

What makes a home 'green'?

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“Home Builders Association looks to answer that question with “Green Building Council.”

A new Johnson City Area Home Builders Association committee hopes to answer the many questions surrounding what makes a home “green” – for builders, homeowners, local governments and anyone else connected to the industry.

About eight JCAHBA members met Thursday to establish goals and develop a mission statement for the association’s “Green Building Council.” From their discussion, members realized much work lies ahead as they seek to establish uniform guidelines for the local industry in an era when many businesses are quick to tout themselves as “green” without necessarily offering objective evidence for those claims.

The council’s draft mission statement reads: “We are a coalition of industry related professionals promoting environmentally sustainable green building practices.”

The Johnson City Planning Department’s Angie Charles attended the meeting, and the council hopes to establish criteria and begin working with the city within two months. Members hope to reach some compromises with the city in cases where current construction requirements conflict with sustainable, green building principles.

The council will base its approach on green home building guidelines established in 2005 by the National Association of Home Builders. Those are similar to the U. S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification standards, with some modification. (Mountain States Health Alliance is building the new Franklin Wood Community Hospital according to LEED specifications.)

Alan Hendrickson, a local builder who is certified green by the NAHB, began the meeting by discussing basic principles of green building. Those range from simple changes in job site habits and planning in order to reduce and recycle job waste to the most environmentally sound use of each home lot and – a key in green building – constructing the most energy efficient home possible.

The group discussed several examples of the extensive education needed to raise the community’s awareness level of a movement that is still evolving itself. For example:

Bambo is a green material because of its sustainability, but if it’s shipped from China it may not be considered as green as a somewhat less sustainable product that’s made and shipped a much shorter distance.

The square footage of a home isn’t the only factor involved in the size of heat pump needed. As more efficient homes are constructed locally, the council hopes to inform HVAC contractors about the lower power heat pumps needed per square foot in those homes.

The council's primary objectives revolve around educating people on:

Sustainable development; use of green building process and efficient planning; using green materials; creating energy efficient homes and buildings; increasing use of alternative energy sources; preserving top soil and trees, and reducing stormwater runoff through low impact development; maximizing energy efficiency and minimizing cost; and helping homeowners realize the direct benefits of a green built home.

The group will establish an educational web site at jcahbagreen.org, and plans to meet next on July 24 in a two-hour workshop, where it will develop a program to take to the city government.