

## Homes & Real Estate

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### **Earth Day is a year-round celebration in Seattle**

To illustrate how verdantly our environmental roots grow, let's highlight five ways that the Greater Seattle area shows its deeper shade of green.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

As Americans observe the 44th annual Earth Day on Tuesday, taking action to solve environmental problems has never been more urgent.

Individual and collective actions help address climate change, health threats from toxic chemicals and other pressing eco-concerns.

Action always beats inaction, and this is the perfect time of year to celebrate our accomplishments as we continue moving forward.

To illustrate how verdantly our environmental roots grow, let's highlight five ways that the Greater Seattle area shows its deeper shade of green.

#### ***Beyond recycling***

Long known as a hotbed for the third R — recycle — Seattle also leads the nation in the first two Rs: reduce and reuse.

The hit rap song “Thrift Shop” by Seattle’s Macklemore & Ryan Lewis celebrates thrift-store shopping and makes reuse cool. The video, partly filmed at the Seattle Goodwill Outlet Store, has more than 500 million YouTube views.

Seattle Goodwill will open a new store May 2 on Capitol Hill, which will create dozens of new jobs. Numerous other stores selling secondhand items have also prospered.

From furniture to building materials, used goods increasingly bring classiness and economy to our homes and yards.

Reduction has surged into the mainstream, as well. For example, Seattle and seven other western Washington cities have enacted bans on plastic shopping bags at grocery stores and other retailers. In Issaquah, the plastic-bag industry supported a ballot measure to overturn the city’s ban on plastic bags, but residents voted in a February special election to keep the ban.

Our reduction ethic extends beyond solid waste. Recent government data shows Seattle’s traffic has decreased, while transit ridership has risen. Fewer cars, smaller cars and more fuel-efficient cars all appear to be local trends with legs — er, wheels.

## ***Green entrepreneurs***

The best way to find a green job might be to create your own, and the Seattle region offers abundant opportunities for green entrepreneurs. Husband-and-wife team Jeremy Smithson and Pamela Burton started Puget Sound Solar in 2001. They now have more than 30 employees and a solid share of the area's growing residential-solar-installation market.

The University of Washington's annual Environmental Innovation Challenge, which took place earlier this month, awarded monetary prizes to students whose entrepreneurial projects received the highest scores from 177 judges. Winners included projects that increase textile recycling and turn windows into solar-energy generators.

## ***Sustaining food***

The Puget Sound region has a strong appetite for groundbreaking sustainable-food businesses and projects. Several efforts have targeted "food deserts," or neighborhoods where healthy, affordable food can be hard to find.

The new 7-acre Beacon Food Forest on Seattle's Beacon Hill has transformed public land into an edible ecosystem with fruits, berries, nuts and vegetables for community harvest.

What's the next big thing in local, sustainable food? Possibly "urban aquaponics," which involves jointly raising fish (aquaculture) and growing edible plants without using soil (hydroponics). True Blue Aquaponics, a Seattle small business, is a pioneer in this approach.

## ***Our purest resource: H2O***

We have also made a splash on water issues. Researchers such as Tessa Francis and Joel Baker at UW-Tacoma's Center for Urban Waters perform vital research on pollution in Puget Sound, including "microplastic" particles from consumer cosmetics.

Grass-roots campaigns such as a single-use plastic water bottle ban at Western Washington University in Bellingham have championed the region's high-quality tap water and reduced water bottle waste.

## ***Power in numbers***

The enduring green strength of the Seattle area emanates from its hundreds of environment-oriented community organizations, both large and small.

They're everywhere. CoolMom sponsors community projects addressing climate change.

Out for Sustainability embraces the LGBTQ communities through activities such as Earth Gay, an annual Seattle work party to restore green space. Cascade Bicycle Club and Washington Bikes have worked hard to advance the causes of bike commuting and cyclist safety.

Will all these efforts make a difference? Many of us believe they already are. So let's celebrate our achievements this week, and keep the action coming. Happy Earth Day!

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