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## Homes with a Green Theme

Area builders form special committee

By Scott Nicholson

Local builders may soon be hammering green certificates on the doors of new houses.

The High Country Home Builders Association recently formed a green building committee, with the goal of developing standards and a certification process to recognize construction that promotes environmentally friendly techniques. The committee presented a program to the general membership last month at a meeting with green building as its focus, spinning off standards adopted by the National Home Builders Association.

"NAHB has been working for a number of years to find a way to make it easy for builders, as they put it, to 'bring green building into the mainstream,'" said Sam Zimmerman, chairman of HCHB's green building committee and owner of Sunny Day Homes.

Zimmerman attended the NNAHB conference in February, when national standards were rolled out, and those will serve as the foundation for the local plan.

"We're incorporating that into as many homes and building projects as possible," Zimmerman said, noting some of the practices were already in use and others can be adopted with little effort.

Anyone can use the available information, whether seeking certification or not, and the association's next step is to submit plans for certification, with several inspections required.

Zimmerman said the unique climate and geography will be taken into consideration in developing local standards, and public education is a big part of the mission.

"An educated consumer actually drives the process," Zimmerman said. "A lot of builders have been wanting to build green for years and year, but the consumers have to want it and be willing to pay for it."

Though some local builders have promoted themselves as using sustainable techniques or developing a niche and reputation for energy-efficient design, there's never been a formal label to apply, nor a certification process to ensure the plans and goals are met. While green building is entirely voluntary and not all steps will be desirable to every homeowner, a certification process would create consistency in many industry practices.

The NAHB's Model Green Home Building Guidelines are for the mainstream home builder and are designed to help systematize the green design and construction process and assist the builder toward incorporating more green building features into homes. NAHB Research Center data indicates that there is a growing number of green homes built annually, and as the market expands, more builders are likely to explore or embrace the certification.

Consumers will also benefit through better knowledge of construction and the function and life span of their homes. Zimmerman said the indoor health and comfort of the people living in a green-built is the first noticeable difference. Second is the lower cost of maintenance in the home, along with lower utility bills. The home also takes less resources to construct.

Zimmerman expects local standards to be developed in the next couple of months and said people can already target the standards.

"There are definitely builders up here already building this kind of home," Zimmerman said. "The only thing left is to find a verifier. We actually have a well-developed level of expertise up here."

With the word "green" working its way into a variety of news stories, it's a natural fit for a business built on stone and wood. Nationally, the exploding market for sustainable, environmentally friendly and recycled building products, along with the greater availability of educational opportunities, has accelerated green building's acceptance rate.

More than half of NAHB's members, who build more than 80 percent of the homes in the country, will be incorporating green practices into the development, design and construction of new homes. Currently, there are about 50 locally grown green building programs across the country, many of which are run by the local home builders' association.

Zimmerman said the new guidelines are simple and easy for both builders and consumers. They center on lot preparation and design, resource efficiency, energy efficiency, water efficiency and conservation, comfort and indoor environmental quality, and operation and maintenance.

Watauga County's Economic Development Commission has developed a green business plan that will certify businesses for their energy efficiency, recycling and other environmentally friendly practices, and has been participating in the building industry's potential role. Zimmerman said such efforts naturally dovetail. "It will strengthen the identity of the region as a green destination," he said.

The High Country Home Builders Association represents more than 300 builders in Avery and Watauga counties.

### Construction elements recommended in green building

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**Energy-Efficient Features**

Many of the energy-efficient qualities of a green home are easy to spot. Appliances, windows, and water heating systems will likely have ENERGY STAR® ratings. The home should also include efficient lighting fixtures and bulbs. Renewable energy sources, such as photovoltaic electricity and water heating systems, further decrease the overall energy consumption within the home.

**Water-Efficient Features**

Fixtures and appliances such as low-flow showerheads, faucets, and toilets, and ENERGY STAR dishwashers and washing machines all conserve water. Programmed, low-volume irrigation systems, rainwater collection systems, wastewater treatment systems and hot water recirculation systems also save water.

**Resource-Efficient Features**

These decisions—from home size, to orientation on the lot, to floor plan layout—are made in the design of your home and development of the lot. The house orientation and design should take advantage of natural daylight to reduce lighting needs, and should use strategies to reduce heat gain in the summer and heat loss in the winter. The home should contain renewable materials, including rapidly-renewable wood species, such as bamboo, and recycled-content materials in carpets, tiles and concrete formulations.

**Indoor Air Quality Features**

The heating, air conditioning and ventilation system (HVAC) must be appropriately sized for an efficient and properly ventilated home. Fans in the kitchen and bathrooms should cycle fresh air inside, and release stale air. Low-VOC paints and finishes and wall papers should be used, as well.

**Outside the Home**

In a green home, care should be taken to preserve trees and other vegetation native to the area. Landscaping should contain plants that are appropriate for the climate, and grouped according to water needs. Driveways and other impervious surfaces should be reduced as much as possible, and may be composed of gravel, permeable block pavers, grids, or other permeable systems.

*Source: National Association of Home Builders*

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