

# PortlandTribune

## Former brownfield a national model

*Headwaters serves as pilot to test LEED-style rating system for landscaping*

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**If the term “housing development” conjures up a vision of ticky-tacky houses, then The Headwaters at Tryon Creek in Southwest Portland will come as a pleasant surprise.**

The mix of apartments and townhomes features green roofs, rain gardens and other ecofriendly landscaping, earning the public-private development’s recent selection as a model program for the Sustainable Sites Initiative. The initiative is laying the groundwork for the first national rating system for sustainable landscapes, similar to the Green Building Council’s LEED ratings for building design, says Jim Lapides, public relations manager of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Headwaters, a cooperative endeavor between a private developer, several Portland bureaus and a nonprofit group, includes some “fantastic sustainable features,” Lapides says. “More importantly, the project applies these sustainable strategies to a former brownfield site – revitalizing the land and restoring the watershed.”

### **Five projects in one**

The 3-acre complex features a trio of housing styles attracting people of different income and age levels, built in a 60-acre drainage basin near Barbur Boulevard and Southwest 30th Avenue. Those are: the 100-unit Headwaters Apartments, two market-rate, four-story buildings owned and developed by the Portland Development Commission; The Village at the Headwaters, a 56-unit affordable apartment complex for seniors, owned by Northwest Housing Alternatives; and Dolph Creek Townhomes, 14 LEED silver-certified, market-rate condos.

The project, built from 2002 to 2009, also involves the restoration of a buried creek and drainage basin, which is used to filter untreated storm water from commercial development on nearby Barbur Boulevard.

Jim Winkler, of Portland-based Winkler Development Corp., is the driving force behind Headwaters, says Shawn Sullivan, project development manager and architect of the condos. Winkler easily could have omitted plans to restore the buried creek, for financial reasons, but instead chose to accomplish something extraordinary, Sullivan says.

Headwaters “pushed the envelope of sustainable design,” he says, all while tying together multiple projects in a cohesive fashion. And it all took place, Sullivan adds, on a once-polluted site. Developers removed more than 2,200 tons of contaminated material in a cleanup approved by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, he says.

### **Former nightclub**

The project originated in 2002, after Winkler purchased an abandoned Fraternal Order of Eagles facility, which had been a nightclub in the 1950s.

Once Winkler decided to build an apartment complex on the site, the PDC got involved, Sullivan says. The Portland urban renewal agency saw an opportunity to do a pilot project for the new City Lights program, an initiative by then-Mayor Vera Katz to develop market-rate, multifamily units in areas with a need that wasn’t being addressed by the market. City income derived from the apartments is used to assist with other affordable housing projects, Sullivan says.

The city’s Bureau of Environmental Services got involved when it encouraged Winkler to “daylight” an underground creek running through the property. The unnamed creek, a tributary to Tryon Creek, was

buried under asphalt and channeled through a pipe in the 1950s, says Tom Liptan, landscape architect with the Bureau of Environmental Services.

Winkler agreed to do that, and then said, “What about you, city of Portland? The rest of the creek is under the street in a pipe,” Liptan says.

The city bureau wound up daylighting the rest of the creek, and then built the largest rain garden in Portland, just across the street from the Headwaters complex, Liptan says.

The city of Portland spent \$495,000 designing and constructing the rain garden, wetland enhancements, new sidewalks, trees, landscaping and creek restoration on city land, including the culverts; \$390,000 came from the Bureau of Environmental Services, and \$105,000 from the Portland Development Commission.

### **Environmental advantages**

The Headwaters at Tryon Creek provides an excellent example of nature in the city, improving the habitat for both humans and wildlife, Liptan says.

“There are 900 feet of restored creek, 2 acres of wetlands meadow and creek, a rain garden across the street from the apartments that manages the storm water from commercial development up the hill, and all kinds of features to slow and filter the water, replicating how nature used to do it.”

This time of the year, the once-underground creek is dry. During rainy season, water rages through the creek, eventually making its way to Tryon Creek, Liptan says.

Almost all the senior units have ecoroofs. Parking lots near the apartments have porous pavement, so rain water soaks into the ground via rain gardens, before getting to the creek. As a result, all storm water on site is filtered for pollutants, before running into the creek.

Residents say they really like looking out onto greenery and knowing it improves the environment, Liptan says.

“Some residents even refer to the rain garden and the creek as the park.”

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### **LEED model moves outdoors**

The Sustainable Sites Initiative, now in the pilot project stage, hopes to create the first national rating system for sustainable landscapes of all sizes, with or without buildings.

“In the short term, we’re using information from pilot projects like Tryon Creek to refine and update the rating system, tentatively by 2013,” says Jim Lapidés, public relations manager of the American Society of Landscape Architects. “In the long term, we hope to change the marketplace for land planning and design in the same way that the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED rating system transformed building design.”

The initiative is a partnership between the American Society of Landscape Architects, the U.S. Botanic Garden and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Eventually, the initiative expects to provide third-party certification of a project’s sustainable land practices.

Sustainable techniques have pioneered ways to achieve cost savings for buildings and tenants, Lapidés says. For example, the traditional landscaping model at apartment projects was to add seas of grass, which required regular mowing, watering and fertilizing. Shifting to drought-resistant plants reduces that line item in operating budgets, he says.

The Headwaters at Tryon Creek has a 3-acre landscaped site that uses no grass. Instead, it has drought-resistant plants that improve water quality and help with onsite storm water management, without being connected to the city system, says development manager Shawn Sullivan.

Two other sites in the Portland area have been named as sustainable sites for the national certification program: Ash House, a private residence in Southwest Portland, and Collier Industrial Park in Clackamas.

For more information, visit [www.sustainablesites.org](http://www.sustainablesites.org).

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