

What's Happening from **Environmental Building News**
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Seattle Bends Rules for "Living Buildings"

A new ordinance in Seattle will pilot-test exemptions for projects attempting to use innovative onsite water and energy strategies that currently run afoul of codes.

The ordinance will allow code exemptions for up to 12 buildings seeking certification through the Living Building Challenge (LBC). The exemptions will allow the buildings to meet LBC prerequisites that require techniques, such as onsite water treatment, that conflict with current land-use and building codes in Seattle (as well as in many other areas of the U.S.). City officials will use the review process to inform future code changes that could make the regulatory landscape friendlier to onsite water and energy strategies.

Buildings pursuing LBC certification are held to a stringent rule: all energy used in the building must be produced onsite, and all water must be collected and treated onsite (see *EBN* June 2009). When the design team for the Bullitt Foundation headquarters in Seattle decided to pursue LBC certification, it discovered that many of the requirements for the rating system conflicted with local codes. The team approached the Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to see what could be done, and the ensuing conversation provided the beginnings of the pilot project.

According to Brennon Staley, a land-use planner with DPD, Seattle has been working to green its codes for several years, focusing mostly on building, mechanical, and electrical codes. For projects pursuing LBC certification, however, the conflicts arose in the area of land use. Some of the green technologies being considered, Staley said, might be discouraged or prohibited by the regulations.

In order to gain the exemption, projects must earn LBC certification or meet the alternative standards set by the City—achieve 60% of the LBC prerequisites (12 of 20 prerequisites in the latest version of the system). In addition, total building energy and water use must be at least 25% below average for similar building types, and at least 50% of stormwater must be captured and used onsite.

To accommodate the code exemptions these buildings will require, says Staley, DPD will “expand the existing design review process to address conflicts in a manner that could balance sustainability and design issues.” Design reviews for individual projects will be used to test potential changes to the land-use code.

Eden Brukman, vice president of the International Living Building Institute, says the ordinance is a huge step forward for LBC. “This could help eliminate some of the current regulatory barriers to achieving the Challenge, setting a precedent for alternative compliance paths,” she said. “It could also result in twelve new Living Buildings in Seattle,” she added.

— *Allyson Wendt*



Opened in May 2009, the Tyson Living Learning Center at Washington University in St. Louis aims to be the first project to be certified by the Living Building Challenge. Seattle's ordinance may clear some of the code hurdles for other buildings pursuing the "Living Building" designation.

For more information:

Seattle Department of Planning and Development
<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/>

International Living Building Institute
www.ilbi.org

IMAGE CREDITS:

1. Photo: Joe Angeles, Washington University in St. Louis