

West Marin Citizen, September 11, 2008



One of the homes that will be on the September 21 Green Home Tour, this home's remodel and retrofit features include solar electricity and solar hot water systems, green building materials, vegetable gardens, and a guest cottage.

Green Homes on Display in West Marin

In tough economic times, more people seek efficient homes

By Miriam Landman

As a green building advisor, I've witnessed the accelerating growth of interest in green building and green remodeling over the past decade, locally and nationally. Studies conducted by McGraw-Hill Construction (MHC) have found quantifiable evidence of this national phenomenon. Among *new* homes built in the United States, about 2% were built green in 2005, but that figure is expected to jump to 10% by 2010, according to MHC's research. And approximately 40% of home remodeling projects now incorporate green materials and strategies.

A home is typically considered to be "green" if it uses resources more efficiently (energy, water, and materials), is healthier to live in, and is more environmentally sustainable (which can be based on a variety of factors, from the home's location to its materials sources). The increased demand for green homes is partly due to a spreading environmental awareness. But now there's another factor at play. It seems that the demand for green home continues to grow, despite or even *because* of the troubled state of the economy these days. Faced with a financial crunch or crisis, coupled with rising energy costs, many people seem to be giving more serious consideration to the benefits of living in an efficient home. The U.S. Green Building Council recently conducted a survey

with the MHC and found that “the struggling housing market has made 70 percent of respondents more or much more inclined to buy a green home over a conventional home.” After all, people who live in homes that are energy efficient or are powered by renewable energy sources (such as solar photovoltaics) enjoy lower utility bills; and people whose homes have good indoor air quality are less likely to get sick, reducing their healthcare expenses, as well as days taken off of work for illness.

Of course economic woes and home foreclosures are increasing the need for more affordable housing, in general. The need for affordable housing in West Marin was critical even before the national economic downturn took hold. Last year, in a survey of people who work in the Point Reyes / Tomales Bay Area, the Community Land Trust Association of West Marin (CLAM) found that 70% of the survey respondents were actively looking for housing or would need housing within the next year. More than half of the respondents lived outside the area (commuting an average of 45 miles a day to work here), and 63% of those people reported that they could not afford housing locally. So not only do many people with low or moderate incomes (which includes many critical service workers) have a hard time finding an affordable place to buy or rent in West Marin, but they have to commute between home and work, which has direct financial costs for the workers as well as collective environmental and public health costs to the whole community and region.

Fortunately, homes can be both green and affordable, and we’re starting to see more examples of this in our area. The movement and market for green, affordable housing is burgeoning around the country; there are homes for sale and for rent, single-family houses as well as condos and apartments in multifamily buildings, including low-income housing developments. For example, in the South Bay, two low-income affordable housing developments recently received LEED Gold ratings from the USGBC: the Villa Montgomery apartments in Redwood City and the Gish Apartments in San Jose. (LEED stands for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design; it is a green building rating system.) The MHC/USGBC survey findings suggest that 52 percent of green homes cost “about the same” as a comparable non-green home, and 20 percent cost less.

West Marin’s CLAM has a mission to provide not only “stable and permanently affordable housing...in the communities surrounding Tomales Bay,” but affordable housing that is also “environmentally responsible.” In 2006, CLAM renovated and added onto a home in Inverness Park, converting it into two affordable rental units. The project incorporated green materials, including reclaimed lumber, formaldehyde-free cabinetry, energy-efficient appliances, and an on-demand hot water heater.

Last September, CLAM hosted a tour of local green homes, and due to the success of that event, they’ve organized another tour this year. The 2nd Annual Point Reyes Green Home Tour is happening on September 21st from 11 AM to 4:30 PM. It begins at the Dance Palace for a few brief presentations and lunch. Supervisor Steve Kinsey will speak about Marin County’s green initiatives. Karl Ashley Smith, author of *Haiku Cottages*, will speak about the beauty of small homes. And architect Jim Campe, one of the tour’s primary hosts and organizers, will provide a tour orientation. Attendees will also be able to tour the “Little House on the Trailer,” which will be parked at the Dance Palace, along with a photo display board that shows various examples of small, manufactured homes. At 12:30, attendees will leave via carpools organized by CLAM to go on a guided tour of

four properties: two in Point Reyes Station and two in Inverness. Most of the homes have been remodeled over time, but one of the properties features a new home that is under construction; that project is aiming for LEED certification. Docents will explain the green features of each home, which include passive solar design, solar photovoltaic panels and solar hot water systems, structural insulated panels (SIPs), salvaged materials, non-toxic materials, drought-tolerant gardens, drip irrigation systems, composting systems, and on-site lumber milling from local trees.

The homes on the tour represent varying sizes and styles. The most affordable examples that will be featured are the compact, manufactured homes and the second units. Small homes are not only more affordable than larger homes, but they are also intrinsically “greener” because they require less energy for heating and cooling, and fewer materials for building and furnishing. And one of the advantages of prefabricated homes is that their factory-based production tends to be very precise and more efficient, producing less waste than site-built homes. Jim Campe points out that “manufactured housing is much more affordable than custom-built housing” and he says that “the market is ready” for truly sustainable, off-grid forms of manufactured housing. CLAM’s Executive Director, Rae Levine, is excited about the tour and the chance to inform attendees about “the explosion of new possibilities for small and manufactured homes,” which help demonstrate that “it is possible to meet our housing needs with smaller homes that are aesthetically pleasing.”

The MHC studies have found that more than 85% of people who own green homes are more satisfied with their green homes than their previous, non-green homes, and these homeowners would recommend that others build or renovate green. On Sunday the 21st, you can meet local owners, architects, and builders of green homes on the CLAM tour and hear firsthand about their particular experiences and recommendations.

Miriam Landman is a West Marin-based environmental advisor and writer with expertise in the areas of green building, green living, and green communities. The founder of M. Landman Communications & Consulting, Miriam has been involved in environmental work for almost 20 years. She used to be a producer and reporter for the national public radio program Living on Earth. More recently, she was a contributing author for the book Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing, edited by Global Green USA (Island Press, 2007). Her website (www.MLandman.com) includes directories of green homes and buildings in the North Bay and the greater Bay Area, along with other green building resources.

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CLAM’s 2nd Annual Point Reyes Green Home Tour: Sunday, September 21, 11 AM-4:30 PM, convening at the Dance Palace Community Center (503 B Street, Point Reyes Station). Tickets are \$40, which includes lunch (steamed clams and other local foods) and Straus organic ice cream. To purchase a ticket, go to www.clam-ptreyes.org (no surcharge) or mail a check in advance (with name, address, phone/email address) to

CLAM, P.O. Box 273, Point Reyes Station, 94956. If you sign up in advance to use your fuel-efficient car to drive people to the homes on the tour, you'll get \$10 off the price of your ticket; call CLAM at 663-1005 to sign up, or to inquire about scholarships.

Green Building Resources

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), Redwood Empire Chapter

www.usgbc-rec.org

County of Marin's Green Building Program

www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/comdev/advance/sustainability/greenbuilding/gbuild_index.cfm

West Coast Green conference + expo: September 25-27, San Jose

www.westcoastgreen.com

LEED for Homes Rating System

www.usgbc.org/LEED

Build It Green / GreenPoint Rated

www.builditgreen.org

www.greenpointrated.org

GreenHomeGuide

www.greenhomeguide.com

USGBC's Green Home Guide / REGREEN Remodeling Guidelines

www.greenhomeguide.org

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