

Prime habitat

Chapmantown neighborhood infill project will be the county's first LEED subdivision

By [Christine G.K. LaPado](#)

Not only is Habitat for Humanity of Butte County's newest low-income housing project the organization's biggest to date by a long shot, it's also the most cutting-edge because it's so unquestionably *green*.

Located just up the street from Chapman Elementary School, the East 16th Street Infill Project will provide about two-thirds the number of affordable homes for low-income families that Habitat has built in its entire 16-year existence in Butte County *and* it will contain all LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) homes—making it the first LEED-certified subdivision in the county.

“The big excitement for us this year is the 16th Street project,” offered Darlene Giampaoli, executive director of the local Habitat for Humanity. “It’s going to be seven houses. Since 1993, we have only been able to build 11 or 12 houses.”

Previously, the nonprofit had been able to secure only a single lot at a time on which to build.

Significant financial help from the city of Chico, FHLB (Federal Home Loan Bank)—which awarded the project a much-coveted grant—and PG&E was crucial to Habitat for Humanity's ability to obtain the required large piece of land. The organization still has to raise \$35,000 per house built (as compared with the usual \$65,000-\$80,000 per house).

LEED for Homes certification, according to the U. S. Green Building Council, is based on a rating system “that promotes the design and construction of high-performance green homes. Green homes use less energy, water and natural resources, create less waste, and are more durable and comfortable for occupants.”



LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Ross Simmons of NorthStar Engineering (left) and Brandon Duntsch of Franklin Construction check out the site of Habitat for Humanity's newest project, a seven-home eco-friendly subdivision for low-income families.

Photo By MATT SIRACUSA

Helping hands

Habitat for Humanity needs volunteers, both to help with fundraising and to help build homes in the East 16th Street Infill Project. No experience is necessary. For more info, or to learn about applying to become a homeowner, call 343-7423 or visit www.buttehabitat.org.

The East 16th Street project will feature solar electric systems funded by PG&E in each home, as well as energy-efficient building materials—including recycled materials—that exceed Title 24 specifications by about 40 percent, said Giampaoli.

Title 24 refers to a section of the California Code of Regulations regarding energy-efficiency standards for new buildings. These standards were established in 1978 as a way to reduce California's energy consumption; they are updated as new energy-efficient technology allows.

"We are looking at getting a gold level of [LEED for Homes] certification," said Ross Simmons, civil engineer with local firm NorthStar Engineering, and project manager/design engineer for the 16th Street project. Simmons is also secretary of the Habitat board of directors.

The lowest level of LEED certification is Certified. Silver is next, then Gold, with Platinum being the highest level possible. (Giampaoli said the cost of getting a platinum rating would exceed the project's funding.)

Added insulation in each of the proposed homes and tankless water heaters located in the attics "that heat water on command instead of all day long," said Simmons, are some of the innovative, energy-saving features that are expected to help earn the project the Gold rating.

Another feature, designed to save water, will be a drought-tolerant landscape, incorporating fescue grasses and native plants.

"One of the biggest features is the actual size of the houses," added Simmons. "We are not building big, energy-wasting houses. These will be smaller homes—900 to 1,100 square feet.

"This will be an affordable housing development," Simmons summed up. "We're not doing luxuries beyond the basic necessities of the house. We're not building garages, for instance. The biggest difference between [Habitat] and a regular house-builder is we don't build garages. We're able to provide more houses for more families if we don't build garages."

Parking "pads" behind each house, with alley access, will give homeowners a place to park their vehicles, Simmons said. Also, the guidelines of the project allow for a homeowner to approach the city in the future for permission to construct a garage.

"It's a great infill project in an area where everything around it is already built," Simmons said.

Giampaoli said city officials agree that it is a good project for the Chapmantown neighborhood.

"The city of Chico has been incredibly instrumental in getting this going," she stressed.

Habitat received a \$450,000 Chico Redevelopment Agency grant from the city of Chico for the entire underground infrastructure of the new subdivision, which Giampaoli said was annexed into city limits.

PG&E is currently busy at the site doing underground telephone and power-line work. Franklin Construction, which cleared all the necessary trees at the site to make room for houses, is in the process of doing the site grading.

After the city approves the subdivision's final map around the end of September and building permits are obtained, Habitat's plan is to begin building the first two houses in October.

Families have not yet been chosen for the subdivision. Criteria for being selected include need—including currently living in overcrowded and/or substandard conditions, and having an income of less than 60 percent of the area's median income—and willingness to complete 200 hours of "sweat equity" in the construction of a Habitat home.

“I think the goal will be to get the foundations [of two houses] poured before the rains hit,” said Giampaoli.
“We’ll start these two houses, and do another three or four next year, depending on funding. It certainly won’t take more than four years [to complete the project].”