

# Forum, tours focus on green homes, new communities

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Good fences make good neighbors, poet Robert Frost wrote.

But that was in the days before “sustainable” became a buzzword along with “ecological” — concepts that are woven into alternative housing arrangements like Wisdom Way Solar Village, Salmon Falls Co-Housing Association and Katywil “eco-village” in Colrain.

In Colrain, developer Bill Cole looks out from the picture window of his home at the 112 acres that are gradually giving way to the 18-home community named for his grand-

parents’ Virginia farm.

Two homes are already being built, with two more lots being sold, featuring near-zero-energy-use houses and a community that produces much of its own food and with a minimum of environmental disruption.

“The new piece is how do we make it work socially?” asks the 61-year-old former classics teacher who’s dreamed of creating an environmentally friendly community for five years and bought the property four years ago.

Katywil is one of several alternative living models to be visited and discussed as part of a

■ There will be a panel discussion this evening in Greenfield and tours of new eco-housing projects on Saturday.

“Together on the Land” program today and Saturday, organized by the 33-year-old Valley Community Land Trust.

The event, focusing on “Options

for Sustainable, Affordable and Ecological Living in Community” will include a panel discussion today from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Second Congregational Church of Greenfield representing the valley land trust, Katywil and other sponsoring organizations: Cooperative Development Institute, Coop Power and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust.

A tour of several of some of the alternative housing sites is scheduled for Saturday for up to 24 people who preregister. It will include half-

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hour site visits to RDI’s Wisdom Way Solar Village, the two Shelburne Falls homes built as part of a four-home Salmon Falls co-operative, the 170-acre Bascom Hollow Farm set up by Mount Grace where three families will work a shared piece of protected farmland along the Falls River in Greenfield, and one of 12 Pioneer Co-op of Franklin County duplexes at scattered sites in Greenfield and Montague.

The Valley Community Land Trust, which owns five properties in Colrain, Ashfield and Wendell, has been interested in doing a community program for a while to look at the issues of affordability of home ownership and environmental stewardship, said organizer Megan McDonough. Because there are so many models that are already out there — some of which share ownership of the land, some of which jointly own the buildings and

some of which have or are considering cooperative ownership of photovoltaic panels or other energy-generating features — the idea was to explore some of the issues and visit some of the properties.

“We started brainstorming with other organizations, trying to look at how we can protect the environment, how we can house people and how we can do it affordably,” she said.

At Katywil, buyers get a three-quarter-acre site on which to choose from one of two designs for handicapped-accessible, energy efficient houses by Colrain architect William Austin, employing passive solar and energy-efficient designs. As members of an “intentional community,” they also agree to a shared set of principles, are trained in “sociocracy,” a form of group-decision making and join a Katywil Homeowners’ Association.

Their roughly \$400,000 purchase

price gives them partial ownership in open conservation space, including a 49-acre Stone Mountain parcel across the river, and use of shared fruit trees, nut trees, berry bushes, an edible forest garden and a shared garden space.

Cole said he’s had inquiries from people as far away as Michigan and Tennessee, but nearly every one of the 90 people who have visited are about his age, have similar interests in gardening, hiking, protecting open space and having a close-knit community. Hardly any have young children.

But he added that the price is a “huge problem .... The last thing I want is to have an enclave around here,” but since fossil-fuel isn’t allowed and the technologies available tend to be expensive, the price may be prohibitive for many people.

“If green is gonna work, it’s got to work for the middle class,” he said, referring to RDI’s Ann Perkins as “my

local hero” because the 20-condo Wisdom Way Solar Village and other projects she’s pioneered to make energy-efficient housing more affordable.

For Cole, who was disappointed to see composting toilets, vegetative roofs and porous roads dropped from his original concept still plans for a “micro-hydro” power generator on the site. Another make-or-break feature for buyers, who are semi-retired or plan to work from home, is high-speed Internet access, which Cole said is key. One man calling about Katywil after learning about it online had just one question: was there a digital subscriber line available? When Cole said no, he hung up.

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