



The Green Architect

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Los Angeles Planning Department hopes to create an “officially” greener future

Representatives from Los Angeles’ Planning Department initiated the first steps to greening new commercial projects in LA. By involving industry professionals in the development of new standards and code requirements, the City hopes to update the 2001 City of LA “Private Sector Development Program” to a “Private Sector Green Development Program”.

A series of weekly discussions aimed at developing solutions to the growing threats to quality of life and the environment in L.A. began in April, sponsored by the City of Los Angeles’ Planning Department. In attendance were architects, engineers, developers, manufacturer’s reps, lawyers and representatives from a number of environmental non profits groups including the Sierra Club.

The purpose was to address several of the city’s goals which would, in the end, protect the city and the environment.

As a starting point were the city’s long-term goals:

- Reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Reduce water consumption. (11% of all

energy used in California is for pumping water over the mountains.)

- Improve water quality.
- Recharge aquifers.
- Improve air quality and public health.
- Reduce waste

With the help of Global Green facilitators, each meeting focused on the challenges and opportunities afforded by specific building types. These included:

- 1 Type V Multi-Family Residential
- 2 Multi-Family Residential (mid to high rise)
- 3 Adaptive Reuse/Existing Buildings
- 4 Commercial including Core & Shell
- 5 Industrial
- 6 Single Family & Small Lot
- 7 Commercial Interiors
- 8 Urban Design

Each presentation included the definition of sustainable design, descriptions of what other cities were doing to increase green development and the challenges of relying upon one green standard (i.e. US Green Building Council’s LEED rating systems) as an outline for private development incentives.

Some interesting examples of how other cities are meeting their environmental challenges included Las Vegas, which offers a 50% property tax reduction for the first 10 years for LEED Silver certified projects. West Hollywood offers increased density to building owners that install a green roof. The City of Pasadena has a staff of LEED accredited professionals that provide free assistance to builders of project > 25,000 s.f.

One of the LEED™ rating systems flaws is that it is not region specific. This is expected to change with the introduction of LEED NC 3.0 but until that time building owners and tenants trying to reach the Platinum level may have to incorporate technologies that don’t make sense for their particular locale. Installing a rain water catchment system in Los Angeles, as an example makes as much sense as installing solar panels in Seattle.

The City of Chicago has addressed the region specific issue by developing a “Chicago Standard”. The City’s development requirements address their specific goals.

During the round of eight meetings Global Green's goal was to define a new baseline code for development, establish the incentives for developers that met higher levels of environmental sensitivity and define how city staff/departments could be aligned to support the green developer.

notified of local "green building" events, contact her at: 310-422-2417 or blair@verdearchitects.com.

Audience brainstorming developed a list of possible solutions. Some suggestions for base code compliance requirements were permeable pavement, low water/ California native landscaping, 50% construction waste recycling, Energy Star appliances in all multi-family residential projects and providing the infrastructure for future PV panel installation.

Developers shared some of their ideas for "carrots" that would provide incentives to build greener buildings: expedite entitlements, automatic code variance approval for certain activities and reduced agency fees. I was interested to learn that allowing the developer to increase the FAR or number of units for green buildings would not be attractive if parking requirements remained the same. The issue of reducing parking requirements for projects in close proximity to major transit hubs and encouraging mixed use projects was discussed.

The reality is that current city codes prohibit the incorporation of some green features that are accepted in many cities and some that neighbor LA. As an example waterless urinals are allowed in Santa Monica and Pasadena and are being installed in most Los Angeles Community College and Unified School District projects. Grey water (sink and shower water being recycled to flush toilets or irrigate) is very popular in other cities and is a great way to reduce the demand for water.

Part of greening the Private Sector Development program would be to modify codes. A well coordinated effort between building, planning, fire and Department of Transportation among others would be required to make it multi-faceted and truly effective. An estimated timeline for completion of these modifications was July 2008.

For more information about the Private Sector Green Development Program please contact Claire Bowin at: claire.bowin@lacity.org

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