City of Vancouver Green Building Program

ADOPTED JANUARY 2026

CITY OF Vancouver WASHINGTON

Vancouver Waterfront

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Esther Short Park

Introduction

The Green Building Program is part of the City of Vancouver's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building a more resilient community. Nearly 40% of the City's emissions come from the energy used to power homes and businesses. To meet the goals of our Climate Action Framework achieving carbon neutrality by 2040 new buildings must use energy efficiently and source power from clean, renewable sources.

As our climate changes, we are already experiencing longer periods of extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and shifting rainfall patterns. Buildings must be designed to protect residents from these hazards while minimizing impacts on local wildlife and natural systems.

We recognize that Vancouver's development community plays a central role in shaping the city. Developers and builders create the homes, workplaces, and community spaces where people live, work, and connect. This program has been designed with their guidance and expertise to ensure that our high standards are achievable, respect the costs of development, and allow time for the industry to adapt to new requirements.

The program outlines policies, incentives, and an implementation timeline to guide builders toward these goals while supporting housing production and affordability. By working together with our development partners, we can create buildings that protect residents, care for the environment, and help our community grow sustainably.

Contributors

CITY OF VANCOUVER

Rebecca Small, Senior Policy Analyst
Chad Eiken, Community Development Director
Chim Chune Ko, Real Estate Project Manager
Lauren DiPalma, Building Plans Examiner Supervisor
Sree Thirunagari, Building Official
Jeri Newbold, Assistant Building Official
Jason Nortz, Development Review Manager
Aaron Lande, Policy and Programs Director
Geraldene Moyle, General Services Director
Patrick Quinton, EP & H Director
Jean Singer, Capital Projects, Manager
Brian Taylor, Facilities Superintendent

CONSULTING TEAMS

Jeremy Murphy, SSG
Alia Dharssi, SSG
Aishah Mohd Isa, SSG
John Kong, SSG
Dave Walsh, Dave Walsh Consulting
Stephen Salter, Farallon Consultants Limited
Matt Fairris, BAE Urban Economics
Eli Booth, BAE Urban Economics
Sean Dennison, Heritage Green Consulting

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Sierk Braam, Housing Initiative LLC
Nick Cabianca, Geonomic
Dave Cady, David Weekly Homes
Victor Caesar, Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA)
Scott Davidson, Vancouver Housing Authority
Kevin Duell, Northwest Natural
Peter Fels, Washington Conservation Action, ACE Coalition Representative
Andy Frichtl, Interface Engineering
Jon Girod, Quail Homes
Ian Harkins, Building Industry Association of Clark County
Bill Hibbs, Clark Public Utilities District
Darcy Hoffman, Workforce SW WA
Sherrie Jones, SW WA Contractors Association
Ben Kaiser, LSW Architects
Dani Ledezma, Vancouver Housing Authority
Noelle Lovern, Building Industry Association of Clark County
Jerud Martin, Urban Northwest Homes
Bryan Monroe, Associate Housing Project Coordinator
Casey O'Dell, Port of Vancouver
Joshua Ollinger, Vancouver Housing Authority
Lona Rerick, AIA, Perkins&Will
Bryan Ruth, Vancouver Housing Authority
Jean Singer, Capital Projects Division Manager

CENTRAL CITY REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Definitions

ASHRAE	American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers
CAF	Climate Action Framework (the City of Vancouver's blueprint toward climate resiliency and carbon neutrality by 2040.
Carbon dioxide	A naturally occurring gas, CO2 is also a by-product of burning fossil fuels (such as oil, gas, and coal), of burning biomass (e.g., wood), of land-use changes (LUC), and of industrial processes (e.g., cement production). It is the principal human-made greenhouse gas (GHG) that affects the Earth's temperature balance.
Carbon neutral	The state when GHG emissions produced are equal to GHG emissions reduced and sequestered (taken out of the atmosphere).
Carbon pollution	The carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases added to the atmosphere through human activity.
Climate change	The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change as: 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.'
District energy	Connecting multiple buildings to a single source of heating and/or cooling.
Ecosystem services	Ecological processes or functions having monetary or non-monetary value to individuals or society at large. These are frequently classified as (1) supporting services such as productivity or biodiversity maintenance, (2) providing services such as food or fiber, (3) regulating services such as climate regulation or carbon sequestration, and (4) cultural services such as tourism or spiritual and aesthetic appreciation.
Energy efficiency	Using appropriate technologies (physical or equipment) and refining operations to work optimally in order to minimize energy use while maintaining the desired operation.
Equity	The principle of fairness in burden sharing and a basis for understanding how the impacts and responses to climate change, including costs and benefits, are distributed in and by society in more or less equal ways. It is often aligned with ideas of equality, fairness and justice, and applied with respect to equity in the responsibility for, and distribution of, climate impacts and policies across society, generations, and gender, and in the sense of who participates and controls the processes of decision-making.
Extreme weather event	A destructive and/or dangerous weather event that is historically rare (but can be increasingly common under climate change conditions) at a particular place and time of year.
Fossil fuels	Carbon-based fuels from fossil hydrocarbon deposits, including coal, oil, and natural gas.

