

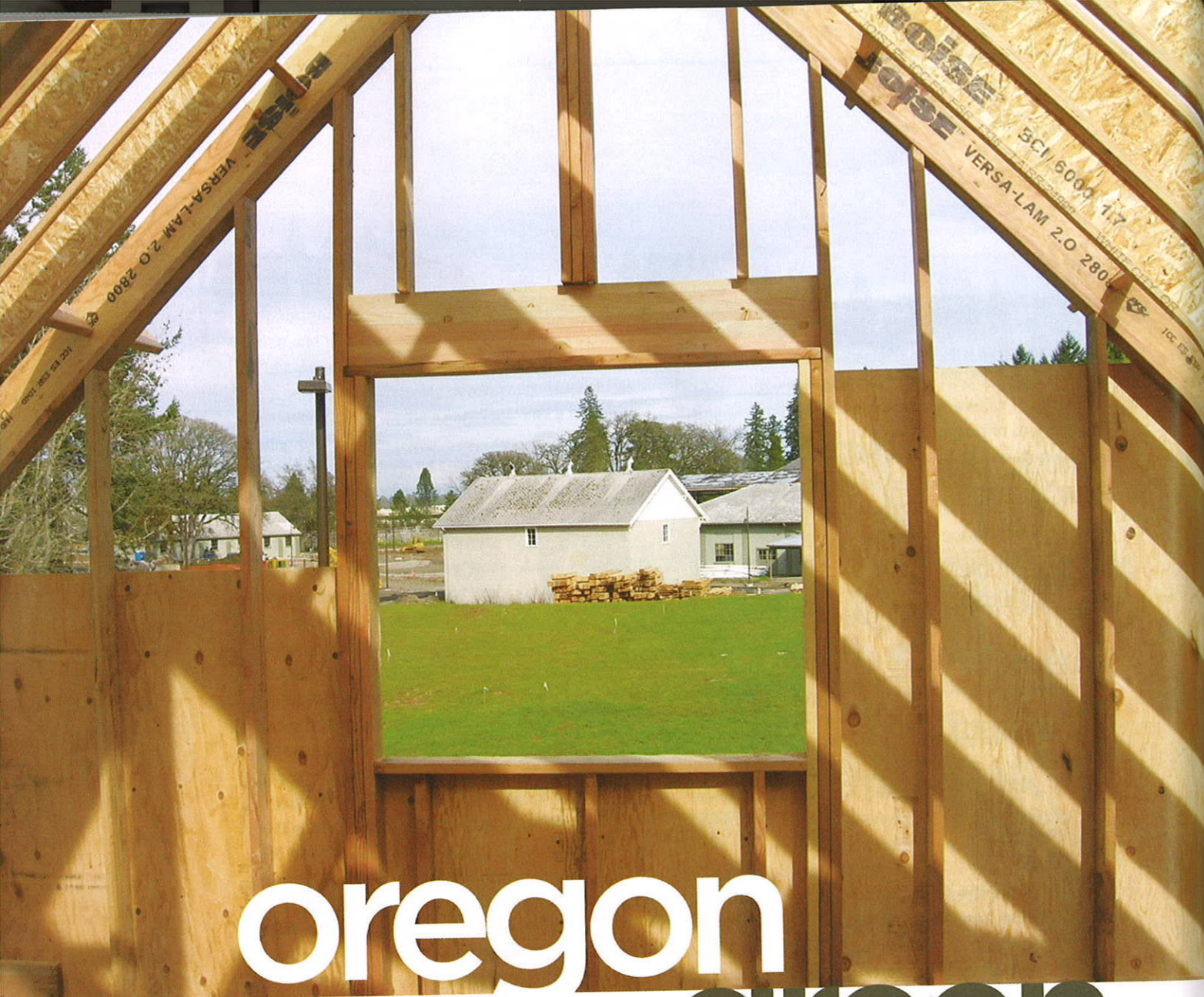
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SUSTAINABLE CHOICES

Plan Bee



oregon green

A new community in Salem, Oregon, is raising the bar for sustainable development.

