

For Devens homes, it's easy being green

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Posted: 10/19/2012 09:45:47 AM EDT

DEVENS -- Jennifer Burney and Deborah Cary have their sights set on the shiny roofs on Adams Circle in Devens.

The subdivision being built by Townsend developer Carter Scott comes with solar panel systems large enough to feed all the power the homeowners would need and more. Wes Parlee, who owns a three-bedroom house on the street, for one, has at least \$9 to \$10 left over from the sales each month after paying for propane, water and sewer.

Scott says the homes, which range in price between the mid-\$300,000's to the low-\$400,000's, didn't cost more to build than conventional homes would. After all, having Scott prove just that was MassDevelopment's goal when contracting him for the "zero-net energy home" project on the state land.

For Burney, the planner for the town of Bolton, it's exactly the kind of project she might propose the town consider for the Village Overlay District the town is trying to develop. And Cary, director of Central Sanctuaries of Mass Audubon in Worcester, hopes the organization will hold programs to teach individual homeowners how to build a home like Parlee's.

Burney's and Cary's interest in the subdivision is music to the ears of Richard Henderson, executive vice president of real estate for MassDevelopment. From the moment the quasi-public economic development agency started working on the housing project, it wanted the development to inspire others to replicate it.

"The point of the project is to get this happening all across the state," Henderson told a roomful of planners, developers and residents gathering for the state Sustainability Conference in Devens on Thursday.

MassDevelopment showcased its "green" housing project in Devens during the conference, which also featured workshops on a range of issues from environmentally-friendly building construction to zoning issues. The housing project includes the eight single-family home development by Transformations, Inc., of Townsend, which Scott owns, and Freedom Green, a 12-unit condominium complex developed by Metric Corp. of Boston. MassDevelopment selected the two firms through the request-for-proposals process to make the project a model for sustainable housing development.

Transformations, which is about to start constructing the eighth home, has all units under agreement. Metric also has some of the units under agreement.

Gregory Bialecki, state secretary of housing and economic development, said developers and environmentalists are finally wanting the same things after decades of their antagonistic relationships. Communities can turn brownfields and blighted properties into business centers while preserving forested land if they know how to navigate businesses to the desired locations, he said.

Bialecki stressed it's important for communities to plan land use when businesses are not knocking on the doors.

Also, "It's incumbent upon us to show people not only this is a good investment in the long term but (the cost associated with it) is manageable on a short term," he said of "green" development, such as buildings that have photovoltaic panels on them.

Carolyn McCreary, former Ayer selectwoman who serves on the town's Green Community Committee, said she attended the conference to get "ideas and directions" for the community to take. David Berry, chief administrative officer for the town of Shirley, said the town has received more than \$150,000 in state grants to improve energy efficiency of municipal buildings, and that he hopes to use what he learned in the conference to make better use of energy resources.

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