

# ideas

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# THE Sustainable COMMUNITY

## High Point Is National Model

by Bill Kreager, FAIA, MIRM

### COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

#### What is the overall community vision?

High Point integrates ecological and social goals to create a new model for affordable, livable, and sustainable neighborhoods. This 120-acre HOPE VI redevelopment replaces 716 subsidized housing units erected after World War II with Built Green™ three-star houses, townhouses, condominiums, apartments, and numerous parks for more than 4,000 people. Envisioned through extensive community and stakeholder input, 50 percent of High

Point's 1,600 units are home to low-income residents, while the entire neighborhood – mixed economically, ethnically, and socially – has been reintegrated into the surrounding urban fabric.

Sustainability was factored into the entire process, from preserving 150 trees to recycling the previous development's old growth lumber to creating a natural drainage system that mimics an open meadow and protects a critical Coho salmon habitat. Energy conservation exceeds code require-

ments by nearly 50 percent, while transit-oriented measures ensure that bus stops connect neighborhood residents with the rest of the city.

#### Describe the area around the community.

West Seattle is set on a peninsula surrounded by the Duwamish Waterway and Puget Sound, separated to the southwest from Downtown Seattle by approximately six miles and the city's geography. Unlike most city neighborhoods, the natural environment defines West Seattle. The peninsula is edged with parks, greenbelts, beaches, and a 50-acre stand of massive, old-growth Douglas fir and western red cedar, with many specimens standing more than 200 feet tall. This remains a living reminder of what West Seattle looked like prior to Euro-American settlement in 1851.

#### Why was this location chosen as the site for this community?

During World War II, Seattle was flooded with thousands of people working for Boeing and other local war industries. In response to the demand for housing, a federal program created High Point in West Seattle – a 1300-unit development for workers that was conveniently near the Boeing factory just south of the city. Following the war, the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) assumed responsibility for the property. In the 1970s, a portion was donated for a park and school, reducing the number of units to 716. High Point then remained essentially unchanged until the start of HOPE VI redevelopment in 2004.

#### How did the location influence home and community design?

Of the 1,600 homes, all of which meet Seattle's Built Green™ standards, 350 are designated for very low-income people at 30 percent of median income or lower, 250 units are for working families with up to 60 percent of the median income, 116 independent and assisted-living units are for low-income seniors at 30 percent of the median or below, and 80 are affordable homeownership units, totaling 796 units of affordable housing. The remaining 804 units will include market-rate senior housing, single-family homes, and condos.

With a near epidemic of childhood and adult asthma, especially in low-income families, High Point is the first community in the country to offer Breathe-Easy Homes. Recognizing that poor indoor environmental air quality is a key factor in the increase in asthma, SHA partnered with Neighborhood House, the University of Washington, King County Health Department, and the American Lung Association of Washington to develop the Breathe-Easy Homes program. This educational program includes design and construction strategies, lifestyle changes, and a monitoring program.

Consistent with the sustainable design approach for the entire community, all of the homes are being built to improve air quality through better insulation and ventilation. Non-allergenic plants for landscaping have also been chosen to minimize the release of pollen. Of the 350 homes set aside for very low-income people, 60 will be Breathe-Easy. •



## BACKGROUND

### THE SEATTLE HOUSING AUTHORITY (SHA)

oversees High Point Community. The SHA is a public corporation (governed by a seven-member citizen commission) that provides affordable housing to nearly 26,000 people in the City of Seattle. Its goal for High Point is to create a national model for mixed income and sustainable communities, including as many sustainable design practices as feasible in redeveloping the site and building new homes. Mithun led High Point's innovative master planning process and provided design guidelines for all private developers involved with the project. Phase I is now complete, with Phase II underway and slated for completion in 2009.

## THE COMMUNITY

### COMMUNITY NAME:

High Point; Seattle, Washington

### COMMUNITY WEB SITE:

[www.thehighpoint.com](http://www.thehighpoint.com)

### NUMBER OF UNITS:

1,600

### BUILDING TYPES:

Single-family townhomes, condominiums, apartments

### AVERAGE UNIT PRICE:

\$400,000

### DATE OPEN FOR SALE:

April 2005

### NUMBER OF UNITS SOLD:

240 in Phase I

## THE TEAM

### BUILDER(S):

Absher Construction;  
Tristate Construction;  
Lyle Homes; Polygon;  
Saltaire; Dwelling Company

### ARCHITECT:

Mithun

### MARKETING DIRECTOR:

Brian Sullivan,  
Seattle Housing Authority

### AD AGENCY/PR FIRM:

Fusionpartners

### LANDSCAPE DESIGNER:

Mithun; Nakano Partnership

### SIGN COMPANY:

Fusionpartners

**What is the target market?**

As a mixed-use, multi-ethnic, mixed-income community, several target markets were addressed. The rental product, which was built to ENERGY STAR® and Built Green™ 3-Star level, had an existing market from the Seattle Housing Authority's public housing clientele.

The market rate for-sale homes, townhomes, and condominiums were targeted toward a mix of urban buyers. The common theme among the target markets was the desire to live in an urban environment, with good access to transportation, quality bistros, shops, and services within walking and biking distances, the diversity of neighbors and the general higher energy level of in-city living.

