

## New Hitchcock Center in Amherst striving to meet rigorous environmental standards

By Diane Lederman  
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Hitchcock Center for the Environment - Rendering of Den Courtyard

designLAB architects

This is a conceptual drawing for the new Hitchcock Center for the Environment to be located at Hampshire College.

AMHERST – After about a year on the design table, the Hitchcock Center for the Environment has released the concept design for its 8,500-square-foot environmental education center that will be built on the Hampshire College campus.

In [late 2011](#), Hampshire College and the [Hitchcock Center](#) signed an agreement to construct a new building on the campus. Last March, it settled on a site on Route 116 between the Red Barn and the college's Farm Center.

This is the next big step in the process, said Julie Johnson, the center's director.

The center is striving for [Living Building](#) Challenge certification, the highest environmental standard there is surpassing the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. There are only five buildings that are so certified in the United States, Johnson said.

Smith College's Bechtel Environmental Classroom, a 2,500-square-foot classroom building in Whately, is one of the five.

Johnson said trying to meet this certification challenge is not easy and they want to share the process.

According to the standard, the building must avoid using any Red List materials; which means materials containing such things as asbestos, petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides, and polyvinyl chloride among others. It must also be a net zero energy building, meaning it generates as much energy as it uses, and net zero water with composting toilets, rainwater recapture and storm water treatment.

The center must also place an equal amount of land as that on which the property is sited into a permanent conservation easement.

To meet the standard, the center is working with designLAB Architects of Boston, Soden Sustainability Consulting and Berkshire Design Group among its partners. Meeting the standard is more costly but she said they want to be pioneers and educate people about the building process. "It's exciting," she said.

"The creation of our Living Building Project is the most significant moment in Hitchcock's history since its founding 50 years ago. It's an incredibly challenging project," said board president Sarah laCour in a statement.

The project is in the quiet fund-raising stage and she said they will likely announce its open fund raising in six to nine months with the goal of breaking ground in 2015. The fund-raising goal is \$7.9 million, but \$1.2 million will be for an endowment.

The center serves about 30 communities mostly in Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin counties and hosts about 50 different schools a year. But it has outgrown its 4,500-square-foot carriage house at the Larch Conservation area.