

A discussion of affordable housing is incomplete without considering the importance to many community builders of creating sustainable communities. While there can often be a disconnect between real estate development and environmental concerns, the 12th District is home to a number of exciting affordable housing developments that illustrate the possibility of integrating social and environmental justice through "green" building techniques and transit-oriented development. Green building offers a means to lower operating costs of a development and contributes to the health of both tenants and the environment, and transit-oriented development allows community members to access resources and amenities in a manner that contributes to both affordability and environmental protection.

Green Building

The Plaza Apartments, located near downtown San Francisco and expected to open in November 2005, will offer 106 single room occupancy (SRO) units affordable to tenants earning between 13 and 42 percent of area median income (AMI). In addition to redeveloping an underutilized urban site, the building will incorporate a number of environmentally conscious elements, including energy efficient appliances, recycled and recyclable building materials, enhanced natural lighting and ventilation design, and solar panels. SRO units, which in the Plaza will have full baths and kitchenettes with full-size refrigerators and two-burner stoves, are an important means to increase the density of affordable units built on limited land resources.

This development is one of the projects that received financing assistance through the Green Communities Initiative, a five-year, \$555 million initiative to build more than 8,500 environmentally-friendly housing units nationwide for low-income families. This initiative, launched in October of 2004, was created by the Enterprise Foundation / Enterprise Social Investment Corporation in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council. The program is funding projects through grants, loans, and equity and will also provide training and technical assistance to developers. Greening affordable housing is thus a way to leverage financing and resources otherwise unavailable to conventional affordable housing projects. In addition to the Plaza, Green Communities projects are currently in development in Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, New York, NY and Alamogordo, NM.

Transit-Oriented Development

Housing developments lose elements of both affordability and "green-ness" if sited in locations that don't offer walkable or mass transit-based access to jobs, grocery stores, daycare, and educational services. Transit-oriented development (TOD), which densely sites housing units and commercial offerings near transit centers, offers a means to address concerns about sprawl, the problems caused by having too many cars on the road, and geographic mismatches between housing and urban amenities.

A recently completed and lauded example of TOD is the Fruitvale Transit Village, located in Oakland, California. Developed by The Unity Council, a non-profit community development corporation working for economic, social, and physical development in the Fruitvale neighborhood, the project includes shops, community service agencies, offices, housing, and a community plaza, all centered around a Bay Area Rapid Transit station. This first phase of development includes a small number of units affordable to renters earning between 35 and 80 percent of AMI, and the Unity Council intends to add 250 units of housing to the Fruitvale neighborhood over the next five years as part of the overall Transit Village development. Fruitvale Transit Village represents an exciting effort to revitalize a community with sustainability and accessibility as central components of project design and execution.

For more information on these projects, see:

<http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/resources/green/index.asp>
<http://www.unitycouncil.org/transitvillage.html>