

# Homes Become Sustainable Through Building Practices

The concept of sustainable building incorporates a variety of factors, but ultimately sustainable buildings provide better quality living environments inside and out, last longer because they are more durable and adaptable, and cost less to maintain because they are more efficient. The methods used to build sustainable homes increase the longevity of the properties and lead to better quality of life for residents. Both single-family homes and multifamily developments can benefit from this practice, and builders in Idaho are incorporating these building concepts to the advantage of Idaho citizens.

Meadow Ranch development in Coeur d'Alene, a 55 and older active adult community, provides quality single-family and town homes close to necessary amenities. These homes were built from the ground up with sustainability in mind. All the framing for the homes is done off-site in a factory so lumber isn't sitting outside in inclement weather. This process also allows the homes to be built much more quickly so they have less exposure to the elements. While the home floorplans vary, each of these homes incorporates features that help the environment and ensure the home will stand the test of time. Low-flow toilets; drought tolerant irrigation systems; and energy-efficient windows, doors, and light fixtures are just a few of the items that ensure the homes are as efficient as possible. In addition, residents benefit from lower utility costs.

The benefits of efficiency aren't seen only in the final product, but quality of life is also a factor for people purchasing these homes, said Dennis Cunningham, president of Active West Developers & Builders, the developer of Meadow Ranch. The development is located near a grocery store and medical facilities, and is just a quarter mile from North Idaho Centennial Trail, a multi-use recreational trail system. Benefits beyond the proximity to local services are what one resident is lauding about his home. "I had a gentleman who told me his eyes didn't water as much and that he breathed better after being in his home for just two weeks," Cunningham said. The resident attributes that change to the quality building materials, such as no VOC paints and carpet padding and adhesives with low formaldehyde.

Residents in two new multifamily developments in Eastern Idaho are also benefiting from sustainable design and construction processes. Rosslare Senior Apartments in Idaho Falls and Cardona Senior Apartments in Chubbuck both recently received Platinum Certification through the USGBC LEED for Homes program, the first two multifamily developments to achieve this in Idaho. Thomas Development Co., the developer of these projects, included several elements to make these projects sustainable. Like Meadow Ranch, site locations were selected

because they were near existing development and community resources. High-efficiency water conserving plumbing fixtures, an ENERGY STAR advance light package, and ENERGY STAR appliances are just a few of the items that help keep tenant's energy costs low. And low energy costs are just one benefit. "The durability of the development is increased because of the high-quality materials," said Claire Casazza, director of development for Thomas Development. The company uses environmentally preferred products in the construction of the developments, which means products must be produced within 500 miles of the



Above: Homes in Meadow Ranch development

Below: A resident's kitchen in the Meadow Ranch development

site, reducing the pollution that occurs during the transportation process. Thomas Development incorporates green building into all its affordable housing projects, a decision made in 2006. "LEED has become the construction and quality benchmark for Thomas Development projects," Casazza said. "It felt like it was the right direction to go in reducing our footprint and cutting down waste."  
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## Market Trends

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“To me it is important to realize that there can’t be one model, or a national model, of what sustainable communities means because it will be different in every region. It is an issue communities need to deal with locally, based on the resources available to them.”

– Pat Barclay, Executive Director, Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment, Boise

“A sustainable community is a community practicing sustainable living and development. This is a community that is reproducing its population and using resources in a way that meets the community’s current needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can continue to be met in the future.”

– Joe Herring, President, Region IV Development Association, Twin Falls

“The concept of sustainable communities provides for consistent continuity and growth in a community. If developed correctly sustainable communities provide for consistency in every economic environment.”

– Darsi Johnson, Acting Chair, Pocatello Development Authority Commission, Pocatello

“It’s about municipalities planning together to determine growth by cities and regions. If we look at land use planning, economic development, and housing as a subset of land use planning all together, from a government and business aspect, we’ll overcome barriers we have today and create a solid infrastructure for future growth.”

– Karl Dye, Executive Director, Bonner County Economic Development Corporation, Sandpoint ■

## Building Practices

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Attention to the reduction of waste and importance of recycling began long before residents moved in. During the construction process, the team worked to reduce waste and reuse and recycle materials whenever possible. At Cardona, 99.5% of construction waste was diverted from landfills. Only one small truckload of non-recyclable products was taken to the landfill. Waste also was reduced through the implementation of panelized construction, where pre-engineered wall sections are produced in factory-controlled conditions and then shipped to the construction site. Building materials that contributed to healthier indoor environments were used whenever possible on the projects.

Processes like those practiced in the design and construction of these homes and apartments help to ensure that residents will have efficient and long-lasting places to live, creating sustainability for future residents. “Hopefully in years to come our sustainable decisions will repay themselves many times over when water rates increase and electrical rates rise,” Cunningham said. ■

as one cohesive system. That is, transportation will be planned in light of needs relating to housing, economic development, local food systems, etc., and vice versa. As an example, the plan will address the issue of low- and moderate-income housing, its relationship to job centers, and the need for an adequate transportation system to get those individuals to and from work. Luft said, “To truly be sustainable, all long-range planning needs to be conducted in light of other issues. For example, we want to make sure plans for increased transit coincide with plans for affordable housing. The goal for the partnerships is to ensure that all planning is happening with an awareness of what others are doing and what their needs are.”

A similar group of partners is also working together to prepare State Street/State Highway 44 from the capitol to Middleton to function as a multi-modal corridor, supporting several modes of transportation such as cars, buses, walking, and biking with equitable, affordable housing options and accessible employment. The group will be exploring funding options, including possible grants such as the Community Challenge Grant offered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to help with funding for the project. Matt Stoll, executive director of COMPASS said, “In order for our region to be sustainable into the future, the many types of long-range plans developed for the area need to complement each other and be designed to work together. My hope is that the relationships we are cultivating will lead to more coordinated planning.”

Even though these newly coordinated planning efforts are just beginning, important partnerships are being formed and steps are being taken to address the critical housing and transportation needs of sustainability in Idaho communities. ■



The corridor highlighted above is the focus of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho’s (COMPASS) efforts to create a cohesive plan for sustainable communities.