33rd Avenue for first-time homeowners.

“On both sides (nonprofit and for-profit) you have people who want to build green and people who could care less,” VanBrabant says. Nonprofit builders provide a “proactive environment to work in, and the quality and the cost reflect that.”

One of the green-building paybacks for Reach comes when it acts as property manager of the projects it creates.

“Building green makes sense because it lowers the ongoing energy costs for renters and owners with less disposable income,” says Dee Walsh, Reach’s executive director.

### Roof tops it off

Reach’s Station Place Tower at Northwest Ninth Avenue and Lovejoy Street, which won the national runner-up prize in rental housing from the Home Depot Foundation, helps bring a measure of income diversity to the Pearl District for renters 55 and older.

Downsizing to fit into his one-bedroom unit and finding good, reasonably priced places to eat in his new neighborhood has occupied Michael Blakeslee, who moved into Station Place Tower in February.

Blakeslee made an appeal for gardening tips at a recent meeting of

SMELL ROTTEN  
EGGS *or* SULFUR?  
THAT COULD BE  
A GAS LEAK.

residents interested in tending the raised-bed gardens on the tower's rooftop terrace.

"There's a lot of knowledge among gardeners. You'll be taken care of," says Barney Loop, 71, to Blakeslee.

He'll have to win a plot first. A lottery was held to determine how to share the 17 planting spaces among 30 interested residents.

The rooftop terrace is a component of the building's most noteworthy green innovation. The roof harvests rainwater for a 20,000-gallon tank built into the ground floor that supplies the tower's dual-flush toilets and fire sprinklers, saving water from the city's mains while capturing and slowing runoff to the municipal sanitary sewer system and the Willamette River.

### **Developers who conserve**

A green development in Tigard addresses the need for more rental housing near the Washington Square mall area, while also distinguishing itself for an environmentally beneficial solution.

Community Partners for Affordable Housing Inc. had families in mind for Oleson Woods Apartments, where townhouse-style units have three or four bedrooms.

"People trying to work here were being squeezed out," says Sheila Greenlaw-Fink, executive director of CPAH. "The whole concept around planning regional town centers is to address this gap in housing for working families."

The jump in green building was made when CPAH integrated Oleson Woods into a sensitive, challenging site for affordable housing: a wooded, three-acre parcel with a neglected wetlands. Neighboring residents and Tualatin Riverkeepers wanted to preserve the open space.

The key to success was to enhance the site environmentally and convince the community that CPAH would protect the space better than other developers would, Greenlaw-Fink says.

By repairing and enhancing the wetlands, the development provided a green amenity for its residents and neighbors. Now, Tualatin Riverkeepers conducts bird-watching walks at Oleson Woods and plans to make it a stop on its bus tour of sustainable development and storm-water management.

"Our job as developers is to convince environmentalists development can be a way to conserve," Greenlaw-Fink says. "We're either stewards or we're not."

CPAH won an honorable mention from the Home Depot Foundation. Host Development Inc. also was honored for houses it built in NorthPortland's New Columbia project.

### **Buy the house, leave the land**

Green building and the goal of increasing homeownership among working families have been combined in north Clackamas County using the land-trust model. Homebuyers purchase a house without having to pay for the land under it, which is held in a community trust.

Clackamas Community Land Trust found its vision of sustainability in 2003 through research into green building, according to Yuill, the executive director.

This led to building practices that eliminate materials with volatile organic compounds such as toxic glues, formaldehyde insulation and gas-emitting chemicals, and using advanced framing, engineered wood and recycled concrete in construction.

It's a matter of helping families with lower incomes have healthier homes, Yuill says.

"If you're in an unhealthy home, you're going to have more medical expenses. But they (low- to moderate-income families) can't afford that," Yuill says. High energy costs also are unaffordable, "all the more reason to give them an energy-efficient home that's cheaper to heat and cool."

David and Nancy Johnson are first-time homeowners who moved into their SE Phillips Creek house in 2005. They view their three-bedroom, 1,100-square foot home from an ecological perspective.

"I get worried about global warming, so I think this is the best option, living in a nice, small, ecofriendly house," says Nancy Johnson, a 28-year-old stay-at-home mom who's expecting the couple's second child.

"People buy houses that are bigger than they need," David Johnson says. "It's nice to have a small home; it makes you prioritize. It brings consumption down."

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### Vital stats

- Ten years from now, the tricounty area will need more than 90,000 new rental units affordable to a family of four earning under \$34,000, according to Metro's Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

- Portland has taken a significant step toward addressing the need with its plan to set aside

30 percent of all urban renewal tax and financing resources, which would provide \$162 million over the next six years.

*Sources: Metro, Affordable Housing Now*

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