

The Alheim Commons

The Alheim Commons is the 20-bed housing facility of the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. It was designed and constructed to accommodate coastal scientists, educators, and resource managers who are visiting south coastal Maine and working on projects with the Reserve, or working independently on projects directly related to the Reserve's coastal resource stewardship mission. The building was completed in December 2005 and ready for occupancy January 1, 2006.

In building the Alheim Commons, the Wells Reserve incorporated recycled-content products and used environmentally friendly materials and construction techniques. Other goals for the completed building included energy efficiency, renewable energy, water efficiency, low-maintenance landscaping, and waste reduction. The Alheim Commons was constructed for year-round use; it is very well insulated and heated through the zoned system, allowing the Reserve to close down unused rooms in the off-season. The design has large south-facing windows to allow for solar gain during cold-weather months.

Equally as important as the green elements were the project goals of ensuring the new building would have the following: low operating costs (or as low as possible), durability, ease of maintenance, and a pleasant, home-like appearance both on the exterior and interior.

The interior of the building safely and comfortably accommodates up to 20 people. The floor plan has seven bedrooms in the barn and two in the house. There are four full baths, and a laundry room. The ell is the building's primary gathering place. The main entrance, located in the back of the building, has a vestibule separating outdoors and indoors. Inside the ell is a large kitchen with refrigerators, stoves, ovens, and cabinets for food and utensils. Adjoining the kitchen in the ell is the dining and common area. In addition to the two bedrooms, there is a study/quiet area in the main house. The interior floorplan was designed for flexibility. For example, the house portion can be converted to more private living spaces, if the need arises in the future. The Alheim Commons is a wireless facility, allowing residents to connect to the internet from the comfort of their "home."

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