

Spring Lake receives first national ZERH certification

Mutual Housing California received certification from the U.S. Department of Energy of the first multifamily Zero Energy Ready Home for a rental development in the nation.

“The development at Spring Lake is the first multifamily rental community to be certified under the DOE Zero Energy Ready Home program,” said James Lyons, an energy engineer with Davidsonville, Md.-based Newport Partners, a consulting firm that supports the DOE program.



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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.

Located on 3.28 acres in Woodland, Mutual Housing at Spring Lake has 62-apartments and townhomes for agricultural workers.

The first families already have moved in.

The photovoltaic solar energy system and the water-based heating and air system is expected to create enough energy for all needs.

“We cut our teeth on building other green, sustainable communities and carrying out green renovations on older ones,” said Rachel Iskow,

chief executive officer of Sacramento, Calif.-based Mutual Housing California. “This new community is the culmination of all we have learned and a model for bringing the green revolution to renters.

“All savings we realize in energy costs will go a long way toward making the community affordable to residents of very modest means,” she added.

It also will help the nonprofit survive and thrive.

“The sustainability of our properties contributes to the economic stability of the community itself – and to our nonprofit corporation,” Iskow said.

To help residents reach the zero net-energy goal the community was designed for, each apartment or townhome has a color-coded energy monitor that shows real-time use: green means efficient, yellow typical and red above normal.

“The apartments are so energy-efficient, residents should only have an extremely low administrative charge from the utility company,” said architect Bob Kuchman, Sacramento-based Kuchman Architects founder.

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A big part of energy saving is figuring out how air leaks into – and out of – a building. As a result, what's known as "air barriers" become an important part of the construction.

"An important focus is on sealing the building and ensuring quality installation of insulation," said Alea German, senior engineer at Davis, Calif.-based Davis Energy Group, the ZERH consultant for the project. "Another is verifying that the equipment is installed and functioning as it was designed to."

Staff calculated that using high-tech innovations at Spring Lake such as extremely well-sealed and insulated buildings, solar panels, a water-based HVAC system and energy monitors only added 4.07 percent to the cost.

That initial outlay should be recouped by savings in the first few years.

Water-saving features, such as drought-resistant landscaping, low-flow toilets and shower head cutoffs that shut off when water goes from cold to hot instead of wasting water, also save energy.

Mutual Housing also expects to receive a Platinum LEED certification, the highest, for the new development.

Mutual Housing at Spring Lake is adjacent to the nonprofit's 1.86 additional acres for phase two of the sustainable community.

Sacramento-based Sunseri Construction, Inc. was the general contractor.

Formerly the Builders Challenge, the ZERH program, has certified more than 14,000 energy-efficient homes that created millions of dollars in energy savings since started in 2008. All of these homes were built for the home buying public. Until Mutual Housing at Spring Lake, renters had no opportunity to live in a 100% certified zero net energy apartment.

To be certified, buildings have to meet Energy Star Certified Homes Version 3.0, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Plus and WaterSense programs and the insulation requirements of the 2012 International Energy Conservation Code requirements.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops, operates and advocates for sustainable rental housing for the region's diverse households.

A member of NeighborWorks America – a congressionally chartered nonprofit that supports community development nationwide—Mutual Housing has more than 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through its focus on leadership, the nonprofit provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, community-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.