Greenhouse gas (GHG)	Atmospheric gases, both natural and human-made, that absorb and emit heat. This property causes the greenhouse effect. Water vapor (H2O), carbon dioxide (CO2), nitrous oxide (N2O), methane (CH4) and ozone (O3) are the primary GHGs in the Earth's atmosphere. The increased presence of these and other GHGs in the atmosphere are the primary causes of climate change.
Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC)	Heating, ventilation and air conditioning technology is used to control temperature and humidity in an indoor environment, providing thermal comfort and healthy air quality to the occupants.
Impacts	The consequences of realized risks on natural and human systems, where risks result from the interactions of climate-related hazards (including extreme weather and climate events), exposure, and vulnerability. Impacts generally refer to effects on lives; livelihoods; health and well-being; ecosystems and species; economic, social and cultural assets; services (including ecosystem services); and infrastructure. Impacts may be referred to as consequences or outcomes and can be adverse or beneficial.
Large Scale Residential	Any residential project with more than 20 units. Mixed-use buildings that meet the unit count and where non-residential (excluding residential amenity spaces) are only on the ground floor shall be included in this category.
Municipal buildings	In this context, buildings and facilities owned and operated by the City of Vancouver.
MERV-13	Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value, rating 13. MERV is the standard scale (1–16) used to rate how effectively an air filter removes airborne particles. A MERV-13 filter captures a high percentage of smaller particles—like fine dust, smoke, and some aerosols—and is the level recommended for good indoor air quality in many commercial and multifamily buildings.
Net-zero emissions	Net-zero emissions are achieved when human-made GHG emissions in the atmosphere over a specific time period do not exceed human-made removals of greenhouse gases in the same time period.
Non-residential	Any project for which its primary use is commercial, industrial, institutional, or other non-residential use. Mixed-use buildings where non-residential spaces exist on more than the ground floor shall be included in this category.
Resilience	The capacity of social, economic and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation
SEPA	State Environmental Policy Act
Small Scale Residential	Any residential project with 20 units or less. Mixed-use buildings that meet the unit count and where non-residential (excluding residential amenity spaces) are only on the ground floor shall be included in this category.
WSEC	Washington State Energy Code

Green Building Program Policies

The City of Vancouver's Green Building Program (GBP) Policies are designed to align new construction with our community's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and climate resiliency goals while also supporting housing production and affordability. These policies aim to ensure that as Vancouver grows, it continues to be an attractive place to build, invest and call home.

Developed in 2024 with support from the consulting firm Sustainability Solutions Group, the initial set of policy ideas was shaped through a public process that built on the strategies and actions identified in the community-informed Climate Action Framework (CAF), adopted by Vancouver City Council in 2022. The project team gathered input through focus groups, interviews, an open house, and direct engagement with local development and affordable housing organizations. A technical advisory group representing a variety of industry and advocacy perspectives met multiple times to review, discuss and refine the draft policies. SSG modeled GHG and energy consumption of the draft policies and provided a high-level financial analysis of the net costs of the proposed policies. A copy of the Initial Draft Policy Recommendations and associated reports can be found in **Appendix A**.

