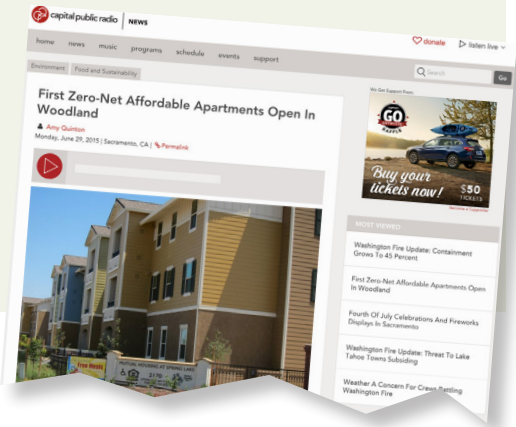


First Zero-Net Affordable Apartments Open In Woodland



Zero-net energy homes produce as much energy as they use. But it's not easy to find zero-net energy housing that's affordable. The city of Woodland now has the first zero-net energy low-income apartments in the nation.



Open the door of this three bedroom apartment in Woodland and it looks like most other new apartments. Clean, with new appliances and cool on this hot summer day.

Vanessa Guerra is a project manager with Mutual Housing California, a nonprofit that advocates for low-income housing. She points out how all 62 units at Mutual Housing at Spring Lake are different.

“All of our kitchens, all of our appliances are energy efficient which really helps with reducing energy costs for the residents and helping us meet that zero net energy goal,” says Guerra.

On the wall in the kitchen Guerra points to what looks like a thermostat for central air. But it's not.

Mutual Housing at Spring Lake in Woodland is the first zero-net energy low-income apartment complex in the nation. *Photo courtesy Amy Quinton / Capital Public Radio*

“This monitor gives residents an understanding of how much energy they're using and allows them to really identify oh am I using too much or am I using just enough,” she says.

Tenants see different colored lights on the monitor.

“When your color is green, it means that you're in a very energy efficient level, you're using your energy at a very low rate,” says Guerra. “When it's in the red, you're using an average rate, if it goes into purple, it means you're going above and beyond what a typical household would use.”

Guerra says the complex is all electric, no gas. All the units combined use about 300,000 kilowatt hours a year. All of that energy is offset through solar power. Most of the parking spaces are covered with solar panels.

“We call them the solar support structures. It's only probably half of the system. The remaining half are all on the rooftops facing south.”

Spring Lake emphasizes sustainability – paints and finishes don't emit as many toxins, cabinets and flooring are made of recyclable and long-lasting materials.

This all got off the ground when the nonprofit conducted a survey of housing needs in Woodland. Mutual Housing California CEO Rachel Iskow says there was a high demand for affordable housing for agricultural



This monitor in the kitchen measures energy use of the apartment unit in real time. *Photo courtesy Amy Quinton / Capital Public Radio*

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

workers. Their primary concern was being able to pay rent.

“But the second thing was high utility bills. It’s really hard for someone making minimum wage to pay utility bills.”

All Spring Lake tenants work in agriculture, either in the field or in food packing or processing. Resident Alex Hernandez struggled to pay high utility bills in his previous apartment.

“Having two teenagers and three handicapped children, it was difficult,” says Hernandez.

Hernandez says he and his family have seen a huge drop in energy costs since moving in two months ago, from \$240 to just \$9.

Rachel Iskow says environmental costs are lower too - even when you calculate the impact of driving to work because there is no public transit.

“Building a zero-net energy development, in a small town like Woodland or a small town throughout the Central Valley that does reduce greenhouse gases.”

Spring Lake provides affordable housing for 300 residents, feeds electricity to the grid and is opening its doors for anyone who wants to learn more about zero-net energy housing.



Solar panels adorn south-facing rooftops also provide electricity for the units.
Photo courtesy Amy Quinton / Capital Public Radio



Solar panels built on structures above parking spaces feed the electric grid.
Photo courtesy Amy Quinton / Capital Public Radio