

Finalist: Community Three Development LLC

By design, Grant Epstein is a different kind of developer. The president of D.C.-based Community Three Development LLC may hold a master's in business administration from Georgetown University, but he also spent seven years as an architect for Torti Gallas and Partners Inc. before launching his own development company three years ago.



As a result, his intimate knowledge of the actual sticks and bricks that go into a building helps Epstein ensure that even small projects will blaze a wide path toward more sustainable communities.

“Most developers buy land, then call an architect and say, ‘We need a building at 14th and Q,’” Epstein says. “Before we even set out to buy 14th and Q, we’ve already designed the building for it.”

So, how do you create a small sustainable condominium building, where economies of scale don’t exist and where LEED certification is neither financially feasible nor particularly useful as a marketing tool? You do it with the little things.

Before starting construction at The Nine, a four-unit condo/retail building at 1316 Ninth St. NW, Epstein and Community Three sat down with contractors, suppliers and design consultants to analyze the cost of each building component, both at the time of purchase and over the life of the building. The company then used an “eco-matrix” to rate and prioritize options based on their green-bang for the greenback.

At The Nine, that meant — in addition to the old standbys like low-flow fixtures, EnergyStar appliances and such — saving bricks from the demolished buildings and washing them for reuse, building just a partial green roof and going “one more step down the food chain” to find suppliers who were themselves using sustainable practices and still charging reasonable prices for them.

By spending just 2 percent more on materials, Community Three doubled The Nine’s energy efficiency. The units will hit the market any day now: “It is 99.9 percent complete, but we wait until things are perfect before selling,” Epstein says.