Following the presentation of the Draft Policy Recommendations in January 2025, Council requested a more rigorous, locally specific financial analysis to better understand how these policies might affect project feasibility. City staff worked with BAE Urban Economics to conduct a financial analysis of potential costs and impacts across different development types. Based on this analysis, and in response to feedback from local developers and nonprofit affordable housing providers, City staff made targeted adjustments to the policies to balance environmental outcomes with practical implementation. A copy of the BAE financial analysis can be found in **Appendix B.**

The resulting policies represent a measured, data-informed approach to encouraging sustainable building practices. They are a key step toward reducing emissions, improving resilience to climate impacts, and ensuring that growth in Vancouver supports both environmental and community well-being.

Implementation of these policies will occur in phases. Policies related to the development of sites not related to the building construction itself will be codified in Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC) Title 20, Land Use and Development Code, as part of the Comprehensive Plan Code Update in 2026. Policies related to building construction will be codified in VMC Title 17, Building Code, following the next round of State Building Code updates which are currently anticipated in 2027. As this policy is codified into enforceable code language, City staff will continue to explore opportunities to achieve the goals of this policy through more effective and/or cost-effective requirements.

In the interim period between adoption of the GBP and these code amendments, new city municipal facilities will be intended to be designed and constructed with all features noted as "required" in this program. Also, other projects that voluntarily provide all features noted as required plus two "optional" features will be eligible for the full suite of incentives identified in this GBP. Due to the fact that some of the proposed incentives will require amendments to Vancouver Municipal Code, the incentives will also necessarily be phased in over time.

APPLICABILITY

Unless specifically noted otherwise, these policies are intended to apply to: 1) all new construction and 2) redevelopment projects that trigger compliance with new state Building Energy Code requirements under Title 17 VMC. Based on stakeholder feedback and potential conflicts with other city policies or state law, it is appropriate for future code amendments to include certain exemptions or specific flexibility in how the Green Building policies are applied to affordable housing projects, restaurants/manufacturing uses, residential projects involving 1-6 units (missing middle housing), and marine terminal operations. Such identified areas for flexibility are described in this document.

GOAL 1: ENERGY AND PERFORMANCE

1.1 Improved Energy Efficiency

Intent: Eliminating carbon pollution is essential to avoiding the worst climate change impacts. Buildings' operational energy use is a prime contributor to local and global carbon pollution. Carbon pollution can be eliminated in new buildings by improving operational energy efficiency and switching to zero-carbon energy sources. Co-benefits include lower energy bills, improved indoor comfort, and better air quality.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Achieve third-party certification for net-zero building operating emissions compliance through a green building standard such as USGBC Zero Carbon Standard, LEED Zero, or Living Building Challenge (Net Zero).	Incentive	Documentation required by the certification standard
Large Scale Residential	**Mandatory** Exceed WSEC building energy efficiency performance requirements using one or more of these compliance pathways: 1. Prescriptive pathway: Comply with the WSEC-C Prescriptive Path plus the Vancouver amendments applicable to the prescriptive path. 2. Modeling pathway: Comply with the WSEC-C Total Building Performance Path (i.e., full building modeling in design) plus the Vancouver amendments applicable to the Total Building Performance Path. 3. Target Performance pathway: Comply with the WSEC-C Target Performance Path (i.e., full modeling, plus prove with actual operational performance). **Incentive** In addition to selecting one of the mandatory pathways, optionally achieve third-party certification for net-zero building	Mandatory	Per the WSEC chosen pathway

	operating emissions compliance through a green building standard such as USGBC LEED Zero, or Living Future's Zero Carbon. Ensure that the minimum Vancouver energy efficiency requirements are met under these standards.		
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Mandatory	Per the WSEC chosen pathway
New Municipal	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Mandatory	Per the WSEC chosen pathway
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Exempt. City will revisit in 2030. Note that some developers will already be adhering to Evergreen Sustainable Development Standards.	Exempt	N/A

Notes

Detailed specifications of the Vancouver Amendments can be found in **Appendix C: Illustrative Draft Code Language.** The Illustrative Draft Code Language illustrates the technical direction and proposed specifications of the Vancouver Amendments and is included for informational purposes only. It demonstrates the proposed modifications to current Vancouver Municipal Code that would implement the Vancouver Amendments, but does not serve as final code language for adoption. The final code language to implement the Vancouver amendments will be developed through a subsequent code-writing process and reviewed for approval at a future date and will include a comprehensive public review and engagement process, pending policy adoption.

