

How to Start a Green Building Program

Reasons to consider a mandatory ordinance

- Simplifies the implementation process for Building and Planning departments
- City can prescribe specific requirements that reflect the values of the communities
- Could greatly increase chances of more green buildings being constructed in the jurisdiction
- Reflects the city or county's commitment to developing sustainable initiatives

Reasons to consider a voluntary program

- Developers are more likely to support voluntary programs
- May be an easier political position to take
- Easier to set up a structure for a voluntary program outside the building department structure
- Allows the market to set the pace for the evolution of green building networks including suppliers, designers, consultant, education, etc.

Development Agreements

- Good compromise between mandatory and voluntary
- Helpful way to introduce green building into the community
- Can be a valuable tool as a precursor to mandatory requirements
- Excellent opportunity to bring the public and private sectors together

Writing the Ordinance

- Don't reinvent the wheel
- Research what other cities and counties have done
- This is important for supporting regional consistency
- Regional consistency contributes to the success of both mandatory and voluntary programs
- Review not only ordinances, but the staff reports as well

Selecting Green Building Standards

- There is no need to write your own
- Consider green building standards that are already in use in your region
- Are the standards appropriate for your jurisdiction?
- You will probably use more than one green building standard
- Inspection/verification requirements of green building standards vary considerably

The Public Process

- The importance of this cannot be overstated
- Consider a working group approach
- Include as many stakeholders as possible
- Developers, suppliers, designers, city/county staff, elected officials, community members
- This is an iterative process and takes time. Success at this point paves the way for an effective and meaningful program

Sustainable Communities

- The overriding goal is to create sustainable communities
- Green building is just one component of a sustainable community
- Conduct a sustainability workshop to show how green building is connected to other related issues
- This approach can help to garner support from a variety of interest groups

Planning Commission

- Work with the planning commission to gain their support
- Utilize the planning commission as a venue for public discussion and input as development of the ordinance progresses

Staff Participation

- Writing a green building ordinance takes time. Is there available staffing to do this?
- Is there a champion on the staff?
- Will there be enough staffing to implement and run the program?

Funding

- How will the development of the ordinance and implementation plan be paid for?
- How will green building plan check and inspection be paid for?
- Increase fees

Use of “Outside” Resources

- Independent consultants can provide green building inspection and plan check services
- Consultants can act as a “shock absorber” in response to permit activity
- Use of outside consultants can facilitate buy-in and supports public-private partnerships

Implementation Plan

- Once the ordinance is written, clearly define how the process will work
- Will the permit application process change?

- How will consultants interface with BD staff?
- What additional forms and paperwork will be required?
- Consider holding an informational meeting prior to the effective date of the ordinance

Education

- Identify educational resources
- Provide general green building education for affected staff members
- Consider providing general green building classes for the public
- Advanced green building inspector training (green building guideline/standard specific)

Legal considerations

- Consult often with your legal counsel
- Identify conflicts between the proposed ordinance and state and local laws
- Local modifications of the California Building Standards Code may be necessary
- Modifying the CA Energy Efficiency Standards is allowed, but only as provided for in CA Public Resources Code 25402.1(h)(2)

Other considerations

- When developing the ordinance, leave out the topic of compliance threshold levels until the very end of the process
- Always remember the “triple bottom line”
- Environment
- Equity
- Economy
- It’s not too early to put something in place

Green Building Standards/Guidelines

- Build it Green – www.builditgreen.org
- California Green Builder – www.cagreenbuilder.org
- Green Globes – www.greenglobes.com
- ICC – www.iccsafe.org/news/green/
- National Association of Home Builders – www.nahb.org/gbg
- U.S. Green Building Council LEED® programs – www.usgbc.org