

Grow Community

Bainbridge Island, Washington

PROJECT DATA

USE

MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITY
24 SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES AND
20 MULTIFAMILY UNITS IN PHASE I;
132 RESIDENCES AT BUILDOUT

YEAR OPENED

2013

SITE SIZE

8 AC (3.2 HA)

RENTAL RATES/SALES PRICES

APARTMENTS: \$1.75–\$1.95 PER
SQ FT

HOMES: \$295,000–\$525,000,
DEPENDING ON LOCATION AND
FLOOR PLAN—1,180–1,880 SQ FT
(110–175 SQ M)

PROJECT COST

PHASE I: \$16 MILLION, INCLUDING
LAND

DEVELOPER/OWNER

ASANI DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTS

DAVIS STUDIO ARCHITECTURE +
DESIGN LLC, CUTLER
ANDERSON ARCHITECTS

LENDER

BUILDERS CAPITAL

EQUITY PARTNERS

A GROUP OF FIVE INDIVIDUAL
LOCAL INVESTORS

“EVERY ELEMENT OF GROW COMMUNITY is intentionally planned to create a sense of community. The physical structure as well as community programs are designed to build an interactive environment and strong social network for people to form close connections with their neighbors,” says Marja Preston, president of Asani Development, the project developer. The developer chose to follow the One Planet Living framework; Grow Community is one of only seven endorsed One Planet Communities in the world. The principles of One Planet promote zero-carbon buildings, a reduction in water use, waste reduction, and use of sustainable, healthy building materials. But they also call for “encouraging active, sociable, meaningful lives to promote good health and well-being”—the primary tenet that shaped the design of Grow Community. The developer chose to follow the One Planet principles with the goal of creating a profitable, and therefore replicable, development model. An important element of this strategy was to provide housing at a price point that young families, single households, and individuals on fixed incomes could afford.



Grow Community was designed to encourage walking, biking, and engagement with neighbors.
Deb Henderson

grow
community



The first phase was built with parking on the perimeter of the site; interior sidewalks connect the streets to the homes. *Deb Henderson*

Phase I of this three-phase residential community combines 24 single-family homes with 20 rental apartments organized around shared community gardens. At buildout, the eight-acre (3.2 ha) development will have 132 residences, a community center, and an early childhood center.

Main Wellness Features

CHEMICAL-FREE INDOORS

Following the One Planet Communities guidelines, the zero-net-carbon homes at Grow Community are constructed with sustainable healthy materials that contain no harmful chemicals and emit no noxious fumes. Preston notes that homes built at a similar price point to that of Grow Community typically have vinyl windows, which do not meet One Planet goals. Asani decided to use wood/fiberglass windows to meet the sustainable materials guidelines, even though this option resulted in a 25 percent cost increase for the overall window package. The result is a home with more durable, longer-lasting windows and better indoor air quality.

DESIGN FOR PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS

The site, on the edge of the town of Winslow on Bainbridge Island, is a five-minute walk from city

hall, the local farmers market, and shops, and ten minutes from the ferry terminal, which is a short ride from downtown Seattle. Its Walk Score of 80 confirms that it is in a “very walkable” location.

On-site strategies to promote walking and exercise are the following:

- * Parking in Phase I is on the perimeter of the site; residents use paths crossing through the community gardens to reach their homes on foot. This design, derived from focus-group participants, was intended to encourage walking and biking and spontaneous encounters with neighbors, and to encourage people to think twice before driving. Preston notes that from an urban planning perspective, perimeter parking is an interesting concept, but seems risky to developers and investors. Nonetheless, Asani decided to follow prospective residents’ recommendations in Phase I.

The paths were designed to be safe and inviting for both adults and children. Vehicle roads are separated so cars never cross the walking paths. In place of playgrounds inserted in the community, the paths were designed with natural play elements, such as circles of flat granite rock for children to jump on and play on. The site was designed so that parents would feel comfortable letting their children walk on their



Garages are not part of the first phase, so storage sheds and shared bike barns are provided for residents.

Deb Henderson

own to town, where the library, schools, and the swimming pool are only minutes away.

- * Because there are no garages, the homes have storage sheds for bicycles, garden tools, and other outdoor gear. A number of residents have too many bikes to fit in the shed (one resident owns eight), so the developer built additional shared bike barns and storage for kayaks. Later phases, however, will have parking underground in response to input from baby boomers, whose interest in Grow Community was not anticipated by the developer. These older prospective residents also wanted one-story homes with universal

Interiors of Grow Community homes feature chemical-free materials and wood-frame windows. *Anthony Rich*



design components where they could remain into old age. By placing parking beneath the buildings in Phase II, the design not only eliminates the visual impact of surface parking and minimizes impervious area, but it also allows three of the five acres in the second phase to be used for open space and community gardens.

- * To further reduce the amount of car use, thereby encouraging walking, the developer started a car-share program: residents pay a small monthly fee to use a Nissan Leaf car. The charging station for the car is connected to a dedicated solar array that provides sufficient renewable energy to power the car.

COMMUNITY GARDENS/SOCIAL INTERACTION

Instead of having individual front yards, the single-family homes are clustered around community gardens. In Phase I, the first of four gardens (one per pocket neighborhood) was constructed for the model homes built in 2012. Asani plans to hold “work parties” to help residents build their gardens and to build a sense of community. Asani will provide soil and other materials for these early gardens before they are turned over to residents. In order to share resources and expertise, residents decided recently to manage all four garden spaces as one large “urban farm” rather than allocate separate plots to each household.

A nonprofit organization, Grow:Connected, will manage programs for the community center. The



developer envisions creating an “eco-concierge” position within the nonprofit. The concierge would develop educational programs about urban gardening, One Planet Living, green building, and renewable energy.

Preston notes the importance of meeting early with potential residents to learn their preferences. Another bit of information gleaned from these early meetings was a strong preference for intergenerational living: potential residents 55 and older showed a strong desire to live in a community with families and children. Asani plans to design the daycare center with universal design elements to accommodate older residents for volunteer work with children.

Performance

With no comparable residential projects in the region that lenders could consider when weighing a loan, Asani Development, made up of a group of local investors, put up the equity itself for the three model for-sale homes. When Grow Community opened in August 2012, Seattle’s housing market was still sluggish, so Asani expected lackluster

sales. Instead, the first 22 for-sale units on the market sold out within six months. There is a long waiting list for rental units still under construction; current rental units go for \$1.75–\$1.95 per square foot, while other rental properties have typically gone for \$1.10–\$1.25 per square foot. Sales were so strong that Asani had to accelerate its construction schedule. “We’re halfway through construction on Phase I, in schematics for Phase II, and people already want to reserve units in Phase III,” notes Preston. “We intended to list on the MLS, but haven’t needed to.” Although advertising did not extend beyond Bainbridge Island, only half the residents came from the island; the rest came from around the United States and Canada.

Four community gardening spaces provide residents with opportunities to grow their own produce and to build a sense of community.

Deb Henderson