

Review: Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing

Walker Wells (Ed.)

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Wells, Walker (Ed.). *Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2007. 232pp. ISBN 9781597261395. US\$30, paper.

Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing, edited by Walker Wells, is a relatively slim volume that functions like a handbook. It is intended to be a practical guide for affordable housing development. The book could also be useful for affordable housing advocates who want to understand and educate others about the benefits of green affordable housing. The book consists of a general overview of what green housing is and the benefits to the occupants and the environment, followed by extensive case study summaries of green affordable housing projects from around the country.

The *Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing* does not require a project to obtain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (“LEED”) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Some of the featured case studies, such as Brick Hill Cottages in Maine, relied on the LEED requirements to guide their decision making but chose to avoid certification because of the certification process’s expense and administrative burden. Instead of advocating LEED certification specifically, the book describes green building principles and how they can be incorporated into affordable housing development by decision makers. The green building characteristics discussed include energy efficiency, weatherization, landscaping, water conservation, and building orientation to take advantage of passive warming from the sun in winter. Green operations and maintenance, a potentially overlooked area, is briefly discussed. The book also addresses cost issues and financing for green affordable housing.

The project overviews or case studies may be very useful for teams working on a current project. These case studies draw on projects from all over the country, including green building on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico to assist those who may be working for or with a tribe. While most case studies address various types of multifamily housing, the book includes a neighborhood-size project in Seattle, Washington that included a mix of affordable single-family homes and market-rate housing, as well as a Habitat for Humanity project of single family homes in Atlanta, Georgia. Several of the case studies were volunteer-driven with some sweat equity assisting in the construction.

The case studies provide comprehensive overviews of each project. The information includes tips for implementing green building features into different types of housing and the features incorporated into each case study. In addition, contact information is provided for each of the featured developments. This increases the usefulness of the case studies because a team working on a current project could contact others who have relevant experience. The case studies also include summaries of the projects’ green features, construction costs, project financing, and other practical details.

In addition to the case studies, the *Blueprint* includes appendices that, while useful in theory, could be much better. For example, one appendix consists of a sample lease addendum regarding the proper care of natural linoleum floors. There are other simple lease addendums that might be useful to green affordable housing developers and could have been incorporated into this handbook without much effort – addendums regarding care of green materials other than linoleum, such as less toxic pest control, and landscaping.

The appendix listing additional resources provides web links for sites in a variety of categories, such as affordable housing, green building, third-party certifiers, energy efficiency, and materials and product information. While the book is designed as a handbook and practical resource, this appendix could be better if it were a little more comprehensive. Each web site reference consists of only the site name and address. Incorporating brief descriptions of the sites would enable the reader to better identify resources that might be most relevant to a project.

Overall the *Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing* is a practical guide to green affordable housing. Because of its case studies and accessible style, the book could be a useful resource for novices and experts who want to build green without blowing their budgets.

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