

Taking the LEED

Thu Jul 03, 2008

By Melissa Mancini

DURHAM -- The green movement has become so prominent even industries known for wasteful practises are joining the crusade.

Industries like construction.

New housing developments can create truckloads of waste but some developers are getting into a program called LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), to counteract the debris left from their building sites.

One of the first LEED homes projects in Durham is being proposed by Liza Communities for the Whitby marina. The developer was chosen by the Canada Green Building Council to be in a pilot project to determine the official LEED standards for homes in Canada. Once built, it will be the first LEED-certified town home community in Canada.

What constitutes a LEED home? The proposed Liza Communities development will offer environmental benchmarks beyond standard building code requirements. The homes will be 38-45 per cent more energy efficient, 35-40 per cent more water efficient, offer 50 per cent superior air filtration, be made of 38-45 per cent more environmental preferable materials and resources, produce 70 per cent less landfill waste and provide a 30 per cent reduction for irrigation demand.

Being environmentally friendly isn't brand new for Liza. The company has been an Energy Star builder since last year and maintains energy efficient standards in all its homes.

"This is another level of construction techniques and green development," said Nargues Mansouri, a project manager for the Richmond Hill based company.

Creating a housing development to meet specific criteria isn't simple but a lot of planning streamlines the process, Ms. Mansouri said. She said it also ensures that all tradespeople and contractors working on the site are all involved in the preparation stages so everyone is on the same page.

Once the project is approved by Whitby Town council and building begins there will be a lot of differences on site, said Liza representative John Burke. Drywall will be recycled instead of going into a landfill. Lumber will be carefully managed so it is separated and reused properly. The home frames will be built in a way that makes them more energy efficient. Homes will be fitted with highly efficient fixtures.

The cost for the company to build the high-standard homes is a three per cent increase in hard costs, for things like materials, Ms. Mansouri said.

“The entire consciousness of the industry has changed and that's important.” -- John Burke, Liza communities.

What's the picture south of the border?

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) originally developed the LEED green building rating system in 2000 for new commercial construction. Following LEED's success in the commercial sector, USGBC began the pilot test of LEED for homes in August 2005. There are currently over 4,200 homes across the U.S. involved in the LEED for homes pilot program and more than 90 that have already been LEED-certified as a green home. The LEED for homes pilot test concluded in spring 2007 and the LEED for homes rating system was launched in June 2007.

-- U.S. Green Building Council

The homes, which range from 540 square feet to 1,700 square feet will be priced from \$150,000 to the mid \$200,000 range, Mr. Burke said.

"This will still be an affordable community, not a luxury condo community," he said.

But most importantly, the proposed project represents a shift in the industry, Mr. Burke said.

"The entire consciousness of the industry has changed and that's important," he said.

There is already proof that LEED works in Durham. Some of the buildings at UOIT and Durham College are LEED-certified, including the campus arena.

Like building LEED homes, the price tag for other LEED buildings is not cheap. But Durham College facilities vice-president Ralph Aprile said the institution is always looking at ways to improve sustainability. Even in campus buildings that are not certified, the school strives for a high level of energy efficiency, he said.

For the school it's important to create a good building that will be around for a while.

"We believe in building for today and building for the future," he said.