

## Planting a green seed

• **Bend couple's ultra-green home project is generating grass-roots interest in sustainability in the community, the program's overseer says**

By Rachael Rees / *The Bulletin*

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Editor's note: Tom Elliott and Barbara Scott invited The Bulletin to follow their efforts to build the ultimate green home, to document the project from start to finish. In this installment, the couple are in the construction phase.

More than three years after Barbara Scott and Tom Elliott decided to build a sustainable and efficient home in Bend, the project is under way and earning praise from green-building advocates.

The couple's goal in building their "Desert Rain" project on Northwest Shasta Place was to follow the stringent standards of The Living Building Challenge, a certification program overseen by the International Living Future Institute.

This week, Jason McLennan, CEO of the International Living Future Institute and Cascadia Green Building Council, toured the project. He also gave a lecture at the Tower Theater and met with city staff to discuss the wider application of Living Building Challenge principles.

McLennan said the Desert Rain building has sent a message to the community about what's possible, turning theory into action with its construction.

"All of this has created a powerful grass-roots interest in sustainability, and this house will be the center of that," McLennan said.

About 300 people were in attendance at the Tower Theater lecture, which showed the community's interest, McLennan said.

For people who are interested in the movement and want to get involved, McLennan said they can join the High Desert branch of the Cascadia Green Building Council, which has started a new Living Building collaborative.



Dean Guernsey / The Bulletin

Tom Elliott, left, talks with Jason McLennan, head of the Living Future Institute, at the construction site of Elliott's home in Bend.



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Tom Elliott, left, talks with Jason McLennan, head of the Living Future Institute, at the construction site of Elliott's home in Bend.

McLennan said the couple's project has taught others about water and energy efficiency, along with healthy material use. The project will be powered by solar energy, save water through rainwater collection and use materials free from harmful chemicals on the Living Building Challenge's red list, including lead, mercury, asbestos and formaldehyde.

"Everywhere we have a project like this, it tends to have a huge ripple effect on the community," he said. "It tends to lead to changes in how the city that it's in does things."

The Desert Rain project is the first of its kind in Bend and one of the first in the world.

While the Desert Rain project will be Elliott and his wife's home, he wants it to stand for something more.

"We want this to drive change in the building industry, in the thought process of how we live on the Earth," he said. "We hope that we are going to serve as an example to other people about different methods and technologies that can be used."

During his meeting with city officials, McLennan said he discussed changes for the city's wastewater as well as planning for urban growth.

"(The Desert Rain) project would make a great demonstration for a new path forward that could save the community lots of money and also be better environmentally," McLennan said.

McLennan also said that structures built by Living Building's principles help support local economies more than standard construction methods, which often use less expensive materials imported from overseas. Using local materials, on the other hand, stimulates local economies.

Elliott said the project has received all of its approvals, except a permit for the constructed wetland bioreactor, which they applied for separately, and is solidly in the construction phase. He projects the house will be completed by spring of 2013.

"We're framing right now and laying in the basic infrastructure for the rainwater collection system and hopefully what will be the waste pretreatment system," he said.

Even after the house is completed and occupied, Elliott said he'll continue to strive to live more sustainably. .

"We tend to get enamored with the structure and technology, but in truth the Living Building Challenge, and sustainability in itself, is something that is never truly done. It's a process."

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