



"DESIGNING A GREAT NEIGHBORHOOD"

Behind the Scenes at the Holiday Project

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David Wann, scriptwriter and producer

To people driving past the old Holiday Drive-In Theater site in Boulder, Colorado, it might seem like a new neighborhood has sprung out of the ground overnight. But those who worked on the multi-year project's development know better: collectively, hundreds of thousands of decisions and choices were made to create the 330-home neighborhood, where affordability and sustainability are primary goals.

In this documentary, we follow the progress of one project in particular, Wild Sage Cohousing Community, where future residents participate in the design of their own neighborhood. The stated architectural goal at Wild Sage is a "zero emissions" neighborhood in which solar energy, energy efficiency, and changes in behavior eliminate the need for fossil fuels. We examine architect Jim Logan's solar strategy, and show how incremental design improvements make this strategy feasible.



It wasn't exactly a simple mission: to create a sustainable, "green" housing development that is also more than 40% permanently affordable. However, the proposed Holiday Neighborhood development – about 330 homes on 27 acres on one of Boulder, Colorado's last undeveloped sites – had a lot going for it.

To begin with, the master site developer, The Boulder Housing Partners (BHP), had a vision for creating affordable neighborhoods that are also very lively, pedestrian-friendly, and energy-efficient. A place where the people who work in Boulder – the nurses, firemen and merchants – can afford to live. Co-director Cindy Brown and her colleagues brought in some of the most innovative designers in the country to plan, develop and design the neighborhood.

What are the impacts of buildings on the environment? Much more than most of us realize, as green building expert David Johnston explains. “Forty percent of all the stuff we make and use in the U.S. goes into buildings, with all the associated pollution and impacts. Thirty-five percent of all the raw energy we use – the oil, natural gas and coal – is directly attributable to buildings, and sixty-six percent of all the electricity that’s generated is used in buildings, primarily for heating, cooling, lighting and appliances. We are also using approximately seventy trillion board feet of softwood (a board foot is a one-inch board, twelve by twelve inches) in our buildings every year to build houses.”



David Johnston, “What’s Working”



Paul Ray, *The Cultural Creatives*

Sociologist Paul Ray, author of the book, *The Cultural Creatives*, has documented, “Three-fourths of Americans want an ecologically sustainable world, which means not having to drive so much, having healthy homes and preserving the Earth’s resources. The kind of neighborhood that’s being built at Holiday is exactly what many homebuyers are looking for.”

Enter the Holiday design team, each member carefully chosen for his or her proven abilities to build sustainable and affordable homes and neighborhoods. Says George Watt of Barrett Studio Architects (the project’s site designer), “The key to sustainability is meeting needs right in the neighborhood, with opportunities to work, shop, play and grow.”

John Wolff, chosen as the developer of three separate Holiday projects, adds, “Building at 30 units per acre is probably the smartest thing you can do in terms of conservation of land, water, and energy. Consider a typical suburban development of three units per acre – you need ten times as much land area for houses and ten times as much infrastructure for water sewer, utilities, and roadways. What we try to do is offer the same quality of life in a more compact, affordable neighborhood with a greater sense of community.”



Cindy Brown, Boulder Housing Partners



John Wolff, Affordable Housing Alliance

Another developer chosen for the Holiday project is Jim Leach, a veteran builder of quality custom homes, and in recent years, one of the country's foremost experts on cohousing – neighborhoods characterized by resident participation in the design process. “The building market tends to create the least inspired neighborhood the market will bear. Things like solar energy and diverse types of use are not usually even on the radar screen.”



Jim Leach, cohousing developer



Jim Logan, sustainable architect

Leach brings sustainable architect Jim Logan into the project, whose goal is a “zero emissions” development that doesn't require fossil fuel. Easier said than done, when faced with the dual challenge of affordability and community consensus among the neighborhood's future residents. Fortunately, those residents are keenly interested in green buildings and lifestyles. They support Logan's solar strategy for passive solar; high-efficiency appliances; centralized, water-based heating; and flat roofs to mount solar panels on. They even salvage twenty solar panels off the roof of a large house in Boulder, to keep the project affordable. Some of the residents work with Habitat for Humanity to build permanently affordable houses (meaning the sales price can never go up).



Wild Sage Cohousing residents helping design and build their future neighborhood

Is the project a success? The numbers say “yes.” More than 400 people with low and middle incomes will live at Holiday, many as first-time homeowners. High levels of efficiency will keep the cost of living down for them and all Holiday occupants. At Wild Sage, all 34 homes are rated Five Stars Plus, the highest score given. Residents will drive an estimated 30% less, pay 50% less in utility bills and use 40% less water than the average American.

Watch “[Designing a Great Neighborhood](#),” to see how they did it...