At a high level, the Vancouver Amendments address:

- Opaque Thermal Envelope Insulation: increased stringency in the R-value and U-value thermal performance.
- Fenestration Performance: increased stringency in the U-value thermal performance.
- Dimming Controls: additional dimming capabilities to reduce power consumption.
- Lighting Power Allowances: increased stringency regarding lighting power consumption.
- Energy Measure Credits: increased stringency in the valuation of mandatory credits.
- Commissioning: additional requirements for commissioning report documentation and the resolution of deficiencies.
- Renewable Energy: additional methods of compliance and exemption of affordable housing from requirement.
- Building Performance Factors (BPF): for projects pursuing the Total Building Performance compliance path (full energy modeling), increased stringency to BPF requirements for multi-family and hotel/motel projects.

- Limits on Substandard Building Envelopes: for projects pursuing the Total Building Performance compliance path (full energy modeling), the ability for higher-performing energy efficiency strategies to compensate for poorer-performing building envelope elements is further limited.
- Optional Target Performance Path: creates a new and optional compliance path which requires full energy modeling in design, requires achieving Building Performance Factors that are 12% stricter than the Total Building Performance option, and requires proving energy efficiency compliance during building operation secured with a financial performance bond.

Notes

The Washington State Energy Code-Commercial provides for multiple compliance pathways including:

- The Prescriptive Compliance Path (C401.2, Option 1). This pathway includes prescriptive performance requirements for building envelope, mechanical, and lighting systems and compliance with the Total System Performance Ratio requirement.
- The Total Building Performance Path, i.e., Full Energy Modeling (C401.2, Option 2). This pathway includes full energy modeling and compliance with the Building Performance Factors (BPF) which compares the proposed building's performance with a reference building of a similar function, location and geometry. This option, which is more complex to model, provides for increased design flexibility provided that the overall energy reduction requirements are met.
- Optional Appendices. At the discretion of the local jurisdiction, optional appendices, such as a Target Performance Path, may be adopted as a local amendment.

Vancouver's Green Building Program includes new local commercial energy code amendments affecting both the Prescriptive Compliance Path and the Total Building Performance Path. To provide a third compliance path, the Target Performance Path is included as a new local amendment to the Commercial Energy Code.

Resources

- Washington State Energy Code -Commercial (WSEC-C). The State's energy code provides the base direction and requirements for energy efficient new buildings.
- Vancouver Municipal Code Title 17. The City's Building Codes Ordinance.
- Current list of LEED Zero certification options can be found here: LEED Zero | U.S. Green Building Council
- Evergreen Sustainable Development Standard (ESDS): A building performance standard that all affordable housing projects that receive capital funds through the state Housing Trust Fund program must comply with.

1.2 All-Electric-Ready Buildings

Intent: Residents and businesses should have energy source options and be able to choose low-carbon electricity for all energy uses in the building now and in the future. This policy enables an easier, less expensive transition to heat pumps and electricity for space conditioning, water heating, and cooking even if the initial system or appliance were powered by fossil fuels.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Ensure the building is 100% electricity-capable, including appropriate dedicated wiring and service for electricity use in all space and water heating and cooling equipment, cooking, appliances, and any other energy-using equipment.	Incentive	Electrical plans
Large Scale Residential	Same as Small Scale Residential	Mandatory	Electrical plans
Non-residential	Ensure the building is 100% electricity-capable, including appropriate dedicated wiring and service for electricity use in all space and water heating and cooling equipment, cooking, appliances, and any other energy-using equipment. Commercial kitchens are incentivized to meet this approach. The City will revisit this policy during the implementation of the 2024 WA State Energy Code update. Exemptions: • Equipment or systems used for manufacturing and industrial processes. • Commercial kitchens	Mandatory, Incentive for commercial kitchens	Electrical plans
New Municipal	Ensure buildings' heating, cooling, and domestic hot water equipment are able to operate using electricity and must not use fossil fuels (specialty equipment and process equipment excepted).	Mandatory	Electrical plans
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Exempt. City will revisit in 2030.	Exempt	N/A

Resources
This approach is additive to WSEC-C C401.3.6 Electrification readiness.

