

CALGreen Building Code Won't Change Long Beach Policies

City Council Scheduled To Vote November 9 On Adopting State Standards

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Although California is implementing a new mandatory green building code, called CALGreen, for new residential and commercial projects after January 1, policies already on the books in Long Beach will remain in place, according to city staff.

The new code, adopted by the California Building Standards Commission earlier this year as part of the state's Title 24 building code, is the first such green building policy in the nation to be mandatory, setting the baseline for new building standards across the state.

The code requires that all new buildings reduce water consumption by 20 percent through such measures as installing low-flow plumbing fixtures, using low pollutant-emitting materials such as less hazardous paints, carpet and flooring and diverting at least half of construction waste from landfills. The new requirements, which don't apply to existing buildings or alterations, are set to go into effect by the new year and be officially adopted by the city council at its November 9 meeting.

The new regulations, however, also include provisions for cities, such as Long Beach, to attach local

amendments to require their own set of eco-friendly goals.

Long Beach has been implementing green building policies since 2006 and made them mandatory last year. The city council adopted its first mandatory green building ordinance in April 2009, applying to new private sector commercial buildings over 50,000 square feet and residential or mixed use projects with 50 housing units or more. The zoning ordinance requires all new buildings abide by a checklist outlined by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, developed by the non-profit U.S. Green Building Council, which is slightly more rigorous than the state's CALGreen standards.

Other green building codes already implemented in Long Beach include: an ordinance for new municipal buildings (adopted in 2003) with a requirement of LEED Silver; the Construction & Demolition Debris Recycling program that took effect November 2007; and a new model landscape ordinance adopted this year with state thresholds in water conservation. The additional local amendments Long Beach is adopting require all new buildings to be the minimum LEED certified, 60 per-

cent of construction to be diverted from landfills instead of the state's requirement of 50 percent, existing bike parking provisions, and a model landscape ordinance, which prescribes state standards of 90 percent of all water use plants be chosen from the state's drought tolerant or low-water use plant list, in addition to low flow irrigation standards.

Meredith Reynolds, sustainability coordinator for the city's office of sustainability, said the new state code allows Long Beach to push for tighter green building regulations through local amendments, enabling the city to be steps ahead.

"We've been a leader in green building for years," she said. "Having the state support us through mandatory requirements for residential and commercial new construction for green aspects confirms what we've already been doing and helps us take it a step further. We can encourage our local folks to do better than the state ordinance but not worse. Anything from water efficiency to energy efficiency to the types of materials that are used and the type of building and where it's cited are going to be very important for every project for new construction moving forward."

A local amendment for what's

called low impact development (LID), which refers to retaining rainwater through a cistern or rain barrel and reusing it on site for potable water use, is something new this year expected to be implemented through the city's Best Management Practices guidelines. Requirements for that amendment won't go into effect until July 1, 2011, since procedures and staff training still need to be worked out, Reynolds added.

Dave Walls, executive director of the California Building Standards Commission, said added upfront costs due to the new mandatory code varies throughout the state, depending on project type, geographic factors and labor costs. But, he added that commercial projects typically will cost anywhere from .5 percent to 2 percent more than the overall cost of the building.

The California Department of Housing Community Development and the California Building Industry Association predicts that, although green building isn't always more expensive, on average, housing projects will increase in costs ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per 2,000 square-foot home or more. Those figures don't account for any additional local amendment require-

ments, which vary depending on a city's local provisions, and could fluctuate depending on what local or federal tax incentives are offered. In addition, a 2003 study called "Managing the Cost of Green Building," by KEMA, an energy consulting company, states that additional costs for projects LEED certified range from 2 percent to 5 percent of the overall costs, while the registration fee is up to \$600 and certification costs range from \$2,000 to \$22,000, depending on the size of the project.

Walls added, however, that environmental construction practices reduce costs over the life of a building, because upfront costs are paid back through water conservation and energy efficient measures that provide cost savings on utility bills. With state required water meters, landlords are now able to see how conserving water actually cuts down on the monthly water bill, which also conserves energy. Energy conservation measures through the installation of energy efficient lighting and other provisions can pay back anywhere from immediately to five years. "You do get a lot of savings in a variety of ways," he said.

Meanwhile, the California Air

Resources Board (CARB) suggests that CALGreen will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 3 million metric tons by 2020. Walls said the code isn't affected by the state's new environmental regulations of AB32.

In addition, new changes other than CALGreen include a requirement that all new residential buildings will now have to be fitted with automatic fire sprinkler systems and carbon monoxide alarms, and prohibit wood frames and foundation walls due to earthquake hazards.

Long Beach Development Services is hosting two more training workshops about the state's new building codes on November 11 at Long Beach City College and December 9 at the Mark Twain Library. To RSVP, call 562/570-7636 or email lbds@longbeach.gov. For more information about the state-mandated changes, visit www.bsc.co.gov. ■