

Building Design and Construction

Report: Building codes and regulations impede progress toward uber-green buildings

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The enthusiasm for super green [Living Buildings](#) continues unabated, but a key stumbling block to the growth of this highest level of green building performance is an existing set of codes and regulations. Federal stimulus funds for green building and infrastructure projects are important drivers in the shift in how buildings are designed and constructed, but there needs to be a "greening" of the regulatory systems to fully meet sustainability goals.

Stepping in to help resolve the impasse is [a new report](#) by the [Cascadia Region Green Building Council](#) entitled Code, Regulatory and Systemic Barriers Affecting Living Building Projects, which presents a case for fundamental reassessment of building codes.

"Since the launch in 2006 of the Living Building Challenge, we have seen that regulatory barriers significantly impede the approval and construction of these cutting-edge green buildings," according to Jason F. McLennan, CEO of Cascadia and the creator of the Challenge. "This report will reframe the conversation about building regulation and what is required to safeguard public health, safety and welfare. It serves as a great foundational document from which city and county jurisdictions can build upon to green their codes."

McLennan notes that concerns about risks like climate change, resource depletion and ecological health have not been included in building and development codes and regulations up to this point. If those risks are taken into account, McLennan says "this report shows that green buildings – and especially Living Buildings – pose significantly less risk to society than conventional building. Therefore the regulatory environment needs to realign behind the Living Building Challenge to safeguard the public well-being."

The Living Building Challenge is a call to those in the design and construction industries to create buildings that function like plants and are net-zero in energy, water and waste. There are now more than 60 proposed Living Buildings in some phase of design or construction throughout North America and beyond. The first two potential buildings that will seek the greenest of green certifications recently opened: The Tyson Living Learning Center at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and the Omega Center for Sustainable Living in Rhinebeck, New York.

The report team, which includes primary authors David Eisenberg of the Development Center for Appropriate Technology and Sonja Persram of Sustainable Alternative Consulting, researched the issues surrounding regulatory barriers in the US and Canada. These included an examination of the range of regulatory and other approvals required to design and build leading-edge projects, as well as a survey of Living Building project teams and interviews with experts throughout North America.

The Cascadia report includes recommendations to spur the creation of an integrated regulatory process that encompasses Living Building goals. These recommendations include: Identify and address impediments, create incentives to reach sustainability goals and launch education and advocacy programs, among others.

"Green building has reached a tipping point," says Sonja Persram. "There is a growing recognition of our responsibility to address the risks of climate change. Regulatory agencies must begin to enable best practices, instead of simply preventing the worst from happening."

King County provided some of the funding for this report because it "gives us the opportunity to evaluate and improve ordinances, and take our green building initiatives to the next level," says Patti Southard, Program Manager for King County Green Tools. "The other driver for King County's

involvement is to be able to provide knowledgeable support to the growing market demand for higher levels of green building, which is fuelled by the Living Building Challenge.”

Access the executive summary and full report at: <http://www.ilbi.org/resources/research/CodeStudies/codestudy3>

About Cascadia

The Cascadia Region Green Building Council is a non-profit organization in both the US and Canada. Cascadia promotes the design, construction and operation of buildings in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington and Oregon that are environmentally-responsible, profitable and healthy places to live, work and learn. Cascadia is one of the first chapters of the US and Canada Green Building Councils, and is the only international chapter in North America. It is also the originator of the Living Building Challenge. For more information, please visit www.cascadiagbc.org.

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