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Stories & Features

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Builders get better at requests for high-efficiency homes



Home in the Harrison Highlands development on a ridge above Agassiz.

BC Housing offers a checklist of questions to ask a builder

It's common for custom home builders to specialize in high performance homes with a range of energy efficient options and certifications, such as ENERGY STAR®, R-2000, Net Zero, Built Green® and LEED. But buying into a subdivision or planned community doesn't usually offer much flexibility.

By taking a LEEP, builders are hoping to change that.

As one of several regional builder participants in Natural Resource Canada's [Local Energy Efficiency Partnership \(LEEP\)](#) program, Odessa Group's Nathan Stone learned alongside other custom builders some new and innovative building techniques to make his homes more efficient. It has helped him deliver on requests from homebuyers like [Dave and Judy Douglas of Agassiz](#) for high-performance features in a master-planned setting.

Jonathan Zerkee of [Sonbuilt Homes](#), who participated in the LEEP program with Stone, often works with homebuyers who are on the fence between a customized home and buying into a pre-designed community. He says it's important to educate the client about the pros and cons of each, while emphasizing the importance of air tightness, controlled ventilation that provides fresh air year round without wasting energy, and insulation at levels above minimum building code.

"Our job is to send homebuyers away with information so that when they do speak with that spec builder, they can ask educated questions and make the right decision for themselves," says Zerkee.

A recent [guide](#) produced by BC Housing's [Homeowner Protection Office](#) recommends asking these questions when considering purchasing a new home with high performance and efficiency in mind:

- How do your insulation levels compare to minimum code requirements?
- Has the airtightness of the house been tested and what level did it achieve?
- Do your homes include a [heat or energy recovery ventilation \(HRV/ERV\)](#) system that was designed and installed by a qualified contractor?
- Do you follow best practices to help extend the durability of your homes?

- What other elements are included in the home to help improve its performance?
- Do you affix a third-party verified performance label to the home?

Custom builder Bob Deeks of [RDC Fine Homes](#) says that nearly all of RDC Fine Homes custom home clients are knowledgeable about the benefits of energy efficiency. He says it's important to ensure they can meet their goals while keeping in mind what's appropriate for their climate, location, lifestyle and budget.

Deeks also says he's optimistic that as more builders gain awareness of the technologies available to them – through programs like LEEP – there will be more options across the board.

"What LEEP does is really gets the community to become more aware of the technologies that are available to them," he says. "Once one or two builders start to successfully adopt those newer technologies, then word will spread within the community that this is a good idea. Consumers will see it and consumers might start asking for it. Really what drives the residential construction industry in the end is giving consumers what they want."

See also:

- [Buildings We Love: Buyer and builder hack the subdivision standard](#)
- [Buildings We Love: Age-in-place home in Chemainus](#)
- [Buildings We Love: North Vancouver's Winton House](#)

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