

GUEST SHOT

Squamscott Block a 'green' project

BY AMY CULLEN

After reading the editorial titled "Board must address 'green' ordinance" in the Feb. 13 issue of The Exeter News-Letter, I was compelled to respond.

I work for New England Workforce Housing, a Portland, Maine-based developer of mixed-income housing. We are currently developing a project on Water Street in downtown Exeter called The Squamscott Block.

The Squamscott Block will have 16 affordable and 14 market-rate rental units and will contain 2,600 square feet of retail space. This building has been designed and will operate as a "green" building with the following environmentally sustainable features: super-high insulation; EnergyStar appliances, light fixtures and building systems; low-emission carpeting to maximize the quality of indoor air; low VOC (volatile organic compound) paint, adhesives and sealants; low-flow faucets and shower heads; high-performance windows; no smoking anywhere on the premises; and convenient indoor and outdoor bicycle storage areas.

The Squamscott Block is centrally located in an area where tenants can walk or bike to work, school and shopping. Reduced dependency on automobiles is the most important feature of this "green" building.

The Squamscott Block isn't our first "green" project. We've recently opened a building in Portland, Maine, called Walker Terrace. Walker Terrace is the first residential building designed and operating under Maine State Housing Authority's green building Standards. Walker Terrace includes all of

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same features as The Squamscott Block. Although New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority doesn't require these standards as Maine does, we decided to continue to build "green" buildings on all future projects.

Walker Terrace has taught us several lessons regarding environmentally sustainable building. First, the cost of using environmentally safer materials, systems and building practices doesn't increase the total cost. There is a learning curve at first and a slight increase in construction cost, but long-term that investment is returned in lower utility and maintenance costs and, we think, lower tenant turnover. Second, finding architects and engineers to design the building and systems isn't difficult to find, and their fees aren't any higher.

Third, there are programs out there that assist developers to offset the construction cost. In this case, we are partnering with Unitil and their EnergyStar Homes program. Unitil has several energy efficient educational and rebate programs for residential developments. You can learn about those programs at http://services.unitil.com/eh/energy_efficiency.asp.

We don't currently have any projects in Epping; however, if Article 22 passes, it wouldn't discourage us from considering one. We also encourage other developers to embrace environmentally sustainable building practices as a matter of social responsibility.

Those interested in learning more about New England Workforce Housing can visit www.NewEnglandWorkforceHousing.com; those interested in unit information at The Squamscott Block can call Paula Usher at MB Management at 516-0590.

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