

Backers see \$60M Grow Community as prototype for going super green

The architect said this is the first housing community in North America to receive the One Planet Community endorsement.

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By [LYNN PORTER](#) Journal Staff Reporter

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Photo by Anthony Rich Photography[\[enlarge\]](#)

There are three net-zero-energy model homes in Grow Community on Bainbridge Island designed by architect Jonathan Davis.

A housing development under construction on Bainbridge Island was designed with the assumption that the world — and this little piece in particular — needs to consume much less.

The first phase of Grow Community should be complete by early next year, with 20 houses and 24 apartments. It eventually will have a total of 50 houses, 81 multifamily units and a community center on eight acres.

The total cost is expected to be about \$60 million, including the land, said Marja Preston, a partner in Asani Development Corp. The Bainbridge Island firm is being paid a fee to develop Grow Community for five investors on the island who acquired the property in 2010.

The site is at Grow Avenue and Wyatt Way, and it's about a five-minute walk to

Winslow, where there is a ferry that could take residents to jobs in Seattle.

The Grow structures will be heavily insulated and have heat-recovery ventilation systems with duct-less mini-split heat pumps, as well as appliances and fixtures that save energy and water. Solar arrays on the roofs are expected over time to generate enough renewable carbon-free energy to offset what is used by the occupants.

Grow Community is designed to have clusters of seven houses around community gardens. The clusters will be connected by paths.

There will be 1.5 acres of open space and bioswales to clean water before it enters Puget Sound. The community gardens will help feed residents, and surplus crops will go to a local food bank.



Solar panels will produce enough electricity to make the homes achieve net zero energy. The first community garden is in the foreground. Photo by Deb Henderson[\[enlarge\]](#)

Each house or apartment will get one parking space in lots located along the perimeter. There will be an electric car and bike-sharing programs initially funded by the owners of the project. Residents who own a car will be charged a fee to use the shared vehicles, but residents without cars won't be charged.

The houses are being constructed under a zoning ordinance the city approved to encourage sustainability and density, said Jonathan Davis, a Bainbridge Island architect who designed Grow Community.

With this zoning, Asani is allowed to build on lots of about 1,200 to 2,800 square feet, much smaller than otherwise permitted, said Davis, who is a co-owner of davis studio Architecture + Design.

In exchange, the developer must build units that are extremely green or

affordable, and may weave green space among the houses like Grow Community is doing.

The houses will be smaller than the average on the island.

“They didn't want people building McMansions in downtown,” Davis said. “They wanted to encourage density.”

The architect said Grow is the first residential community built in North America to receive the “One Planet Community” endorsement from a U.K. nonprofit called BioRegional. The nonprofit's goal is to create communities where people can live within the ecological footprint of this planet. BioRegional calculates that the United States currently consumes resources at about five times that level.

BioRegional believes that sustainable communities depend on the lifestyles of the people who work and live there, not just on green buildings.

One Planet communities should have highly energy efficient buildings as well as services, infrastructure and design features that make them attractive and affordable for people to live sustainably. One Planet principles cover energy, waste, transportation, water use, materials, food, equality and heritage.

To get the endorsement, a community must have a plan for sustainability and how it will be measured.

Houses at Grow Community will range from 1,100 to 1,850 square feet.

On the small end, a two-bedroom with one or two bathrooms sells for \$333,000 to \$337,000. At the large end, a three-bedroom with two and a half bathrooms, a mud-room and office space goes for \$450,000 to \$489,000, depending on the lot size. Prices are without upgrades or solar.

Accessory buildings, with living space and a three-quarter bath, cost about \$40,000.

Apartments range from 450-square-foot studios to two-bedrooms of 900 to 1,050 square feet, renting from \$975 to \$1,950. Renters do not pay for energy costs.

Davis said the timing on the project has turned out to be perfect.

Ten apartments in the first phase are pre-leased, and all but a handful of the 24 homes are under contract, he said. People will move in gradually, starting in August.

“2010 wasn't a really good time to think about building homes or spec homes or anything at all,” Preston said. But the investors wanted to move forward anyway, partially because they needed to recover their investment in the land, but also

because they saw the project as the prototype for a new concept: an urban infill One Planet community that Asani in partnership with the Grow investor-owners could build in other places such as Seattle and Portland.

“The decisions that are being made on this project are taking that long-term view into account,” she said.

The Grow investors (which include Asani partner Bill Carruthers) wanted a good return on their investment, said Preston, and for the project to benefit the community as well as be innovative, sustainable and affordable.

Asani held workshops to ask people what to develop. The response was an urban community that is walkable and where people are encouraged to interact with their neighbors, Preston said.

The firm had a model: a 200-home subdivision called Village Homes that was built about 40 years ago near the University of California, Davis. The homes face greenbelts and gardens, and have held their value “in an incredible way,” Preston said.

At the same time, Asani liked the One Planet idea of focusing not just on green buildings — as the LEED program does — but on designing a whole community.

Asani asked Davis to design Grow to be as green as possible while keeping it affordable, including for young families Preston said.

Preston said there are good schools near Winslow, but not much high quality affordable housing.

The owners of the Grow development were members of a group which bought the project site from the U.S. Navy in 2007. Due to economic conditions, some of the investors in the land were not able to move forward with developing Grow, so the five investors bought them out, Preston said.

The property had on it 21 houses built in 1957 that are being demolished to make way for Grow. Those residents are being given priority to rent in the Grow apartments, Preston said.

Davis and his wife, Mary Jo Davis, a graphic designer and co-owner of the architecture firm, are buying a house and accessory unit at Grow for their family.

“We’ve created this community with all these sustainable features in them and feel that we need to walk the talk,” Jonathan Davis said. “We want to live in town in a community. It’s not just the sustainable features, it’s the whole community.”

The Grow project team also includes PHC Construction, general contractor; Quantum Engineering, structural; Browne Wheeler Engineers, civil; RTC

Transportation Consulting; EcoTope, mechanical engineering; Tim Goss, Landscape Architect; and Homegrown Organics, community gardens.

Asani is also developing the Island Gateway mixed-use complex on Bainbridge Island with developer Kelly Samson, who is affiliated with Samson Family Land Co. The Asani partners, besides Carruthers and Preston, are Andrew Lonseth and Marty Sievertson.