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Project of the Month: CWS Architects designs 37-unit LEED Platinum certified Oak Street Lofts

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According to CWS Architects (CWS) the Oak St. Lofts (OSL), a new 37 unit affordable apartment building targeted to local artists, has been awarded LEED Platinum certification from the USGBC. Developed by Avesta Housing, one of the largest affordable housing developers in northern New England, OSL has been widely praised as an example for the developer's creative approach of blending many public benefits into the otherwise single-purpose development of affordable housing. Ben Walter, president of CWS said, "Oak St. Lofts pushed the boundaries of traditional affordable housing development by really focusing on how it could best benefit the community - socially, economically and responsibly. Avesta Housing has insightfully recognized that the most successful developments are not cookie cutter developments."

For example, a sustainable design and construction approach and LEED certification was embraced at the project's conception as a necessary investment in the facility. "As the challenge of managing the affordability of long-term fuel and operating costs continues to rise, it has become clear that higher initial construction cost investments that net long-term savings are not only justified, but required" said Walter. "Developers who aggressively strive to conserve energy and use more durable materials will carry less risk and realize long-term financial operating stability. Planning for this future has become a no-brainer." In addition to incorporating many state-of-the-art air tight envelope systems, the building includes an efficiency management system, energy recovery ventilator and a solar hot water pre-heat system.

Additionally, as an infill development located in the heart of Portland's thriving Arts District, OSL sought to be an integral part of the arts community by focusing on the needs of artists. Walter said, "By providing affordable "artist specific" housing in the epicenter of the Arts District the project will help ensure that the emerging artists won't be priced out of this increasingly popular and expensive creative community that the artists helped to create." The facility includes a resident managed public gallery space to display and promote their artistic ventures, a large and functional shared artists' work room and the units are designed to promote usability as a live/work environment.

The facility was almost fully rented upon opening and the resident artists range from traditional visual arts to performing arts, musicians, writers and more. The project will also provide many social and economic benefits to downtown Portland for many years to come. Many of Portland's local businesses and world renowned restaurants depend on Portland's artistic community to support its service jobs with a creative workforce.

In addition to Avesta Hsng. and CWS Archts., the project development team included Thornton Tomasetti (LEED consultant, formerly Fore Solutions), Wright Ryan Construction (construction manager), Mitchell & Associates (landscape architects), Becker Structural Engineers and Bennett Engineering (MEP). Primary financing was provided by Low Income Housing Tax Credits

administered by Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA), Neighbor Works America, proceeds from the Maine Legislature's Green Affordable Housing Bond and a grant from the city of Portland.

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