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Savannah Sprouts First 'Green' Residential Project in Southeast

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It's not easy being green — but it is economically beneficial and environmentally responsible.

So says a growing number of builders and government bodies, and so say Foram Group and Lott+Barber Architects of Savannah, the developer and design team behind Lakeview Village and Residences at Lakeview Village. They describe the west Chatham development as the first residential project in the Southeast to use green (the slang-becoming-mainstream term for environmentally friendly) building practices in residential planning and architecture.

The development is being designed and will be built according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards established by the U.S. Green Building Council, a coalition of 4,000 organizations from across the building industry working to promote environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy residential and commercial buildings. The project will seek LEED certification, which can only be granted after a project is completed.

It is also the first project in the area to participate in and seek certification from the EarthCraft House Multi-Family Development, a program of Southface, the Atlanta-based nonprofit that promotes sustainable energy homes and workplaces through education, research, advocacy and technical assistance.

The development fronts the Pooler Parkway at the northwest quadrant of the parkway's intersection with Interstate 16. It will contain a 3.7-acre, open-air commercial center — Lakeview Village — with 28,000 square feet of mixed-use retail and shopping including outdoor markets and restaurants.

The residential component — Residences at Lakeview Village — will be a 23.1-acre multi-family neighborhood with 400 units ranging from one to three bedrooms and one or two baths. The residential area will include a 12-acre lake with floating platforms, boat docks and a wildlife path; a pool, pool house and play area; Village House, which contains assembly rooms, billiard tables and lounges; exercise centers; a network of gardens, gazebos and outdoor barbecue pits; and lap pools and basketball, volleyball and racquetball courts.

Lott + Barber is using such green design techniques as water-efficient landscaping, resource reuse, renewable energy and other innovative green design and technology strategies.

For Lott + Barber, building green is a no-brainer. Lott + Barber Principal Forest Lott said the firm has always been interested in environmental sustainability, so it tries to convince all its clients to build green. When clients ask Lott + Barber's planning and sustainability expert, Denise Grabowski, why they should build green, she answers their question with a question.

"Why not?" Grabowski asks them. "It's reasonable, it's responsible, it's logical. Why not do this?"

Economic and environmental benefits

According to figures from the Green Building Council, buildings in the United States account for 36 percent of total energy use (65 percent of electricity consumption), 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, 30 percent of raw materials use, 30 percent of waste output (136 million tons annually) and 12 percent of potable water consumption.

The Council said economic benefits to building green include lower electricity and water bills, lower operating costs for businesses operated out of green-built buildings and enhanced asset value and profits for builders/developers.

Green Building Council National President Rick Fedrizzi said buildings built using LEED standards can save anywhere from 30 to 70 percent in energy costs and cut water bills in half. The environmental benefits include better air and water quality, less solid waste, conservation of natural resources, and enhancement and protection of ecosystems and biodiversity.

The Council said building green is better overall for the community, too, minimizing the strain on local infrastructure and contributing to the overall quality of life.

Loretta Cockrum, CEO and president of Foram Group Inc, the developer of the project, said that following the LEED standards will give Foram an opportunity to develop the kind of property "that will have a look and a feel that's very similar to our general philosophy of good land management."

"Primarily we really are land managers and so being custodians of the land has been a principle of ours for 30 years," Cockrum said, "so it's going to give us an opportunity to carry that through to a vertical development."

Challenges

Building green has its challenges, but it doesn't necessarily have to be more difficult, Grabowski said. For instance, the process involves using more innovative technologies not commonly used in the marketplace.

It also requires more coordination among the members of the design and construction team. One of the biggest goals of green building is to reduce energy demand using alternative energy sources like solar energy, energy-efficient windows and strategic use of shading. This must happen in the system design phase, which means the architect, the mechanical engineer and anybody else working on the project must work together more closely than in traditional building.

"If you can reduce cooling needs, for instance, you don't need as large a unit to cool the building," Grabowski said.

It can also come with higher upfront costs. Geothermal power and energy-efficient windows, for instance, are more expensive to put in, but the costs are absorbed over the life of the project, Grabowski said. But that investment could take from eight to 12 years to pay off, Green Building Council's Fedrizzi has said.

"That can deter some people who are looking to build a building and sell it and aren't in it for the long haul," Grabowski said. "For them it's more difficult to recoup those upfront costs quickly."

But if a developer is willing to wait, proponents say the payoff will be worth it.

Green building practices are starting to develop a foothold in government, too. So far two states — Washington and Nevada — have passed laws requiring developers to build green when they use state money. Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn on June 17 signed into law Assembly Bill 3, which requires all state-funded projects to meet U.S. Green Building Council standards. Other states are recommending builders follow green standards, and some offer incentives like tax breaks for building green.

Grabowski said the design community is starting to catch on, but it will take more time. She likened it to the initial resistance to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which she said at one time was not the norm but now is "just a given."

"The potential is there for that to happen with green building standards," Grabowski said. "We're just not there yet."

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