Notes
If the all-electric ready requirement were made mandatory for commercials kitchens post 2030, the City would offer an appeals process for circumstances where the kitchen requirement would be burdensome, for special circumstances, etc.

2.1 Embodied Carbon and Life Cycle Assessment

Intent: Often overlooked, building materials and construction practices contribute significantly to a building's total carbon pollution production. Reducing the carbon released in materials production and construction practices is essential to reducing buildings' contribution to local and global carbon pollution. A carbon pollution aware approach to construction can result in fewer materials used, saving costs. Low-carbon base building materials are typically near cost parity with standard base building materials.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Nothing required.	N/A	N/A
Large Scale Residential	Comply with one of the following embodied carbon reduction paths: 1. Complete a Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment (WBLCA) of structures and enclosures that demonstrates 10-20% reduction in embodied emissions compared to a reference building. 2. Retain 45% or more (by area) of on-site existing structures and/or exterior materials. 3. Achieve 25-40% reduction in A1 to A3 (product stage) embodied carbon emissions for 90% of eligible materials considered in aggregate, compared to a reference project with the same type and quantity of eligible materials and using current industry average emissions data. Ambition increases every code cycle: **2025-2027**: All buildings > 200,000 sf; Path 1: 45%; Path 2: 25%; Path 3: 10% **2028-2030**: All buildings > 100,000 sf; Path 1: 45%; Path 2: 30%; Path 3: 15% **2030 onward**: All buildings > 50,000 sf; Path 1: 45%; Path 2: 40%; Path 3: 20% For developments with multiple buildings, the standard applies to the project as a whole, not to each individual building.	Incentive (2025-2029) Review for potential mandate in 2030	Path 1: Structures and materials retention report Path 2: Calculations report Path 3: WBLCA report

Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential. For developments with multiple buildings, the standard applies to the project as a whole, not to each individual building.	Incentive (2025-2029) Review for potential mandate in 2030	Path 1: Structures and materials retention report Path 2: Calculations report Path 3: WBLCA report
New Municipal	State-funded projects must comply with the Buy Clean and Fair Washington Act HB1103. Other municipal projects are required to comply with Large Scale Residential requirements. For developments with multiple buildings, the standard applies to the project as a whole, not to each individual building.	Mandatory	Description report, per Act HB1103 Path 1: Structures and materials retention report Path 2: Calculations report Path 3: WBLCA report
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Incentive	N/A

Notes

For Path 2, the most current CLF Material Baselines report should be used as the standard for finding current industry average emissions data (2025 CLF North American Material Baselines - Carbon Leadership Forum)

A1-A3 construction material life-cycle stages:

A1: Raw material extraction and processing, processing of secondary material input (e.g. recycling processes).
A2: Transport to the manufacturer.
A3: Manufacturing.

All stages include the provision of all materials, products, and energy, as well as waste processing up to the end-of-waste state or disposal of final residues during the product stage. The assessment takes only the building and its parts into account, but not furniture or appliances, for example.

Resources

- US Department of Energy Embodied Carbon Reduction in New Construction Reference Guide. A brief, effective embodied carbon guide with an extensive list of tools and resources.

- One Click LCA website. This resource provides information and calculation tools for life cycle assessments and embodied carbon green building approaches

Athena Impact Estimator for Buildings. A free and industry-leading tool for whole-building life cycle assessments.

2.2 Sustainable Building Materials

Intent: Building material choices can have positive or negative local and global environmental, economic, and social life cycle impacts. Using sustainable building materials avoids resource extraction approaches that damage and contaminate ecosystems. It also encourages local economic activity and reduces the use of new raw materials.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Taking the Large Scale Residential approach qualifies for incentives.	Incentive	N/A
Large Scale Residential	At least 25% (by cost) of the total value of permanently installed building products must meet the requirements for at least two of the responsible extraction criteria identified below: • Extended producer responsibility. • Bio-based materials. • Wood products. Wood products must be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or other USGBC-approved equivalent. • Materials reuse. Reuse includes salvaged, refurbished, or reused products. • Recycled content. Recycled content is the sum of post-consumer recycled content plus one-half the pre-consumer recycled content, based on weight. • Products sourced (extracted, manufactured, and purchased) within 1,000 miles of the project site.	Incentive	As per LEED v4.1 BD+C MR Credit: Sourcing of Raw Materials
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	Incentive	As per LEED v4.1 BD+C MR Credit: Sourcing of Raw Materials
New Municipal	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	As per LEED v4.1 BD+C MR Credit: Sourcing of Raw Materials

Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Incentive	N/A

Notes
Responsible extraction criteria definitions are aligned with current LEED standards, including LEED v4.1 BD+C and LEED v5 Building Product Selection and Procurement:

Extended producer responsibility. Products purchased from a manufacturer (producer) that participates in an extended producer responsibility program or is directly responsible for extended producer responsibility. Products meeting extended producer responsibility criteria are valued at 50% of their cost for these calculations.
Bio-based materials. Bio-based products and materials other than wood must be tested using ASTM Test Method D6866 or equivalent method ISO 16620-2, or be certified to the USDA BioPreferred Voluntary Labeling Initiative that includes verification via ASTM 6866 testing. Exclude hide products, such as leather and other animal skin material.

- Bio-based products that meet the criteria above: value at 50% of cost multiplied by the biobased content of the product for these calculations.

Wood products. Wood products must be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (not equivalent). Products meeting wood products criteria are valued at 100% of their cost for these calculations.
Materials reuse. Reuse includes salvaged, refurbished, or reused products. Products meeting materials reuse criteria are valued at 200% of their cost for the purposes of these calculations.
Recycled content. Products meeting the following recycled content criteria are valued at 100% of their cost for these calculations:

- Recycled content is the sum of post-consumer recycled content plus one-half the pre-consumer recycled content, based on weight.
- The recycled fraction of the assembly is then multiplied by the cost of assembly to determine the recycled content value.

Products sourced (extracted, manufactured, and purchased) within 100 miles of the project site are valued at twice their base contributing cost, up to a maximum of 200% of cost.

Life cycle information is available for most building products through environmental product declarations.

2.3 Electric Vehicle Charging

Intent: This City policy ensures that electricity used for electric vehicle (EV) charging is tracked separately from the building's total power consumption, supporting accurate energy reporting under Washington's Clean Buildings Performance Standard. Tracking can be accomplished either at the charging point or through the charger's software.

This policy does not require private development to include any additional electric vehicle (EV) charging stations beyond those already mandated by Washington State standards for EV charger installation and electric-ready spaces (as currently defined by WAC 51-50-0429).

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Low Scale Residential	Nothing required beyond state code, which requires that each dwelling is EV-ready for minimum one charging unit.	Mandatory (state code)	N/A
Large Scale Residential	Developments must at minimum meet the electric vehicle charging requirements adopted by the State of Washington for the applicable development type, as those requirements exist on the adoptive date of this policy. Electricity used for EV charging must be tracked separately from the building's total power consumption. Tracking can be accomplished either at the charging point or through the charger's software.	Mandatory	Letter of commitment and architectural and electrical plans for parking areas and electrical rooms
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	N/A
New Municipal	Follow state code minimums (as those requirements exist on the adoptive date of this policy) for supplying public EV charging infrastructure in civic buildings. Same as Large Scale Residential for separate tracking for electricity used for EV charging. For municipal facility buildings, align with the fleet management strategy requirements. Consult with Clark PUD on managed (smart) charging options that may reduce the need for more expensive electrical equipment upgrades.	Mandatory	Architectural and electrical plans for parking areas and electrical rooms
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	N/A

Notes

Electric Vehicle Smart Charging. By managing energy loads more effectively and participating in grid optimization, EV smart charging options contribute to lowering the need for expensive electrical equipment upgrades and maintenance. Clark PUD can coordinate with developers on integrating smart charging systems into projects.

The City may also consider advocating the State for a more nuanced approach to EV charger provision in new buildings, including allowances for different charger types.

