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Building for an energy-efficient future

👤 Melody Finnemore 📅 October 08 2021

Sustainable Building Week 2021: Multidisciplinary event returns in hybrid format with in-person tours, online discussions.



COURTESY GRAPHIC: ZGF ARCHITECTS - The PAE Living Building is one of the buildings being highlighted in this year's Sustainable Building Week event.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003716197310-0728.jpg>) Last year's pandemic shutdown forced the annual Sustainable Building Week agenda to be carried out entirely online, a disappointment for attendees and presenters who relish the interactive nature of the event and the host of activities on the schedule.

However, according to co-founder Webly Bowles, a project manager with the New Buildings Institute, the all-virtual format allowed more people from across the country to participate, created a forum for more information to be shared, and further showcased Portland's role as a leader in sustainable design and construction.Â

"One of the reasons we've continued doing this during the pandemic is that, even if we don't have strong connections between individuals in person, it's still essential that we move forward because of what is happening around climate change," Bowles said, pointing to recent extreme heat, wildfires and other devastating natural phenomena. "We need to move forward and continue to share information, innovation and this cross-pollination of ideas."

Sustainable Building Week began five years ago when its founding organizers saw that the Great Recession's economic impacts overshadowed sustainability in the design, construction and development sectors. So they rallied a group of volunteers from various professional organizations to launch an event that would highlight the latest advances in sustainable development and Portland's position as a national leader in it.

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“We wanted to find a way we could bring all of these different groups together and collaborate to share what we were all doing,” Bowles said.

This year’s fourth annual Sustainable Building Week, slated for Oct. 11-16, will focus on the next chapter of sustainability in a new era of challenges. Topics range from COVID-19 recovery to climate change, and how the built environment needs to adapt to meet changing needs while ensuring a healthy environment for the future.

A hybrid format will include tours and forest walks done in person, while other discussions will occur online and be recorded so participants can access them later. Presenters and discussion moderators specialize in the architecture and design, construction and community planning sectors.

Co-founder Terry Campbell said the mix of in-person and online offerings presents an opportunity to “engage people right here in the city as well as from surrounding regions while reducing the environmental impact of travel.”

This year’s event features more than 20 scheduled programs, divided across five themes that tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the design and building industry: energy, water, materials, health and community.

Sustainable living

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Bowles said one of the biggest draws will be tours of the recently completed PAE Living Building. At five stories and 58,700 square feet, it is the largest commercial Living Building in the world. Located in Portland’s Old Town Historic District, the building features retail, 40-stall bike storage, showers, restrooms, lockers and a fitness center for building occupants’ use.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003716197394-0728.jpg>)The second floor is filled with Class A commercial office space, and the top three stories house the corporate headquarters for PAE Consulting Engineers Inc. In addition to meeting net-zero energy, water and waste standards set by the Living Building Challenge, the structure is designed to withstand a magnitude 7.5 earthquake. Developer Edlen & Co. states that it also serves as a replicable model for future market-rate urban Living Buildings.

Bowles said another hot topic up for discussion throughout Sustainable Building Week is energy and carbon. “We see carbon woven throughout each day because it’s such an important topic when it comes to sustainability. Even a session on materials will include information about carbon.”



COURTESY GRAPHIC: ZGF ARCHITECTS - At five stories and 58,700 square feet, the PAE Living Building is the largest commercial Living Building in the world.

Go Zero

The Go Zero Tour 2021, presented by Solar Oregon and Energy Trust of Oregon, will highlight zero energy homes virtually and in-person from around the state. Residential buildings account for almost a quarter of all energy use in Oregon, and zero energy home design is an important strategy in climate change mitigation.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003716197691-0728.jpg>)The Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, in partnership with representatives from Hyla Woods and Sustainable Northwest Wood, will host a forest walk at Tualatin Hills Nature Park. The event will cover sustainable forest management and the local wood movement, including discussion on recent impacts to the wood products industry during the pandemic and the importance of tree diversity in the face of climate change and increased wildfire hazards.



COURTESY PHOTO: SOLOR OREGON - Argyle Gardens is yet another featured component of the Go Zero portion of this year's Sustainable Building Week.

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Go electric

A series titled Electrify Now will cover the latest trends in moving toward 100 percent electrification for homes and other structures in the Pacific Northwest, in addition to waste reduction and energy-efficiency measures, to quickly get to net-zero energy use.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003716197505-0728.jpg>)A discussion hosted by ZERO Coalition will cover policy options to help make energy-efficient retrofits to existing homes and buildings more equitable, affordable and accessible. The event highlights the story of the June Key Delta Community Center, a Living Building project developed, owned and operated by the Portland Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.



COURTESY PHOTO: SOLOR OREGON - This 1928 home, with its retrofitted solar panels, is being featured in the Go Zero component of the 2021 Sustainable Building Week.

"This week of events is crucial for our community because of two things. The pace of innovation is truly astounding in this field, as is the need for action," said Issac Barrow, commercial real estate market manager at Portland General Electric and a presenter during last year's Sustainable Building Week.

"We're at a pivotal moment in time where sustainability is moving from something that people feel is an additional burden for the project, to something that actually makes projects more economical and more attractive. Sustainable Building Week is key for information sharing and level setting, and helping move the industry forward," he said.

Attendees can choose which activities fit their interests and schedules, then sign up for individual events. Admission costs are free for most topics, with nominal fees charged for specialized training or events. To register, go online (sustainablebuildingweek.com (<https://sustainablebuildingweek.com>)).



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