

Green Building Requirement Zoning Amendment Background

In 2010, the City Council first adopted Green Building Requirements (Section 22.20 of the Zoning Ordinance) based on the recommendations of a task force formed to study zoning standards that would encourage sustainable development practices. These requirements apply to construction projects of 25,000 square feet or more, which are required to meet performance standards based on the LEED rating program. Since that time, the Green Building Requirements have been applied to 91 projects totaling approximately 17 million square feet of development.

Buildings generate over 80% of Cambridge's total greenhouse gas emissions, which demonstrates the importance of promoting green building practices. The Net Zero Action Plan, completed in 2015, recommends revising the current Green Building Requirements to require a minimum LEED Gold standard for larger buildings and to promote a greater emphasis on energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reduction, as well as enhanced commissioning. While new buildings are responsible for a relatively small portion of Cambridge's total greenhouse gas emissions, their high visibility and long lifespan makes them an important example of green building practices in Cambridge. As the Net Zero Action Plan transitions toward achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions for new and existing buildings, the Green Building Requirements are an important mechanism to ensure that new buildings and substantial renovations achieve high levels of energy performance and sustainability.

The Community Development Department has been working on potential amendments to Section 22.20 of the Zoning Ordinance for the past several years, generating ideas and incorporating stakeholder feedback. Most recently, two stakeholder meetings were held in spring 2019 to review the revised proposal and additional changes were made to add clarity to the requirements and review process. Outside of the City's work, the state energy "Stretch Code" was also revised to increase required energy performance.

The amendments seek to increase the energy performance outcomes for large new buildings and substantial renovations in Cambridge while ensuring that the review process is as streamlined and effective as possible. The zoning amendment now being proposed is makes the following key changes:

- Increasing the minimum citywide standards to LEED Gold for projects of 50,000 square feet or more, and LEED Silver for projects of 25,000-50,000 square feet.
- Inclusion of Enterprise Green Communities and Passive House as optional rating systems that may be used in place of LEED. Much of the zoning text has been rewritten to facilitate the inclusion of additional green building rating systems through future zoning amendments as the green building field continues to evolve.
- Requiring an enhanced commissioning process for all projects subject to Green Building Requirements.
- Requiring a Net Zero Narrative to be submitted at the initial stage of review which describes the projected energy use and greenhouse gas emissions of the project, measures to improve energy performance and promote renewable energy, incentive programs that are being used to reduce energy demand, and pathways to transition the building to net zero emissions in the future.
- Other text changes intended to clarify and streamline parts of the review process that have caused confusion in the past, including more specific information about the inclusion of Energy Simulation Tools (also known as "energy models").

