

# New standards for livability, sustainability, and affordability in Seattle neighborhoods | West Seattle Herald / White Center News

Seattle City Council today adopted two pieces of legislation that will work to improve the livability, sustainability, and affordability of Seattle neighborhoods. The first ordinance creates a pilot project to allow for entirely self-sustaining green buildings in Seattle. The other enhances building design, affordability, construction type, landscaping and environmental standards in the areas of Seattle zoned for mid-rise or high-rise development, including properties in the First Hill, Queen Anne, Alki, Ballard, University District, Northgate, and Lake City neighborhoods.

## Living Buildings

A “living building” is the next generation of “green building,” made of sustainable materials and using only as much energy and resources as it is able to generate on-site. The pilot project will allow up to 12 unique “living buildings” to be developed in Seattle over the next three years. Seattle’s land use code doesn’t currently allow for the unique characteristics required to meet living building standards, so the City Council gave the Department of Planning & Development the authority to grant developers the flexibility they need to meet project requirements.

Councilmember Sally J. Clark said, “Living buildings could become the next quantum leap forward in development, and based on what we learn from this pilot project, some living building standards could become the new status quo for development. In the face of ever-growing demand for energy, water, and non-renewable resources, that’s a direction I’m planning to take our built environment toward.”

Buildings taking advantage of the pilot program will compete in the “Living Building Challenge” contest, sponsored by the International Living Building Institute, and must meet at least 60 percent of the challenge’s prerequisites. The first living building project, proposed for Capitol Hill, could receive final approval for construction in 2010.

## Mid-rise & High-rise Building Styles

Council also adopted a comprehensive update to the way buildings are developed in Seattle’s mid-rise and high-rise zones. The update provides for more affordable housing and amenity space for residents, along with greater flexibility in building design.

The legislation includes provisions to:

- Encourage inclusion of more amenities in buildings like common areas, patios, garden space, stoops, or ground-level retail;
- Reduce the bulk of a building pressed against the sidewalk;
- Improve landscaping requirements and fencing standards to better reconnect buildings to the neighborhood;
- Allow wind-powered electricity generators on the top of multifamily buildings;
- Grant extra height or building capacity if a developer provides affordable housing and constructs to green building standards;

Lower parking requirements in multifamily-zoned areas, and remove parking requirements entirely in Seattle’s six Urban Centers and light rail station areas;

Provide design flexibility resulting in a variety of building styles and individual housing unit sizes.

“Seattle’s land use code can better reflect the values of sustainability, affordability and livability that neighborhoods want. This legislation should set us in the right direction for better design for better neighborhoods,” said Councilmember Sally J. Clark.

The Living Building Ordinance, C.B. 116740, and the Multifamily Code Update, C.B. 116749, are available online from the [City Clerk website](#)