MICHAEL MEHAFFY

OREGON IS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS INNOVATIONS in urban development and environmental stewardship, but a new, 32-acre (13-ha) community being built in the capital city of Salem may set a benchmark for the trend in sustainable community development. The Pringle Creek Community has high aspirations: its development team aims to provide a showcase for integrated, market-driven sustainable development. More than that, the community is an early pioneer in the trend to combine green building standards with the environmental and social achievements of new urbanist community design.

The project already is receiving positive reviews. The National Association of Home Builders recently awarded

its first Green Land Development of the Year award to the community, Oregon secretary of state Bill Bradbury called its master plan "a vision of Oregon's future," and Salem mayor Janet Taylor says she sees the project as "an opportunity to do something innovative that will put us on the map nationally, perhaps internationally."

Pringle Creek's green building goals are noteworthy. Among the project's environmental attributes are the following:

- ▷ it has the largest residential application of pervious asphalt in the country;
- ▷ its village center streets are made of porous concrete;
- ▷ 100 percent of the framing lumber for its 190 homes will be Forest Stewardship Council certified;

- ▷ 90 percent of the rainwater will infiltrate the ground naturally;
- ▷ 80 percent of the many existing trees have been preserved;
- ▷ lumber from the trees that were removed is being milled on site for reuse;
- ▷ more than half the houses will use geothermal heating and cooling that is 400 percent efficient;
- ▷ 35 percent of the land is preserved as open space, parks, plazas, and gardens; and
- ▷ every home will exceed Earth Advantage and Energy Star standards.

But the project team also aims to build a true community, incorporating event facilities, a market, a café, community gardens, public transit, walkable design, live/work units, and incubators for local businesses. In addition, it aims to do all this in close consultation with local community members while preserving and building on the site's existing assets.

The project already has deep roots in the community. It is part of a redevelopment of the former Fairview Training Center, a vacated, 275-acre (111-ha), state-owned campus for the developmentally disabled. The campus was studied in 1999 as a redevelopment site by a consortium of interests—the state, Salem, the Morningside Neighborhood Association, and local citizens and business interests. The initial concept sought to capitalize on the site's rolling hills and old buildings, and its convenient links to adjacent residential development, a new industrial park, and the town's nearby airport.

At about this time, Bill Lindburg, president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, was looking for a design exercise that might inspire the area's young architects. He enlisted former Salem mayor Bob Lindsey, an advocate for compact land use planning and head of the local chapter of the land use watchdog 1,000 Friends of Oregon, and Russ Beaton, an economics professor and sustainability guru at Willamette University. Together, they organized a one-day charrette to consider what cutting-edge, sustainable development of the site might produce.

The charrette, held in spring 2000 and attended by more than 130 people, resulted in community enthusiasm for the vision of a model sustainable community. It established the core values for the redevelopment that continue today—energy and resource independence, environmental stewardship, social and economic diver-



Some 80 percent of the existing trees have been preserved in the 32-acre (13-ha) Pringle Creek Community in Salem, Oregon. Twelve acres (5.3 ha) of the property will be preserved for open space, including walking trails, a creek and wetlands, a community plaza, community gardens, and parks.



Located in the heart of Oregon's Willamette Valley, the sustainable living development will include a community garden (left center), walking paths and trails (far left center and far right center), a riparian open-space corridor (stretching through the middle of the site and to the left), tree-lined green streets (center right), plus a village center with a community square, shops, and housing (above center).

sity, employment of ecological design principles, and community involvement.

Beaton and others assembled a group of investors to form a private investment and planning company committed to principles of sustainability, and the company submitted a bid for the site. Impressed by its commitment to sustainable development, then-governor John Kitzhaber, himself a national pioneer in sustainable practices in state government, designated the group to guide development of the site.

Portland architect and Salem native James Meyer, principal of Opsi Architecture LLP, was selected by the new company to analyze the site, arrange a market study, and organize the planning process. Meyer, a leader in sustainable design trends, says he is passionate about a more responsible role for architecture—one that respects the environment and the site. "We wanted to integrate sustainability at every level," he recounts. "It was a matter of making the decisions that are right for the environment and the people who will live here. It's incredibly rewarding to see buyers responding so strongly already to the values of the project."

