
EWEB shows eco-friendly new operations facility. The utility's west Eugene project is nearing completion under budget and beating energy targets.

By Emily Gillespie, The Register-Guard, Jul 28, 2010

The new Eugene Water and Electric Board operations facility in west Eugene is almost complete, surpassing target energy standards and coming in under budget. The Eugene branch of Cascadia Green Building Council led a tour of the facility for its members and the public on Tuesday, showing off the many sustainable, eco-friendly components that have been in the works for five years. The building is on Roosevelt Boulevard between Randy Papé Beltline and Highway 99.

Equipped with solar water heating, on-site wastewater treatment and electricity-producing solar panels, the building is on course to be 45 percent more energy efficient than state building energy codes. And although the hope was to meet standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design's Silver standard, the project already has been certified toward a Gold standard from the U.S. Green Building Council.

The building was designed with lots of windows and open spaces, so much so that 75 percent of occupied space does not need electrical lighting.

"It's all about creating inspiring, efficient places for people to work," Pivot Architecture project manager Larry Banks said. He described the process as a "balance between functionality, economy and sustainability. It's living up to expectation. I'm excited."

The building is at the stage of final touches — painting, carpeting, and finishing. The project team is happy with the final product after years of hard work.

"The two big stories of this project, in my opinion, are site restoration and the eco-machine," Banks said. "The goal is energy efficiency and stewardship of water."

Of the 52 acres of land that EWEB acquired, 14 acres are designated wetland areas, which the area had been previously.

"It's very much about having a wildlife sanctuary," Lease Crutcher Lewis project engineer Brian Sugg said. "The last couple of days we have seen a couple of red-tailed hawks and turtles." Other animals are expected to return to the wetlands during the rainy winter months.

The eco-machine is a water treatment machine designed to use UV filters and algae and other bacteria to treat the water. The water is then used in toilets and also used to irrigate plants in the north parking lot.

"We wanted to live the values of water efficiency and stewardship," Banks said. The hope is to set an example for EWEB users, he said. The machine processes 2,000 gallons of water per day.



Kevin Clark/The Register-Guard. Water is reflected on the eco-machine at the Eugene Water & Electric Board's new Roosevelt Operations Center. The machine treats water and sewage on site.

Though the EWEB board of directors budgeted \$83 million for the project, the total cost is near \$72 million. The reduction is largely a result of a decrease in construction costs during the recession.

“At one point, construction inflation was in the double digits,” Banks said.

EWEB spokeswoman Jeannine Parisi was quick to point out that the savings means less debt, not more money for the utility.

“It’s important for the public to know that we don’t just have \$11 million just sitting on our desk,” she said. “We have to borrow less money. So it’s like we’ve got a cheaper house.”

From the beginning, planning included a dozen different types of experts, from wetland biologists to acoustic specialists, including John Todd Ecological Design, an architecture firm whom Banks says is on the forefront of sustainable design.

“The point of doing that was to get all of the stakeholders (together) early on to help shape the project,” Banks said. “It really worked, the more heads the better.”

EWEB will continue to use the downtown site, moving about half of the utility’s employees to the operations facility once construction is done in late October.

The west Eugene location, however, has potential to house the administration staff as well, if EWEB chooses to make the move in the future.

“We bought property wanting to have options,” Parisi said. “And there is definitely space.”

Curiosity brought EWEB customer Jeanette Steele, 72, to the new site on Tuesday. “I am very impressed,” she said. “The ecology and everything, it’s just very impressive.”

Steele was accompanied by her grandson, 10-year-old Edward Steele of Veneta. “I thought it was kind of cool that they’re helping the environment and trying to preserve the wetlands,” he said.

Follow this link for additional photos on the RG site:

<http://www2.registerguard.com/mm/index.php/slideshows/comments/new-eweb-building/>