

EarthCraft Certification and VHDA's QAP

Virginia's tax credit Qualified Allocation Plan provides an opportunity for applicants to be awarded 30 points for receiving EarthCraft certification (participation is not mandatory).

EarthCraft is a program the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association developed through a partnership with Southface Energy Institute and government and industry leaders. The certification process serves as a blueprint for healthy, comfortable homes that reduces utility bills (for both property owner and household residents) and protects the environment. In Virginia, the EarthCraft program is administered by EarthCraft Virginia which has comprehensive guidance available for new construction and rehabilitation of multifamily affordable housing.

Certification requires meeting with an EarthCraft representative during project planning, using energy modeling for projections and allowing on-site examinations by an EarthCraft inspector. Guidelines are available at www.ecvirginia.org

There are 4 EarthCraft building standards: Multi-Family (NC & Rehab) and Single Family (NC & Rehab) and each has its own worksheet showing the areas of emphasis.

MF NC Areas of Emphasis - need 200 points to earn certification:

- **Site Planning**
- **Energy Efficient Bldg Envelope & Systems (must earn between 75-90 points here)**
- **Energy Efficient Lighting/Appliances**
- **Resource Efficient Design**
- **Resource Efficient Bldg Materials**
- **Waste Management**
- **Indoor Air Quality**
- **Water – indoor/outdoor**
- **Resident Education**
- **Builder Operations**
- **Bonus Points (exs: sidewalks connect to bus. Dist., affordability, access to bike paths, bike access to other sites; density >15 units/acre, solar light, pool solar heat, community recycle center, etc.)**

MF Rehab Areas of Emphasis -(between 100-160 pts to earn the certification depending on types of renovation):

- **High Performance Building**
- **Ventilation**
- **Indoor Water**
- **Fixtures & Finishes**
- **Waste Management**
- **Outdoor Projects**
- **Homeowner & Contractor Education**

Final Certification is not given until construction is complete; however, projections and the worksheet would show developer's plans to meet requirements.

Cost – approximations – in obtaining the EarthCraft certification:

- Annual fee of \$250 per developer.
 - MF NC - \$300/unit; Rehab may be a little higher (this includes entire process, including the inspections and first testing of units)
 - SF NC - \$.10/sq. ft. (note, not adjusted even though MF NC increased); Rehab may be a little higher
 - Retesting of any units that failed a previous test - \$75/unit
- The fees are billed as you go not paid in a lump sum.

General Outline of Process (subject to revision)

- Architectural plans past concept stage (need building siting/rough floorplans/elevations) Product specifications are helpful here, but that can be handled in the draft scoring section just as easily and would avoid having the extra expense put into preliminary plans.
- Perform energy model/draft scoring sheet - This should consist of one meeting (provided the energy model is performed prior to the meeting) with as many of the development and design/construction team as are known at that time attending. It can be held wherever that group can convene around a set of plans.
- Developer submits TC Reservation Application to VHDA by the specified due date – Must include Architect's Certification stating EarthCraft Certification is attainable.
- Preliminary TC rankings announced in April - Final TC rankings announced in May - Allocation App returned in November.
- Construction commences - Inspections performed - Each building must have at least two inspections, one pre-sheetrock and one post-sheetrock. Note that the first building may require more inspections to make sure all of the components necessary are handled appropriately, but subsequent buildings can usually be handled with two inspections. The second inspection does include a quantitative evaluation of the building envelope and duct systems ("blower door" and "ductblaster" tests), and if the proper benchmarks are met that should be achieved in one trip. The # of units inspected is 1 unit in 3 for the building envelope and 1 unit in 2 for duct systems (of those ducts outside conditioned space).
- Property must be completed & placed in service (i.e., ready for occupancy) no later than December 31st of the 2nd year following the year of allocation. Developer submits to VHDA Application for Forms 8609 - all costs must have been finalized and certified. EarthCraft certification must be complete and certificate provided.

Additional resources:

www.newecology.org/ - gives executive summary of the costs/benefits of green building.

www.designadvisor.org/ - under the Green Building area presents cost data summaries of case studies.

www.crawlspace.org/ - shares information regarding having no vents to outside.

For more information, please contact Cara Wallo, Tax Credit Allocation Officer, VHDA (804) 343-5714.