

# Collaboration between City of Bellingham and Bellingham Housing Authority will save water and reduce waste

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*In the midst of a huge Green Communities project, the Bellingham Housing Authority has found a creative way to flush out some of the extra materials—reuse.*

Bellingham, WA –“What are we going to do with all those old toilets?” asked Todd Nelson, Development Manager with the Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA).

This question started a collaboration with the City of Bellingham’s Public Works Department and has shed light on how its procurement process can be used to encourage more recycling and make a green project even greener.

## **Green Communities**

The BHA’s Green Communities project is currently implementing energy efficiency and building retrofits to three of the largest buildings in Bellingham.

Through a \$9.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funding, the project kicked off last October to start work on energy and building updates to the residential complexes of Lincoln Square in Bellingham’s York neighborhood, Washington Square in the Lettered Streets neighborhood and Chuckanut Square in Fairhaven.

The project includes numerous energy and water efficiency upgrades which will reduce the operating costs, improve environmental performance and make the buildings a nicer place to live. Among the improvements, existing toilets in all 400 units will be replaced with water-saving dual flush models, estimated to save an average of over 2 gallons per flush adding up to more than 1.6 million gallons per year.

## **Toilet Recycling Options**

Working with general contractors at Dawson Construction, the BHA is recycling and reusing much of the waste from this big project. For example, hundreds of old electrical light fixtures are taken apart to separate the bulbs, ballasts, copper, and steel parts for separate recycle streams. But the 400 old toilets will be the single largest stream of waste in the project. Toilets are difficult to reuse or recycle since they are dirty, heavy and hard to turn into anything but broken pieces of porcelain. At first they seemed destined to be sent to the landfill.

A short conversation with Freeman Anthony at the Bellingham Public Works Department confirmed that a good potential use exists for broken pieces of porcelain – sidewalk concrete aggregate. Crushed pieces of porcelain can potentially replace the virgin aggregate needed in concrete for sidewalks. To help keep the toilets out of the landfill, Anthony and the BHA worked with Cowden Gravel and Ready-Mix to develop a plan – have Cowden grind the toilets into aggregate for concrete that the City can use in the Meador-Kansas-Ellis trail project, to be completed in summer 2011. The use of this recycled content may decrease the City’s cost to complete the trail project and will save the BHA expensive disposal costs. And of course about 10 tons of waste will be prevented from reaching the landfill.

## **Paving the Way for More Recycling**

The Public Works Department is working to develop a specification using recycled aggregate which could allow for the use of recycled brick, concrete, tile, toilets, and other similar types of construction waste. “Developing the specification for this project made a lot of sense because there was so much waste in one place,” said Anthony. “The Housing Authority gave us an opportunity to consider this option because of the volume they could provide. We hope that we will be doing this a lot more in the future.”

“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.”

<http://www.cob.org/pwprojects>

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