

Homes & Real Estate

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Green opportunities abound at the grass-roots level

Neighborhood sustainability efforts thrive in the Seattle area, providing assistance, encouragement and inspiration. Here's a sampling of nonprofit, community-based programs.

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You can have the greenest home in the world, but you're likely to make a greater impact and have more fun if you also get involved with green grass-roots community projects.

Neighborhood sustainability efforts thrive in the Seattle area, providing assistance, encouragement and inspiration.

Here's a sampling of nonprofit, community-based programs, by areas of interest.

Energy

Reducing energy consumption is one of the most effective ways a household can address climate change. Northwest SEED (Sustainable Energy for Economic Development) has pioneered a successful community-based approach with its Solarize Washington (solarizewa.org) campaign.

In Solarize projects, residents of a large neighborhood or adjoining communities get discounted prices on solar panels and systems from selected contractors through group purchasing.

Nearly 500 homeowners have signed solar contracts through these projects, installing 2,200 kilowatts of solar power. New Solarize programs are launching this summer in Southwest Seattle, on Mercer Island and in the Edmonds/Lynnwood area.

Past projects, such as Sustainable Seattle's Sustainable Neighbors Action Program, have helped residents get energy audits and learn energy-conservation strategies. If you would like to see more energy efficiency education projects at the neighborhood level, let local utilities and nonprofits know.

Transportation

Driving less by walking and biking more also makes a dent in climate change.

On busy thoroughfares in Kirkland, Seattle's Madison Valley and other communities, pedestrians can use brightly colored flags to get drivers' attention and safely cross the street. Neighborhood volunteers supporting these efforts may be motivated by safety, but these are also considered green projects because they encourage walking.

Area parents' groups also organize "bike trains" or a "walking school bus" to help young students get to school safely — and carbon-free. Local green groups Cascade Bicycle Club (cascade.org) and CoolMom (coolmom.org) provide support and advice for these projects.

Undriving (undriving.org), a program founded in 2007 by Sustainable Ballard, effectively raises public awareness with its popular Undriver License campaign.

Food

Growing strong for more than 20 years, our region's popular farmers markets and community gardens have helped make the Puget Sound area a leader in neighborhood sustainability efforts.

The groundbreaking, community-based Beacon Food Forest (beaconfoodforest.org), located on Seattle's Beacon Hill, will eventually become an edible urban forest garden, open to the public.

Gleaning programs harvest unpicked fruit and often donate it to food banks and meals programs. City Fruit (cityfruit.org) volunteers gleaned more than 10,000 pounds of unused fruit in 2013 from residential properties in several Seattle neighborhoods, even though it was not an abundant fruit year locally. Gleaning hits its stride August through October with plums and apples.

Gardening

Various community programs that distribute rain barrels and promote rain gardens are helping address stormwater runoff while supporting our region's avid contingent of gardeners.

On East Columbia Street in Seattle's Central Area, the Pollinator Pathway (pollinatorpathway.com) project has turned parking strips into blooming oases for bees and other pollinators.

Sharing and swapping

Tool-lending libraries, like those featured in a recent EcoConsumer column, are a new breed of community-generated project. Four practical and hands-on tool libraries operate in Seattle, and another opens in Fall City in August.

Overall sustainability

Some neighborhood and community organizations go eco in a big, broad way and have put their energies behind the green efforts described above. Sustainable Northeast Seattle (sustainableneseattle.ning.com), Sustainable West Seattle (sustainablewestseattle.org) and Sustainable Bainbridge (sustainablebainbridge.org) are among the most active of these groups.

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