

Smart, sharp, skinny and sustainable

Officials from the City of Portland, NW Natural, Earth Advantage and the HBA gathered downtown Aug. 14 at an open house to celebrate the completion of some unusual new homes.

They're sharp. They're certified sustainable. And they're skinny. Portland's Living Smart Program initiated the concept in 2005, seeking ways to maximize land use for urban housing. The city held a competition for architects to submit ideas, and builders were invited to use the blueprints to craft the homes. Builders interested in participating in the program get to skip most of the permit process, as the program's blueprints are pre-approved by the city.

HBA members Jack Wagon and Randy Palazzo accepted the challenge.

Their work was unveiled at two separate events Aug. 14. City Commissioner Randy Leonard and Building Development Services Director Paul Scarlett addressed an afternoon crowd of more than 50 people in the living room of Palazzo's Northeast Portland home. With the high ceilings and open floor plan, the assemblage was comfortably gathered in the room to hear the commissioner note that these are the first of what the city hopes will be many more homes of this type.

Many visitors at the open house remarked that the interior space feels remarkably spacious. Palazzo said he was pleased with the finished product, which he said accomplished good usage of the lot space and blends well with the existing neighborhood architecture.



Builder Jack Wagon (left) and program supporters at Wagon's home.

"Building infill homes, I personally feel that builders have a responsibility to keeping the original character of the neighborhood," he said. "I'd encourage other builders to look at it from that neighborhood's perspective."

Wagon completed two homes.

Phase one of the Vargas Commons Project is located at 50th and SE Knapp, in the South Woodstock neighborhood. He said he is excited to build more Living Smart homes, "because the reaction from the marketplace has been thunderous."

"We saw here an opportunity to



Randy Palazzo and Jack Wagon, HBA builders who constructed Portland's first Living Smart Homes, celebrate at Palazzo's.

invent a whole new product type that has not previously existed in Portland's housing market," Wagon said. "There's a traditional stigma about the 25 / 100 skinny lots – that they have a short economic lifespan and offer a poor aesthetic to the neighborhood. We've done some-

thing here with great finishes on sustainable performance properties that really adds to the neighborhood.

"High quality, small footprint is finally here in the detached housing infill market."