



*Michael Sloss, Vice President for Product Innovation at Enterprise Housing Financial Services, discusses implementation of the Green Communities Initiative during the “Creating Green Affordable Housing for Florida” workshop.*

# Green Communities

BY MARY SORGE

**L**ower housing life cycle costs are especially important to individuals and families with limited income. Cheap housing that is of poor quality or lacks energy efficient is not affordable.

With increasing populations of families with limited income moving to Florida, there is an affordable housing crisis and an even greater one when life cycle affordability is considered.

The Bonita Springs Area Housing Development Corporation was approached by the Enterprise Foundation inquiring if we would like to participate with them on an initiative to build an affordable “Green Community” in SW Florida. Our first question was **“What is a Green Community?”**

Over the past several months, I have learned more than I thought I ever wanted to know about Green Community criteria. The information we have learned has served to enlighten us to take our developments of workforce housing to the next level.



The Green Community concept is addressed in several facets of a subdivision:

1. Growth management issues are addressed through a community’s proximity to schools, alternative transportation, such as buses, shopping and recreation facilities. Our community “Renaissance at Rosemary Park” is located .6 miles from a bus stop; .6 miles from a convenience store; 1 mile from a school, library, recreation center, and swimming pool; and 2 miles from a shopping plaza with restaurants, a major discount store, a major grocery store, doctor’s offices, and various specialty shops. Emphasis is placed on creating walkable, livable neighborhoods with sidewalks that benefit residents and communities by causing fewer sprawl-related transportation impact.
2. There is a cost savings through long-term reduction in operating costs as well as a benefit to the community in preserving energy for future generations through improved energy performance and water conservation.

3. Green building integrates materials and methods that promote environmental quality into their designs. Adopting green building practices will redouble our contribution to the physical health and well being of our citizens.

Green or sustainable design can significantly lower life cycle costs while only increasing the initial investment costs by 5% to 7% assuming the green features are integrated into the overall design as the dwelling is planned. Green designs if integrated into dwellings from the beginning, can reduce energy use by 50% to 70% and water use by even more. Healthy home design features that improve indoor air quality and discourage mold growth can substantially lower medical expenses especially in children and older adults.

The Renaissance at Rosemary Park is layered with numerous partnerships. The city of Bonita Springs lent Bonita Springs Area Housing Development Corporation \$200,000 at 0% interest along with a low interest rate loan from the Florida Community Loan Fund for the land acquisition. The city partnered with the Renaissance Group of Bonita Springs, a philanthropic group of residents, to provide the infrastructure and predevelopment on the project. The city of Bonita Springs will also provide impact fee waivers and water and sewer connection credits amounting to approximately \$325,000 for the community

and maintain affordability. The Enterprise Foundation has offered a grant for the implementation of the “Green Community” concept, as well as a \$15,000 loan at 0% interest to hire an architect to integrate the green design. Additionally, they have entered into a contract with Florida Solar Energy to provide technical assistance to our organization. The Bonita Springs Area Housing Development Corporation is partnering with a local “green architect” and sustainability/green-building experts at Florida Gulf Coast University to build a community of green/sustainable homes in the warm and humid subtropics. This project will not only provide much needed affordable workforce housing for one of the fastest growing regions of Florida but will also be an invaluable demonstration project for building green/sustainable affordable housing. 

*Mary Sorge is the Executive Director of the Bonita Springs Area Housing Development Corporation. Prior to her position with the BSAHDC, she was a senior vice president of the Bank of America Community Development Corporation office in Jacksonville. Ms. Sorge is a past Chairperson of the Florida Housing Coalition, and currently serves as Secretary on the Executive Committee of the Florida Housing Coalition's Board of Directors. She also serves on the Developmentally Disabled Council Affordable Housing Task Force.*

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