

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND REVIEW

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Sun is shining on 'green' construction

By **TRISTAN BAURICK** Staff Writer

An expert on eco-**building** brings his ideas to Bainbridge.

Green by Design

This is the first installment in a multi-part series exploring sustainable design on Bainbridge Island. On Wednesday: a proposed "green building" ordinance.

Jason McLennan's hometown served as a beacon, of sorts, where the world's tallest smokestack rose over a desolate, chemical-burned landscape. Even taller than the tower was its plume of sulfur dioxide, reminding all of northern Ontario that their backyard was host to another record holder: the continent's largest single producer of acid rain.

"The nickel mine's smokestack was larger than the Eiffel Tower," McLennan said of Sudbury, Ontario's most infamous landmark. "It killed the lakes and it made the soil so acidic that most plants couldn't grow. It had a huge impact on me growing up."

Trained as an architect, McLennan is now a nationally recognized leader in the sustainable design industry, which seeks to lessen the built environment's impact on the natural environment. McLennan's book, "The Philosophy of Sustainable Design," is required reading in over 30 universities in North America and Europe. He was named one of the most influential people under 40 years old by **Building** Design and Construction magazine shortly before his move to Bainbridge Island in July, where he took the reigns of the Seattle-based **Green Building** Council's Northwest chapter.

McLennan will discuss the future of the "**green building**" industry at the IslandWood learning center on Thursday.

He also plans to delve into sustainable design on Bainbridge Island – a place that may one day serve as a new kind of beacon.

"Bainbridge should be proud," he said. "People have fought to make Bainbridge a beautiful and healthy place to live. But it shouldn't rest on its laurels."

McLennan's move to the island puts him at the focal point of a national **green** design movement. All eyes are on the Northwest, where trends emerge and innovations are born, he said.

McLennan wants to ensure that what the world sees proves inspirational and meets the highest standard of sustainability.

"There's (an) opportunity for the region to be a showcase for the world by providing the most compelling examples of responsible and sustainable development anywhere," he said.

One such showcase is IslandWood, which, not-so-coincidentally, will be McLennan's first showcase to the island.

The nonprofit environmental learning center on 255 south island acres was constructed with recycled materials and features solar panels, composting toilets, rainwater irrigation, low-toxin paints, finishes and adhesives.

McLennan would like to see such design elements grow beyond a few island hideaways and creep into every home, backyard, office, store and downtown street.

"People care a great deal on this island," he said. "But, to be frank, there's a hell of a lot more to do."



Brad Camp/Staff Photo

Author and sustainable design expert Jason McLennan will discuss the future of earth-friendly construction on Bainbridge and worldwide at the "green built" IslandWood learning center.

McLennan's concept of "sustainability" goes far beyond low-energy light bulbs screwed into bedside lamps, the percentage of recycled material in a roll of toilet paper or tacking a few solar panels to the roof.

"For many...a **'green' building** is something that merely incorporates a few recycled products or has good windows," McLennan writes in *The Philosophy of Sustainable Design*.

"This approach is not nearly enough. A lot of **buildings** and **building** products get designated **green** or sustainable because they contain a few fixtures that lower their environmental impact to some degree. Sustainable design is not about fixtures."

McLennan advocates a more "holistic approach" to sustainable design.

This more philosophical design concept is increasingly seen less as a "aesthetic exercise" and more as a means of survival in a rapidly changing world.

"Climate change has become the most significant issue of our time," he said. "The debate about global warming has pretty much died. Now you have the Al Gore movie. You see it on the cover of *Vanity Fair* and *Time* magazine."

It's even on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. The March 12 issue features a pitcher at a Florida stadium standing knee-deep in water.

"When you see climate change on *Sports Illustrated*, you can see the shift is happening and that it's happening all over the country."

McLennan wants to see the shift hit high gear on Bainbridge.

He is working with a group of environmental activists, architects, lawyers and real estate professionals to craft a "**green building**" ordinance for the City of Bainbridge Island.

Under the auspices of the nonprofit group Sustainable Bainbridge, the committee is working with city's Winslow Tomorrow project to develop a series of guidelines, requirements and incentives to promote lower-impact development.

Whether the proposed rules mandate or encourage **green** design, McLennan

"Architects, engineers, contractors and developers have a critical responsibility as the shapers of the places we inhabit," he writes in his book. "We in the **building** professions must bear a large share of the responsibility...to live sustainability, because many of the solutions to our environmental problems are design problems."

McLennan has reason for his take-no-prisoners optimism. Sudbury, which once served as a training site for astronauts readying themselves for the moon's desolation, rebounded in the 1970s, earning a United Nations commendation for environmental recovery.

As a college student, he participated in a vast re-**greening** effort that resuscitated Sudbury's soils and repopulated the valleys with grasses, blueberry, birch and poplar.

If Sudbury can become a beacon for environmental change, he said, Bainbridge most certainly can.

"We have people's attention," he said. "They're looking here for their next step."

Talking green

Sustainable design is the topic of two public seminars this coming week.

- Wednesday: Members of Sustainable Bainbridge, Solar Washington and the Kitsap County Commission will discuss local efforts toward earth-friendly **building** and home energy savings at this month's Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce luncheon at Wing Point Golf and Country Club.
- Thursday: Sustainable design expert Jason McLennan will discuss the "future of **green building**" on Bainbridge and beyond. The two-hour discussion begins at 7 p.m. at IslandWood, 4450 Blakely Ave. NE. Call 842-4439 for more information.