**What is the unique selling proposition?**

As a completely renewed in-city neighborhood, High Point was able to offer a variety of new home types that had all the advantages of new construction, including Built Green™ construction usually found only in the suburbs, with a location and charm of one of Seattle's most treasured in-city neighborhoods.

**How was the community marketed to potential buyers?**

The public marketing campaign was kicked off with a major promotion paid for by city utilities and other sponsors in a weekend event at High Point, "The Seattle Green Living EXPO." Over 8,000 people attended and took docent-guided tours of the green and sustainable features of the community infrastructure and the model homes.

In addition to newspaper ads, articles, on-site events, Web site, signage, radio, and guerilla marketing,

one of the most effective marketing initiatives was a 64-page "magazine" published as the "community brochure" and distributed free throughout the larger neighborhood by the local merchants and restaurants.

**What were the community's goals for:**

**PRODUCT DESIGN:** Home design emphasized timeless and traditional architectural inspiration, a variety of styles and sizes to appeal to diverse buyers, and an emphasis on green building techniques.

**INTERIOR MERCHANDISING:** Each one of the five builders merchandised their models to appeal to their target, resulting in a variety of lifestyles represented. A major component through all the models was featuring each home's approach to green building by highlighting materials and components. For example, one builder used hardwood floors that were recycled from a high school that was recently remodeled. Another demonstrated a solar hot water panel. Others highlighted special green materials such as cork flooring or paper stone counter tops.

**PROMOTIONS:** High Point's most significant promotion was the Seattle Green Living EXPO, which attracted over 8,000 visitors and substantial press coverage. Smaller open houses and promotions were managed by the individual builders.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** A major emphasis of High Point is sustainability, from the natural drainage system and other infrastructure efforts to the requirements that all market-rate home builders meet a minimum standard of Built Green™ 3-Star. In fact, most builders exceeded this requirement and reached a 4-Star, ENERGY STAR® level of construction, which required

independent third-party verification. The sustainable aspects of the community became a major feature of the marketing campaign. •

LESSONS LEARNED

**What goals were and were not achieved? What were the reasons for these outcomes?**

High Point's inventory of for-sale homes sold out in record time. During the active marketing phases, which occurred in a historic up-market, the builders experienced regular price increases, improving their margins and benefiting the master developer through profit sharing incentives. High Point was competing against extensive inventories of new home communities throughout a regional market. Being an 'in-city master plan,' which is an anomaly, the marketing had to reach out and create interest. There was a market for homes in the city, but High Point was the only game in town in terms of a completely new master planned community. All sales and revenue goals were met or exceeded, even when the local and national market slowed dramatically toward the end of High Point's Phase I marketing window.

**How did the builder, designers and sales staff work together to accomplish the community's goals?**

This project was typical of any large master planned community in that there were five different home builders, each with its own sales staff and marketing needs. The marketing challenge was to provide the creative "glue" that held them all together, communicating the top-level benefits of the community, while allowing

each builder the platform to position its own product.

A key component of success was the use of Fusionpartners as the marketing and graphics consultant for all five home builders. Builders were required as part of the purchase and sale agreement to belong to a marketing cooperative, where funds for general advertising and marketing were pooled to create a consistent and coordinated look and feel to all advertising and marketing activities. Fusionpartners provided creative services which included community-wide advertising and marketing. The firm also provided the builders with templates for directional signage, advertising, and other collateral.

The key lesson in a situation like this is that there is no such thing as too much communication. We learned to use regular meetings, Internet traffic reporting, and regular marketing updates to get maximum input from the home builders, helping keep the campaign on track.

**What were the challenges faced and how were they overcome?**

The Seattle and national market experienced a dramatic slowdown starting in September of 2007. At that time, two of five market-rate builders still had available inventory. The key here was to keep media exposure alive for about four months longer than expected to help these builders complete their sellout, which was accomplished early in 2008. Messaging focused on the positive acceptance of the community and the scarcity of this kind of opportunity. Media shifted to largely Internet-based strategies and aggressive use of a permission email list built up over the life of the project. •



RESULTS

**What is the average weekly traffic and market acceptance rate since the opening day?**

Traffic during the 30-month active marketing phase ranged from 30 to 200 buying units per week. Simply put, High Point had enough traffic to meet its sales goals.

**What awards or recognition has this community received?**

High Point has received numerous prestigious awards since 2003. Here are a few of the awards received in 2007 alone:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Urban Land Institute: 2007 Global Award for Excellence                   | 2007 Built Green Hammer Award (highest scoring community to date)            |
| Urban Land Institute: 2007 Award for Excellence — Americas               | National Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence: 2007 Silver Medalist        |
| National AIA: 2007 Housing Committee Award (Multifamily)                 | 2007 Washington Excellence in Concrete Construction: Sustainable Merit Award |
| National AIA/HUD Secretary's Award: 2006 Community Informed Design Award | Puget Sound Regional Council: 2007 Vision 2020 Award                         |
| NAHB National Green Building Award: 2007 Multifamily Project of the Year |  |

**What are the future projections for the community?**

The good news is that we have successfully completed Phase I, learned a great deal, and have the opportunity to do it all over again sometime in 2009/2010 when a slightly larger Phase II comes on the market. •