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## GREENTIFICATION

BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON -- So, what would you do with 396, 40-year-old toilets? That's the question facing the Bellingham/Whatcom Housing Authority in Washington state.

"We're not supposed to be throwing them into landfills," Todd Nelson, the Authority's development manager, told *The Bellingham Herald*. "Won't have to," responded Freeman Anthony of the City's public works department, proposing instead to grind up the porcelain toilets to mix into concrete on the Whatcom Creek Trail to be built this summer. Trailblazing solution, huh?



But, you may be asking yourself, how'd the Authority end up with 396 used toilets? Easy. Just "blame" the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act proposed by President Obama and passed by the Congress in 2009.

That Act provided the Authority with a more than \$9.9 million Green Communities grant from HUD to retrofit three high-rise public housing complexes built between 1969 and 1971 - Lincoln Square, Washington Square and Chuckanut Square - to "go green."

Replacing old and inefficient toilets in each of the projects' 396 units was priority number one. No wonder. New dual-flush toilets, the Authority estimates, will save two gallons a flush or 1.6 million gallons of water a year.



Credit: The Bellingham Herald

That's just the beginning of the savings the Authority will realize. It's also switching out all the light bulbs and fixtures to energy efficient lighting. Each old fixture, reports *The Herald*, is "being taken apart to separate the bulbs, ballasts, copper and steel parts" which, like all the construction waste generated by the transformation, will be recycled.

There's more. The Authority also plans to upgrade ventilation systems and install energy-efficient boilers. To place a total of 220 solar panels on the roofs of all three buildings to convert solar energy into electricity for the buildings or to sell back to Puget Sound Energy's grid. To bury a geothermal heat pump at Washington Square to pull heat from the constant temperature in the ground and use it to preheat water. To convert a concrete slab at Lincoln Square into a rooftop garden, significantly reducing the building's heating and cooling costs.

Last, but not least, the grant will also fund an education campaign to make sure that residents understand the "how's" and "why's" of the new, green building features when the work is completed next year. It's a critical element in cutting energy costs since, *The Herald* reports, "as much as 50 percent of a building's energy performance is linked to the behavior of occupants or management."

"They're doing some amazing cutting-edge stuff in these buildings," said Mariah Ross of Sustainable Connections, a local non-profit collaborating on the "green" upgrades. "This is exactly the kind of thing we wanted to do with the Green Communities Grant," said Nelson. "We are looking to do the best thing we can for the environment while bringing down our operating and construction costs. And in doing so, we can help set an example that takes hold in the larger community."

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