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## Researchers using living lab to foster culture of sustainability

News May 15, 2018 by [Johanna Weidner](/waterlooregion-author/johanna-weidner/7B167600-A2D2-4618-A225-467D0DB4EC9F/) [✉ \(mailto:jweidner@therecord.com\)](mailto:jweidner@therecord.com) Waterloo Region Record

WATERLOO — Green buildings are great, but they depend on the people inside to meet their potential.

Encouraging a culture of sustainability is the aim of a five-year project that got nearly \$1 million from the province and will use the groundbreaking [Evolv1](http://www.coragroup.com/project/evol1/) (<http://www.coragroup.com/project/evol1/>) building in Waterloo as a living laboratory.

"It's a really great opportunity. The whole building has been designed as a demonstration," said Wilfrid Laurier University psychology associate professor Manuel Riemer. "We will be right in the heart of the building."

Riemer, York University faculty member Joel Marcus and their research partners received funding for their research through a Ministry of Research, Innovation and Science Ontario Research Fund — Research Excellence grant.

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Changing behaviour can be challenging and typically not well supported by a person's environment because a culture of sustainability is lacking.

"They are very ingrained and we have to consciously think about changing them," Riemer said. "Moving into a new building is a great time to do that."

Evolv1 is a LEED Platinum, multi-tenant office building that produces more energy than it uses. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

The building, located in the David Johnston Research and Technology Park, is owned by the Cora Group, and was developed in partnership with Sustainable Waterloo Region. Tenants will start moving into the building this summer.

The key to encouraging sustainable behaviours is not just focusing on the individual, but also the context.

"You really have to look at the whole system," Riemer said.

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The researchers' plans include hiring a director of culture and sustainability. "That person will be responsible for engaging what we call the citizens of the building," he said.

Researchers also want to involve those citizens in deciding where to take the project. Ideas so far include starting a community garden, hosting potlucks to encourage reduced meat consumption, and providing more information about the building's green characteristics.

The impact of the building on the people inside will also be studied to figure out which aspects boost well-being and productivity. Sensors will objectively measure the environment wirelessly in real time, including noise, light exposure and air quality.

"Green buildings can help with people's well-being, but they don't necessarily do so always," Riemer said.

While the research will focus on the Waterloo building, the goal is to develop a program on how to create a culture of sustainability in any building.

"There's a huge demand for this," Riemer said.

He said the interest locally is demonstrated by the widespread involvement in Evolv1, including industry, nonprofit groups, universities and government.

"It's a real regional effort that has the potential for national or even international impact."

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