

GREYLOCK GLEN

Four Seasons of Outdoor Recreation in Adams, Massachusetts

An Interview with Greylock Glen Outdoor Center General Contractor [Amanda Zepka](#)



Amanda Zepka is the President of [Souliere & Zepka Construction, Inc. in Adams, MA](#), which is a certified general contractor under the Division of Capital Asset Management & Maintenance (DCAMM) and a Women's Business Enterprise (WBE).

Souliere & Zepka was founded in 1981, and ownership was passed to Amanda and her brother, Seth, in 2019. Recently, the firm has focused on western Massachusetts, including work at UMass-Amherst. The majority of their work currently is new construction through publicly bid contracts.

The Greylock Glen Outdoor Center is the company's first Net Zero building, although they have experience in LEED Certified projects. We interviewed Amanda to learn more about her perspective on the project and how it will impact the community of Adams.

What has been the most challenging aspect of this project?

The weather! Our office is five minutes down the hill from the construction site, and it can be raining here but snowing there. It can also be anything from 8 to 12 degrees hotter or colder, depending on the season. It is its own little enigma of an environment, so working in the elements is a challenge. There are certain construction activities we cannot do if it's too cold, too wet, etc.

That makes total sense, but I'll admit I was expecting a different answer. How about the supply chain issues we hear so much about for the construction industry?

That is definitely a challenge, especially since the pandemic began, and I don't think that issue is going away anytime soon. We have to check in and stay on top of every type of material needed much more than we used to have to. There are no standards anymore. For instance, a door used to be a four-week lead time and now it can be anywhere from six to twelve weeks. Staying on top of things and checking in routinely has created considerably more project management than used to be needed. Because the supply chain continues to be an issue, we've learned to be more rigorous about checking in with subcontractors and our suppliers. Also, we try and get materials and equipment released a lot earlier, especially electrical and HVAC materials, and then store that material/equipment until it is needed on site. Unfortunately, I don't envision these practices going away.

Is there anything else that has changed in how you've had to approach this project, either because of the weather or the supply chain challenges?

The weather has definitely been a challenge. We lost some time at the beginning of the project due to some changes in the way that the EPA handles its permitting process and this created a five or six-week delay. There's a limited window in New England for building, and that was a significant shift to have to absorb early at the beginning of the project.

Construction presents new challenges every day. That's always been the case, but I feel like that has been elevated since the pandemic started. I do feel that people have become a bit more flexible, understanding that the workflow cannot always go as scheduled, whether it's because of forces outside your control like the weather, or because of the supply chain. My least favorite but also new favorite word has come to be "pivot..." Construction does have to follow a certain linear path – you can't put a roof on if you don't have walls – but having patience while we do some things out of sequence, and being a little bit more flexible, has created more of a team environment among us and our subcontractors.

Switching gears here a little bit, what is your *favorite* part of this project?

There's a very personal connection to this project. Our business has been in Adams for 42 years. I grew up in Savoy, which is only up the hill, 12 minutes away. My brother and I both went to Hoosac [Valley] High School; a lot of our employees live in Adams, so after watching for years – and decades – of things happening and not happening at the Glen, to see this come to fruition and to have the opportunity to bid it was really exciting. I love that it's Net Zero. I think the way it is designed, from the great welcome space and multipurpose rooms to the kitchen, nurses' station, and retail wing was really well thought out. The building can have multiple uses, which makes me feel good about its potential to bring all kinds of experiences, events, and people to the area. Speaking for myself and my company, we are extremely proud to be a part of this project.

When the building is complete, what features are you most hoping the visitors will notice?

Visitors will be able to see and appreciate how majestic the Greylock Glen is. This building aligns with its environment. I hope visitors will not only see but will feel how authentic its construction is to the space that it's in. From the glulam construction to how it is aesthetically laid out in its surroundings. The windows in the front and the back of the welcome space will frame Mount Greylock, and you'll have a beautiful, unobstructed view of the summit.

Have you found that there are downsides to working in Net Zero, benefits to it, or major differences, that you would like to share?

The actual way in which the various elements of the build come together is a lot more complicated than traditional building structures. There are more layers of materials which makes how everything ties into each other more specific and complex. This also means the construction process takes longer than a traditional build. My project management team and supervisors on site have to be wired tightly when it comes to building these details in real life. We're getting close to what's called the "first instance testing" which is the process of testing air leakage after we've put on the air vapor barrier to the walls and windows. This provided us with an early check on the envelope performance of the structure. The

Commissioning Agent will come in to test that first, and then further down the road, we will have a blower door test.

The plans for the building changed a little bit over time, with some slight reductions in total square footage while maintaining all the various uses you mentioned. Is there anything you wish could be added back in, or changed further?

One element of the project, an add alternative to the base bid which was not accepted due to funding constraints, was related to the outdoor patio and other finishing touches on the exterior. There is still a patio in the current plans, but the upgraded version would include seat walls, pavers instead of scored concrete, and a firepit, all of which would give the patio a more finished feel which would really improve the experience of outdoor events and celebrations. I would love to see that element added back in.

What else would you want our readers to know about what this means for the Town of Adams?

Along the lines of what I was saying earlier, when I saw the plans come out at bid time and I was reviewing them with my team, I was really pleased with what this building is and all the ways it can serve the community, whether it's a wedding reception, a reunion, a conference, a music event - I can really see this building being rented out every weekend from April through October. There's a wing where you can have one big conference room, or you can create three separate break-out spaces. There's so much opportunity to bring different people, clientele, and organizations to this building which will generate activity and revenue for the town. It's great because prior to this, it was very challenging to have any event up at the Glen. You'd have to get a generator for a power source, there were very limited amenities, and cellphone reception is spotty. This will provide a great space for people to come and have a unique experience. I also love that there's a retail space – it's a four-season building where visitors can rent mountain bikes, hiking gear, skis, or snowshoes out of that space.

Do you have any impressions of how this will tie together with the proposal for the Greylock Glen campground?

My first impression of the ecovillage – I like it. I think Shared Estates has the right philosophy on how we can bring progress to the area while still being sensitive to the environment and the people who live here. Their proposal is for half as many buildings as was originally approved. It's important to have a place for people to stay that's part of the unique experience that the Glen provides. I think since the pandemic, people really want to go somewhere special, make memories, and have a cool experience. They'll be able to have that with this ecovillage in conjunction with the Outdoor Center. I think the people who will come and stay here will also spend money here, whether at a show at the Adams Theater, having dinner or lunch on Park Street, or going to yoga in town, they're going to want to explore the area as well, in addition to hiking and experiencing the Glen and Mt. Greylock. I think there's a lot of momentum in Adams right now and it all coincides nicely with bringing back downtown Adams. It makes me excited that Adams will have more active storefronts and general busyness on the street. I think there's room in Adams for people who appreciate the landscape and the environment of the Glen while also enjoying the downtown culture of the place they're visiting – I think that can happen.