

Community Housing Partners

By Orlando Artze

Photo: Courtesy of CHP/Jasmin Cotman



Community Housing Partners (CHP), a nonprofit community development corporation located in Christiansburg, Va., focuses on providing affordable, green, sustainable housing opportunities and services for low-income individuals and families. Their activities include sustainable development, architectural design, construction, energy services, homeownership facilitation and housing management.

A family makes use of the new community room at Lafayette Square in Williamsburg, Va. The extensive renovations included the use of environmentally responsible building practices and design features such as energy-efficient mechanical systems, appliances, and lighting; EnergyStar windows; low-VOC finishes; durable siding; and native landscaping.

Q: What are CHP's sources of funding for its green projects?

A: Because all of CHP's projects are considered green projects, we generally do not apply for funding sources based entirely on the green elements of a project. Since each project is unique, CHP uses a combination of funding and/or tax credits from local, state and federal agencies, private partners and lending institutions. How and if this money is applied to the green aspects of a project is usually left to CHP's discretion.

Q: How does CHP obtain green funding?

A: It is extremely difficult to quantify the exact cost of adding green practices to affordable housing programs since projects require different building materials that vary in price. As a result, it is often difficult to say precisely how much of our total funding applies to the green aspects of projects. And though many green designs are cost effective in the short term, others may take several years to reclaim the savings. There are staffing costs, but they depend on the extent of the work done and the number of strategies included in each project. To determine potential costs, CHP must outline all the possibilities, determine a budget, and then decide which green strategies are appropriate to implement.

By incorporating green design and construction strategies into CHP's everyday methodology, we have learned some important lessons:

- True environmental policy works best if it becomes an over-all agency goal. Helping staff, customers and colleagues think differently about the environment and conservation will help the program succeed.

Photo: Courtesy of CHP/Philip Beaurline



The Roanoke-Lee Street development was created by CHP in partnership with the town of Blacksburg, Va., and consists of 14 units of affordable and sustainable duplex housing.

- Stable funding is critical. CHP must calculate the various budgetary options for materials and activities and then develop a plan. We do seek funding from groups that support green building, such as LISC, NeighborWorks America, the Home Depot Foundation and Enterprise Green Communities, but also from more traditional funding sources used for development projects.
- A metric system, such as CHP's self-created Development Feasibility Scoring System, helps the agency set and achieve objectives. It also provides staff with a useful list of planning and construction options and alternatives.
- Green building can be cost effective. Organizations can adopt various activities that provide significant savings. Even if funds for environmental practices are low, staff should do what they can, when they can. This gets the agency moving in the right direction.

Q: Of the green features CHP uses, which ones provide the most energy savings and environmental benefits?

A: The following is a list of features that provide the most energy savings:

- Advanced framing techniques
- Energy Star lighting, windows, and appliances
- Cellulose insulation
- Air sealing
- Seer heat pumps
- Low VOC paints, sealants, and adhesives
- Low-flow toilets and faucets
- Fiber cement board siding (such as HardiPlank siding)
- Energy-efficient water heaters
- Tankless gas water heaters
- Super insulated electric water heaters
- Solar thermal water heaters

For more information about CHP, visit www.communityhousingpartners.org or call (540) 382-2002.

Orlando Artze, CHP's Executive Vice President & COO, joined CHP in April 2006, bringing with him over 20 years of experience in the affordable housing field from his previous work with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), where he most recently served as the Program Vice President for the Southeast and Minnesota regions. Artze holds an MBA from Baruch College, City University of New York and also has an MA in American History from Stony Brook University, State University of New York.

Photo: Courtesy of CHP/Philip Beaurline



The Tekoa Youth Facility is a 20-bed therapeutic residential facility for at-risk youth in Christiansburg, Va. This new construction project is an award-winning example of low-impact, green, attractive, sustainable design.

Photo: Courtesy of CHP/Melissa Byrd



Yorktown Square II, which has earned the EarthCraft Multifamily Energy Efficiency Standards certification, was acquired and redeveloped by CHP to preserve this affordable housing stock for the community and residents of Yorktown, Va.