

Event organizers continuing to work to ‘keep Portland green’

BY ALEX JENSEN

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Building industry professionals are converging in Portland during the fourth annual Sustainable Building Week.

Though last year’s event took place entirely online because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s event is a hybrid. Events such as nature walks and building tours are taking place in person, while topic discussions are occurring online and being recorded. More than two dozen events will take place through Saturday.

“We’re calling on Portland to once again come together and find solutions to some of the greatest challenges our modern society has ever faced,” said Webly Bowles, co-founder of Sustainable Building Week. “This is an opportunity for our region’s greatest thinkers and problem solvers to cross-pollinate ideas that will continue to evolve Portland’s leadership in sustainability practices, creating models for the nation to follow.”

In the past year, the Pacific Northwest has experienced record-breaking weather on both ends of the spectrum. More than 330,000 Oregonians were left without power temporarily after an ice storm in February, and then a heat wave in early summer brought temperatures as high as 112 degrees Fahrenheit.

Then the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in August issued a report that painted a dim worldview if carbon emissions can’t be curbed.

Many individuals are experiencing and seeing the effects of climate change firsthand right now, said Terry Campbell,



ZGF Architects, courtesy of Sustainable Building Week
The PAE Living Building, in Portland’s Skidmore/Old Town Historic District, will be the focus of two tours during Sustainable Building Week. Both are full.

co-founder of Sustainable Building Week. The overall goal for the week, he said, is to foster collaboration among building industry professionals who might not typically associate with each other.

For instance, Tuesday will bring two free tours of the PAE Living Building in Portland’s Old Town Chinatown neighborhood. The five-story mass-timber structure is decked out with efficient features ranging from solar panels to on-site waste management systems. Both tours are already full, Campbell said.

Another in-person event slated for Tuesday is “Into the Woods,” a free hosted walk through Tualatin Hills Nature Park. It’ll be a 90-minute, active, buckle-your-seat-belt immersion into the world of sustainable forest management and the local wood movement, Hyla Woods forest

owner and Build Local Alliance member Peter Hayes said. The event will include a discussion of the pandemic’s impacts on the wood products industry and the importance of tree diversity in the face of climate change. The nature park includes local tree species from the Willamette Valley foothills, Oregon Coast Range and Cascade Range.

In a series of events, Electrify Now, a volunteer organization, will dive into the latest trends in the movement toward 100 percent electrification of homes and structures in the Pacific Northwest.

With electricity now cleaner and faster it’s become the primary strategy to fight climate change, said Joe Wachunas, an electrification advocate for Electrify Now. The group will kick off Sustainable Building Week with the all-electric vs. gas de-

bate by comparing costs for new residential construction. Other topics will include waste reduction and efficiency measures to quickly achieve net-zero energy use.

More than 1,800 people have registered for the series already, Campbell said.

Sustainable Building Week is unique, Hayes said, because it stays the same but keeps improving. Last year, many events looked at decarbonization with a focus on embodied carbon. This year, that conversation will continue with numerous events involving electrification and zero-energy buildings.

“The IPCC report casts a very urgent message,” Campbell said, “that folks need to get on board and find ways to make an impact.”

To learn more or register for events, visit <https://sustainablebuildingweek.com>.