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Las Cruces' own green and sustainable neighborhoods

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Living Green

Development certification programs make more than homes sustainable, green

The Building Industry Association of Southern New Mexico (BIA-SNM) announced last week that the Fall Parade of Homes has been modified for 2010 and will now feature energy-efficient and sustainably built homes in a Green Street single-site setting.

The homes constructed will be special since each will be required to meet rigorous silver level certifications through either the Build Green New Mexico/NAHB Green or U.S. Green Built Council - LEED for Homes programs. Homes built within the development will also be Energy Star certified and will be required to have active solar energy generation capabilities.

Additionally, the developers of the entire, yet to be named, 33-lot subdivision, Green Street showcase site (located at the intersection of Brown and Compress roads) have committed to providing a certified green and sustainable designation for the entire development.

So what does it mean for a development or neighborhood to be certified as "green" and or "sustainable?" It depends on who you ask.

The same national organizations that provide the guidelines, standards and third-party certification for homes have developed comprehensive programs identifying and rewarding what they feel to be the best practices in sustainable and green subdivisions and neighborhoods.

USGBC's pilot LEED - Neighborhood Development certification system will be ready to be rolled out to residential developers nationwide later this year and it describes its Green Neighborhood projects as, "Exemplary projects that perform well in terms of smart growth, new urbanism and green building."

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) completed development of their ANSI-approved National Green Land Development Certification system in 2009. According to the NAHB website, "Green building expands beyond the walls of the structure to include site and community development considerations. The benefits of a home's green development practices such as xeriscaping, permeable pavement, low-impact development, storm water management and environmental preservation efforts are more fully realized when done on a larger community or subdivision scale."

BETH SITZLER | The Las Cruces Bulletin

Picacho Mountain is an energy-efficient and sustainable subdivision that uses xeriscaping among other green practices.

The Home Builders Association of Central New Mexico created the BGNM program in 2006 as a way to certify and differentiate exemplary homes and developments in our state. BGNM has certified sustainable subdivisions using its own modified NAHB guidelines up until the first of this year.

Doña Ana County's own BGNM Certified Sustainable development – Picacho Mountain – is a great example of one type of green subdivision. Bob and Karen Pofahl and crew have embraced sustainability through efforts in environmental preservation, storm water management, low-impact pad preparation, a focus on renewable energy and access to open spaces.

When you drive through a green/sustainable development such as Picacho Mountain, what you do not see is scraped, bladed and eroded home sites. What you do see is native vegetation, lot and street layouts that preserve natural water flows without causing soil loss and water pollution, great views, lots of native critters and good walking access to see it all.

If you talk to the Pofahls for more than a minute, they will explain that what you see so far is just the beginning and that their development is well on the way to being a true mixed-use neighborhood with homes, services, open spaces and recreation available for people at a range of income levels.

By contrast, the infill location of the new Green Street neighborhood can satisfy a significantly different set of green and sustainable development objectives. The existing homes and neighborhood surrounding the Green Street area are 20 to 50 years old. At this more urban location the new development will take advantage of an existing infrastructure of utilities, transportation and services.

Residents of the Green Street development will have ready access to the city core for jobs, schools, shopping, dining, government and transportation services (you may even be able to avoid the dreaded Telshor/Lohman interchange altogether). All of these accessible service providers will gain economic benefit through an increased customer and tax base within an otherwise mature and limited growth area of our town.

Water quality and conservation are important everywhere in our part of New Mexico and measures will be included in the Green Street neighborhood to ensure plants, landscapes and hardscapes are water smart and appropriate for this area. Preliminary planning is in place to provide urban wildlife habitats within the neighborhood to encourage populations of native species, including beneficial insects, bats, reptiles and birds.

The great thing about these green and sustainable neighborhood development certification programs is their flexibility and the opportunity provided to implement key strategies and concepts in different types of developments. Hopefully, homeowners, builders, developers and city/county planners can use lessons learned about best practices demonstrated in diverse projects such as Green Street and Picacho Mountain to provide sustainable strategies for a range of neighborhood and multi-use development situations in the Las Cruces area.

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