GOAL 3: CLIMATE RESILIENCE

3.1 Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Storage

Intent: Local, renewable energy and distributed energy resources provide many benefits, including greening the electricity grid, improving energy resilience, reducing stress on the grid, lowering energy bills, and reducing building heating and cooling loads through systems such as rooftop solar, solar thermal, ground source heat exchange, and thermal energy networks.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Provide a solar-ready zone of not less than 300 sf for one- and two-family dwellings. Provide a solar-ready zone of not less than 150 sf for each dwelling unit in a townhouse project of three stories or fewer in height and total floor area less than or equal to 2,000 sf.	Incentive	Architectural and electrical plans
Large Scale Residential	Comply with state code WAC-51-11C-41100 which requires new buildings or additions larger than 10,000 sf of gross conditioned floor area to include a renewable energy generation consisting of not less than 0.5W/sf multiplied by the sum of gross conditioned floor area.	State code + Incentive	Architectural and electrical plans

	Additionally, buildings of any size are incentivized to install a renewable energy system(s) consisting of not less than 0.75 W/sf multiplied by the sum of gross conditioned floor area; or, alternatively, install a ground-source heat pump (GSHP) or other ambient thermal energy system that provides the building's primary heating and cooling. Additionally, buildings of any size are incentivized to install energy storage capacity to reduce peak load demands.		
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	State code + Incentive	Architectural and electrical plans
New Municipal	Provide an on-site renewable energy system(s) that exceeds Washington State Building Code requirements by 75%; or, alternatively, install a ground-source heat pump (GSHP) or other ambient thermal energy system that provides the building's primary heating and cooling. If site conditions do not allow on-site systems, participation in a community solar project or other renewable power purchase may be used to meet this target. Additionally, procure renewable power for the energy consumption not met by on-site renewables. Ensure back up power is provided by generators using R99 fuel or renewable energy battery or thermal energy storage devices or a combination of these options.	Mandatory	Architectural and electrical plans and purchasing agreement
Non-residential Industrial	For buildings or additions larger than 10,000 sf of gross conditioned floor area with process load applications,[1] consult with Clark PUD on the potential to host community solar projects. Explore other opportunities for renewable energy (additional opportunities may merit incentives).	Mandatory	Confirmation letter from Clark PUD as proof of consultation, with description of the outcome of the consultation process
Large and/or multi-building developments	For master planned developments, assess the viability of district energy systems and microgrids.	Mandatory	District energy, microgrid, and shared renewable energy generation equipment assessment report

[1] Process load applications are a manufacturing, industrial, or commercial procedure or activity where the primary purpose is other than conditioning spaces and maintaining comfort and amenities for the occupants of the building.

	For master planned developments, assess the viability of district energy systems, microgrids, and shared renewable energy generation equipment (e.g., community solar).		
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential	State code + Incentive	Architectural and electrical plans

Notes

The approach for Small Scale Residential buildings adopts Appendix T—Solar-ready provisions-detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses of the WAC Title 51, the WAC-51-51-60106.

Renewable energy systems may include:
On-site Renewable Electricity Generation

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems – rooftop, façade-integrated, or ground-mounted.
- Solar thermal systems – for domestic hot water or low-temp heating loads.
- Wind turbines – small/medium-scale, where feasible.
- Biogas/biomass systems – anaerobic digestion or biomass CHP (less common).

Renewable Thermal Energy Systems (not electricity-generating, but considered renewable energy sources)

- Ground-source (geothermal) heat pumps (GSHPs) – use the steady temperature of the earth for heating and cooling; provide renewable thermal energy but do not generate electricity.
- Thermal Energy Networks (TENs) – shared, networked geothermal/ambient-loop systems.

Air-source heat pumps are not included in this category, as usage of this equipment is addressed in existing State code.

3.2 Refuge Area

Intent: Vancouver's primary climate risks are wildfire smoke and extreme heat, both of which can have severe negative health impacts. Incorporating refuge areas in buildings during design and construction ensure that occupants have safe spaces to shelter-in-place during emergencies, disasters, and power outages, with access to basic amenities.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements

Small Scale Residential	Nothing required	N/A	N/A
Large Scale Residential	For buildings greater than 10 stories, include a communal refuge area with heating, cooling, potable water, and 72-hour back-up power generation, preferably from renewable sources, for shelter-in-place during emergencies such as heat waves, power outages, and severe storms.	Incentive	Architectural plans
Non-residential	Nothing required	N/A	N/A
New Municipal	New municipal facilities that contain central amenities such as, lobby, gym space, or meeting rooms, to provide temporary shelter for vulnerable residents. Common refuge areas are temporarily shared, lit spaces where vulnerable residents can gather to stay warm or cool, charge cell phones and access the internet, safely store medicine, refrigerate basic food necessities, access potable water and toilets. Provide a minimum of 72-hours back-up power generation for critical areas and functions. Ensure back up power is provided by generators using R99 fuel or renewable energy battery or thermal energy storage devices or a combination of these options.	Mandatory (per City policy)	Architectural plans
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential	Incentive	Architectural plans

