Housing Authority Leads the Way in Green Design

Philadelphia, PA- Philadelphia Housing Authority, already a leader in building ENERGY STAR® affordable housing, is taking its commitment to energy efficiency and a clean environment to a new level. Nellie Reynolds Gardens, a three-story, 64-unit green building is under construction in northern Philadelphia. Nellie Reynolds Gardens will cover over 85,000 square feet, including a full service senior center on the ground floor.

The $23M project arose in response to the need for affordable senior housing in the city. Compared to conventional construction, Nellie Reynolds Gardens will be much more efficient in the use of energy, water, and materials, with fewer negative impacts on human health and the environment.

Described as the new generation of senior living by PHA Executive Director Carl Greene, the project will include ENERGY STAR fixtures and appliances throughout, and a “green roof.”

The 20,000-square-foot green roof with natural vegetation helps regulate internal temperatures. The plants cool the building in the summer through natural evapotranspiration, and the extra mass boosts insulation in the winter. It will also reduce storm water runoff from the roof. Estimated energy savings from similar green roofs range from 10-20 percent, but the benefits go beyond that. The commitment to such a high level of green building actually sped up the project’s permitting process.

“Affordable housing has not been at the forefront of the green movement and we want Nellie Reynolds Gardens to provide a cost effective model for the industry,” says Kirk Dorn, the housing authority’s spokesperson.

To help preserve indoor air quality, materials specifications include recycled or “Green Label” carpet and environmentally friendly, low-VOC paints, primers, and caulking. The scheduled completion date for Nellie Reynolds Gardens is December 2008.
HUD Greens M2M Program

HUD’s new Green Initiative Pilot Program encourages owners of multifamily affordable housing units to apply the green building principles of sustainability, energy efficiency, recycling, and indoor air quality to the operation and rehabilitation of their properties. Announced in December 2007, the Green Initiative is available to Section 8 properties undergoing restructuring through the Market 2 Market (M2M) Program. For PHAs with Section 8 properties in their portfolio, these grants lessen the financial burden of implementing green practices. Successful programs can then be replicated on other properties.

The pilot program expands the Physical Condition Assessment (PCA) required by the M2M program to explore green opportunities. Based on the PCA, the owners then work with contractors and the Office of Affordable Housing Preservation (OAHP) to take advantage of cost-effective green alternatives on each subject property.

Owners who decide to “go green” can reduce their required financial contribution from the traditional 20 percent of the total rehabilitation costs to as little as 3 percent.

Ultimately, this program will help to build knowledge about cost-effective green initiatives in the affordable housing market. Learn more about the pilot program on the M2M Green Resource Web page.

Davis Migrant Energy Project: Turning Sun into Savings

Yolo County Housing (YCH) installed SunCaches, low-cost residential solar water heating systems, on 40 of the 88 units at the Davis Migrant Farmworker Housing Center in the summer of 2007. Savings through this solar installation to the YCH and to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) are estimated at $12,000 in the first year of operation supposing full occupancy at the Center.

The U.S. Department of Energy funded production of the SunCache, which had been under development by the Davis Energy Group (DEG) for years. DEG then donated the units to YCH, a donation valued at $85,000 including installation. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) administered the Davis project and provided valuable technical assistance.

According to Eric Lee, Senior Engineer at DEG, SunCache is designed for the Sunbelt region. “These would be ideal for the Four Corners region and tribal lands in that area,” he says. SunCache will be in full-scale production by May 2008. California’s proposed State Solar Hot Water Efficiency Act, AB 1470 would grow a mainstream market for solar water heaters by creating a statewide rebate program and building 200,000 rooftop systems within 10 years.

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