Rural Development Inc.

Rural Development, Inc. (RDI) is a non-profit housing developer in Franklin County, MA. The Home Ownership Program builds single family homes across Franklin County and the North Quabbin for low to moderate income first-time homebuyers. RDI has chosen to emphasize green building for their homes.

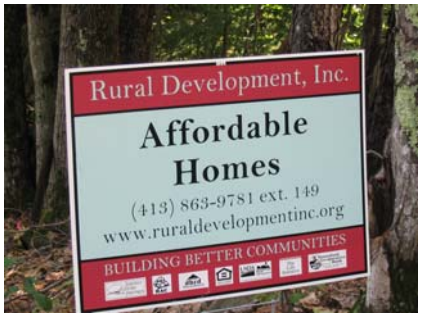
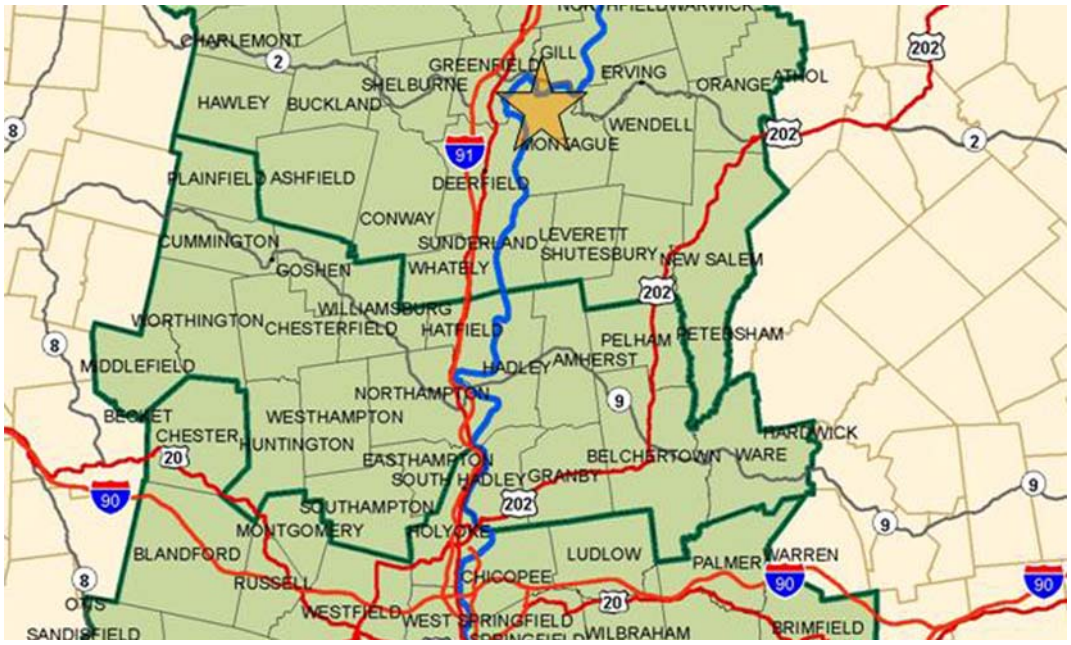


Image courtesy of Megan McDonough

Several homes have received LEED certification – a national green building certification program developed by the US Green Building Council. Their efforts have also been recognized nationally by the Home Depot Foundation, who gave RDI "An Award of Excellence for Affordable Housing Built Responsibly" in 2005. This project demonstrates the ability to build green housing at reasonable cost while creating greater opportunities for home ownership. In doing so it incorporates many of the social, economic and environmental concerns of sustainability.



Lessons Learned:

- Leadership in sustainability attracts others who want to collaborate with successful organizations
- Assumptions that green building is more expensive need to be questioned.

Rural Development Inc. background information

This organization works in all of the towns of Franklin County – both rural and more urban, as well as the Athol area of Worcester County. The median home price in Franklin County is $207,800 which is $22,600 higher than the national median home price as of 2006 and the median income for the area is higher than the national median.[1]

Rural Development Inc (RDI) has built over 95 single family homes to date. In 2007 they built a near zero-net energy house in Colrain, MA that will serve as a model for a solar village in Greenfield, MA.

From a press release about the near zero net energy house[2]:

RDI house design by Austin Design, Inc. of Colrain

"Their house is modeled to produce 3,694 kilowatts of electricity annually while using 4,339 kilowatts; the owners will therefore need to plan to purchase 645 kW a year for just under $200 per year (with the monthly service charge). It is also modeled to use 274 gallons of propane as back up to the American Solar Works hot water system, as well as for cooking and clothes drying. A more typical 1,352 square foot home would use 1,001 gallons of propane."

This non-profit developer uses a combination of cost-saving measures, donations, grant and loan programs to achieve the affordability of the projects they build. They have been able to attract donations of services and goods because they have distinguished themselves in the affordable housing field by adopting innovative green practices. Professionals and businesses like being associated with an innovative and social-conscious organization. This ability to find collaborative solutions to working towards sustainability is a lesson that may be transferable to other projects.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey
[2] www.ruraldevelopmentinc.org