

## Old Mill, new ideas

**Students will determine how sustainable the district is — and then come up with ways to improve on that**

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

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Dean Guernsey / *The Bulletin*

Ben Nadler, left, and Lauren Cronan are part of an Oregon State University-Cascades Campus sustainability class that is taking a close look at the Old Mill to assess how sustainable it is, and what it could do to become even greener.



Rob Kerr / *The Bulletin*

The Old Mill District has already started taking sustainable actions, including composting food scraps from restaurants. A group of OSU students is studying the Old Mill for its Sustainable Communities class.

Some Old Mill District restaurants compost leftover food, and many of the businesses in the Bend shopping area recycle cardboard and other materials. The district has worked to restore wetlands and riverside habitat along more than 1,000 feet of the Deschutes River, and the grounds are watered using an efficient irrigation system.

Old Mill officials have worked to make the district — home to about three dozen shops, restaurants and offices — more sustainable for several years, said Marketing Director Noelle Fredland.

“There's a lot of things that we're doing, and there's a lot of things that we could be doing,” Fredland said of the onetime sawmill site, which Bend-based William Smith Properties began converting into its current incarnation a decade ago.

And this spring, a group of students from Oregon State University-Cascades Campus is stepping in to help determine exactly how sustainable the Old Mill is — and how it could be even greener.

The students, part of instructor Matt Shinderman's Sustainable Communities class, will assess economic, ecologic and social components of the Old Mill this spring, analyzing things like energy consumption, waste production and more.

“The Old Mill has been doing quite a bit that we would acknowledge as related to sustainability, but the idea is to get it much more focused and strategic,” Shinderman said, “so that as they move forward, they will have a prioritized list of things they can address.”

The students spent the winter term designing the assessment and determining how to quantify the sustainability of shops, offices, restaurants and residences in the Old Mill.

“Mostly what we're trying to do is design a baseline assessment for the Old Mill, so they can determine where they sit,” said Ben Nadler, a student in the class who's considering a sustainability degree, either at OSU or another school.

OSU-Cascades is slated to have a sustainability degree in fall 2011, and this is the second year for the Sustainable Communities course — offered only at the Cascades campus, Shinderman said.

The students will look at things like how much businesses recycle and how much food is being wasted, composted or thrown away, Nadler said. They'll look at how many kilowatt-hours the buildings use, whether any of that electricity is from renewable sources, and what solar or wind possibilities the Old Mill could try in the future, he said. The students could make recommendations to the Old Mill, and then the businesses could choose whether to act on them.

The Old Mill also could examine transportation, Nadler said — perhaps figuring out how to encourage people to walk from store to store, instead of driving and reparking.

The idea, Nadler said, is to “make them stand out as a leader in the community — so it's not just a place that people spend money at, it's also doing good for the community.”

The assessment is just one part of the OSU course, which also includes guest lecturers talking about green building, renewable energy, economics and natural resource management, Shinderman said.

But the study of the Old Mill is designed not only to look at the environmental issues of a place — like using environmentally friendly materials — but also to examine the economics of the area, like how businesses might be able to save money by reducing their waste or electricity.

Social aspects also will play into the study, Shinderman said, with students considering how the business owners and residents could feel like they're part of a community. Visitors could play a role in that as well, he said, and the students could investigate whether people get a sense of a community when they visit.

The Old Mill District has already been working on environmentally friendly and sustainable projects, Fredland said. It incorporated some historic buildings into the development, including the sawmill's old powerhouse building that is now home to REI, and an old red shed that was converted into DeWilde Art & Glass.

But many of the efforts have been the “low-hanging fruit,” she said, so she was thrilled to have the sustainability students get involved and bring fresh eyes to see what the Old Mill could consider in the future.

“It's great to be able to work with a university to see what they come up with,” Fredland said.

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