Meyer brought in Patrick Condon, the James Taylor Chair of Livable Communities at the University of British Columbia, to conduct a more in-depth community planning charrette. The three-day gathering included Gary Lawrence, former Seattle community development director; Steve Coyle, principal of LCA Town Planning and Architecture; and Ron Kellett, associate professor of architecture at the University of Oregon. The group also included engineering experts, development economists, city officials, and local investors.

This intensive charrette laid the foundation for a master plan for the entire 275-acre (111-ha) site that exhibited a strong commitment to sustainability. Other notables in sustainable planning also toured the site and offered feedback, including William McDonough, Paul Hawken, and Christopher Alexander. In 2003, a flexible mixed-use and sustainable development zoning ordinance was crafted with the city that opened the door to innovation.

Kellett likened the master plan to a fine Oregon pinot noir—rich in subtleties and nuance. "There's so much flavor and detail in the plan, you've got to take some time to fully appreciate it," he says. The market *did* take its time, shifting slowly toward acceptance of green building and, more recently, Pringle Creek's style of green planning. But at its full scale, the project was perhaps ahead of its time.

In late 2004, three of the original investors recognized the problem of the project's scale and decided to push forward on a smaller portion as a pilot project. The investors formed a new company to proceed on 32 acres (13 ha) of the site to implement the vision. The core planning team of Meyer, Condon, and Kellett was once again engaged, along with Ramsay Worden Architects Ltd. of Vancouver, British Columbia, this time to flesh out the details embedded in the master plan. Local businessman Don Myers was recruited to bring the project to reality.

Building on the original sustainable principles, the planning team created detailed plans that included 130 homesites across seven housing types on 20 acres (8.1 ha), with potential for the market to embrace another 30 accessory dwelling units and/or 30 mixed-use condominiums. Lots ranged from 900 to 4,000 square feet (84 to 375 sq m), with an average size of 3,000 square feet (280 sq m).

Every decision was made in light of sustainability, with embedded energy, livability, and aesthetics all coming into play as the team learned to think about each decision in terms of its impact on the land and



how it might foster a sense of community. The development team gave full expression to the master plan with specifications that called for green streets of porous asphalt and concrete—24 feet (7.3 m) wide with parking on both sides—and landscaping for rainwater infiltration. Pedestrians and bicyclists were given priority, along with public transit, and the decision was made to provide homes with only single-car garages.

Existing on-site resources were highly valued and are being employed in the project in the following ways:

- ▷ three old buildings that had housed maintenance shops and provided food storage are being restored to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Platinum standards;
- ▷ two large greenhouses are being restored to provide community gardens and nurture native plants;
- ▷ old metal buildings were deconstructed and used elsewhere;
- ▷ old foundations and walls were ground up for road base or broken up for retaining walls;
- ▷ a dozen dying fir trees were cut to the largest possible dimension with a portable mill;
- ▷ a 350-gallon- (1,325-liter-) per-minute well is providing geothermal heating and cooling for all the commercial and mixed-use buildings and 80 homes; and
- ▷ solar access and prevailing breezes were carefully factored into the layout.

"When we started this thing six years ago, sustainable development was still regarded by many as the province of environmental zealots," notes local developer Tony Nielsen, master plan coordinator for both the

original Fairview project and the new Pringle Creek Community. "But we quickly learned—from the Urban Land Institute, from people like John Knott and Jim Heid, from projects like Stapleton and Prairie Crossing—that consumers were beginning to demand much more from their neighborhoods and more from their homes." But the question remained whether the Salem market—considerably more conservative than Portland's—was ready for sustainable development.

The answer came on a warm afternoon last August when more than 700 people came out to see the site before a spade of dirt had been turned. They came to hear about the vision, to see the plans, and to become part of something new. Today, 11 model homes are under construction, work is about to begin on 20 custom homes, and sales have just started. "We're in the path of growth, in every sense," says Myers. "Salem is growing rapidly, south Salem is the designated location for growth during the coming decade, and Oregon has always been a leader in managed growth and now sustainable development. But more than any of these—sustainable development, green building, smart growth, new urbanism, whatever we call it—the market is demanding real communities." **U**

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There will be seven diverse housing types—among them single-family structures, including cottages (far left) and "tall houses" (above); duplexes (center); rowhouses; and live/work units. Twenty-six of the homes will be carbon-neutral, "net zero," solar-powered homes designed to generate more energy than they use.