**Plans for green housing in works**
WKU, Habitat for Humanity teaming up for subdivision to be built on Glen Lily Road

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Bowling Green is about to get greener.

Western Kentucky University and Habitat for Humanity announced Thursday they will partner to create a new 16-acre, 50-unit green housing community using low-impact development techniques.

Site development for the project - the first of its kind in the state - will begin by the end of the year, funded with a $655,000 grant to WKU from the Kentucky Division of Water, according to Nancy Givens, WKU coordinator of sustainable program development with the Center for Environmental Education and Sustainability.

The community, called Durbin Estates, will be just off Glen Lily Road near the former L.C. Curry Elementary School on land owned by Habitat for Humanity. Plans call for it to be a mixed-income subdivision of both single and multifamily dwellings such as condos, said Rodney Goodman, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Bowling Green-Warren County Inc.

Some of the homes will be built by Habitat for Humanity while other lots may be sold to the public, with restrictions.

“It’s going to be about more than building homes, it is going to be about building a decent, safe community for people to live in where there are community gardens, community interaction and community associations,” Goodman said.

The development is unique among Habitat for Humanity projects because it combines the elements of multiple housing units with green infrastructure, said Terry Wilson, director of WKU’s Center for Environmental Education and Sustainability. “We feel like the project will provide a strong sense of community for the folks that end up living there because that is what we are trying to do from the start is create a real community,” Wilson said.

The plan has been in the works for some time but has been held back by funding, according to Goodman.

“We have been waiting for funding for infrastructure and now we’ve got it,” Goodman said. “Right now we can go in and build one or two homes in a community, but we can’t go in and make a large change, so this gives us a chance to make a huge impact.”

The project addresses environmental and economic issues, including the larger concern of global climate change, according to Givens. It also will serve as a model of infrastructure that uses natural methods of reducing the cost to communities of treating water, protecting waterways and restoring the environment.

Storm runoff, drainage and seepage from agricultural and urban areas is the leading cause of water pollution in the United States today - and because it all comes from different sources, it is difficult to manage, according to Givens.

WKU students will also play an integral role in the design aspects of the project, such as a major retention basin that drains runoff so it can be returned as pure ground and river water. Students may also be involved in keeping data to validate the cost and benefits of the sustainable features.

Other mechanisms to be included in the green infrastructure include pervious pavement, cisterns, rain barrels, irrigation piping to collect and recycle rainwater, rain gardens, landscaping that slows water flow and provides natural filtration, drought-tolerant native plants and organic alternatives to the use of chemicals.

Plans also call for a community center, outdoor amphitheater, walking trails, community gardens, rain gardens, edible landscaping - such as fruit and nut trees as well as berry bushes - landscaping with native plants, walking trails and mass transit stops.

WKU and Habitat for Humanity are also considering the use of a passive home model - which uses 90 percent less energy than a standard home - as a construction prototype, Givens said, adding that the development “returns money to families.”

“This will show that if we can develop housing that is environmentally friendly, sustainable for its homeowners and we can do it in a low-income setting, then it sets a precedent for the entire community,” said Goodman. “The other thing is - for our families - being able to produce a setting with lower energy bills means we are making a sustainable, affordable situation for them.”

The project will also be used as a training model on how to use natural ecosystems and technologies. Habitat for Humanity affiliates from all over the state will use the building project for on-site training, according to Goodman.

“We see this as a model for the future to be replicated by all communities,” Givens said. “We are definitely going to be setting a model for our region and state.”

Durbin Estates will also serve as an educational model for the community and organizations, as well for as individuals, who will be able to volunteer and get involved, Givens said. WKYU-TV will be make a 30-minute documentary on the project.

“We have already developed a broad coalition on the project and we only see that expanding,” Goodman said. “We are building a community for people to live in and it is also going to be an on-going educational facility for WKU. The short term is about the infrastructure but the long term is about the community.”