Notes
Communal refuge areas may serve as building amenity spaces during normal operations. The backup power system should provide electricity to the refuge area and to the ground floor or first two floors, as appropriate to the building's use. It should supply power to essential systems—such as security, domestic water pumps, sump pumps, at least one elevator, and boilers or hot water pumps—based on the building's design, amenities, and the needs the refuge area is intended to meet during a prolonged power outage.

Resources
- City of Toronto, October 2016. Minimum Backup Power Guidelines for MURBs: Voluntary Performance Standards for Existing and New Buildings.

3.3 Cool Roofing

Intent: Maximizes the utility of roof spaces while addressing emissions reduction goals, stormwater management objectives, and urban heat island issues.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Roofs are encouraged to have highly reflective roofs, green roofs, or solar panels, or a mix of sustainable roof features on 100% of the building's non-mechanical roof space. Pitched roofs are exempt from this.	Incentive	Architectural plans
Large Scale Residential	100% of non-mechanical occupied roof space to have highly reflective roofs and incentivized to install one or a mix of green roofs or solar panels (exceeding 3.1 requirements). Steeper pitched roofs (greater than a 2:12 pitch) are exempt from this requirement but encouraged to use lighter-colored or highly reflective materials where feasible.	Mandatory + Incentive	Architectural plans
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory + Incentive	Architectural plans
New Municipal	Require 100% of non-mechanical occupied roof space to have one or a mix of sustainable roof features. Steeper pitched roofs (greater than a 2:12 pitch) are exempt from this requirement but encouraged to use lighter-colored or highly reflective materials where feasible.	Mandatory (per City policy)	Architectural plans
Deed Restricted	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory + Incentive	Architectural plans

Affordable Housing			

Notes

The sustainable roof features for consideration in City of Vancouver are:

- **Highly reflective roof:** Uses high albedo or light-colored materials, with a Solar Reflective Index (SRI) of 78 or over, to reflect most sunlight instead of absorbing it as heat into the building. Although effective at first, roofing materials collect dirt, dust, and particulates that reduce the effectiveness of high albedo materials. Thus, a maintenance plan must be in place to routinely clean the surfaces.
- **Green roof:** Also known as a living roof, roof gardens and vegetated roof, is a roofing system that incorporates vegetation, soil, and drainage layers to support plant growth on the roof surface. Green roofs provide numerous benefits, including improved stormwater management, reduction of urban heat island effect, improved air quality, energy savings, habitat creation, and aesthetic enhancement.
- **Rooftop solar panels:** Solar panel systems generate carbon-free electricity that lowers utility bills, relieves strain on the electricity grid, and reduces GHG emissions.

3.4 Indoor Temperature

Intent: Climate projections suggest increasing risk for heat waves and wildfires for Vancouver, which exacerbates health issues such as heat-related illnesses, respiratory problems, and dehydration. Relying solely on mechanical cooling systems, like air-conditioners, adds stress to the electric grid and, if the grid is powered by fossil fuels, contributes to carbon pollution. Incorporating passive cooling solutions like natural ventilation, shading, operable windows, and thermal insulation during the design process will help buildings maintain comfortable indoor temperatures without being over-reliant on energy-intensive cooling equipment.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Ensure all regularly occupied spaces in dwelling units are equipped with operable windows. Ensure dwellings can consistently maintain a minimum of 60°F in the winter months and a maximum of 80°F in the summer months.	Incentive	Architectural and mechanical plans, as well as detailed explanations of technological and passive design solutions that achieve this outcome
Large Scale Residential	Ensure all regularly occupied spaces in dwelling units are equipped with operable windows.	Mandatory	Architectural and mechanical plans, including statement from mechanical engineer of record indicating compliance with ASHRAE 55-2017

	Ensure dwellings can consistently maintain a minimum of 60°F in the winter months and a maximum of 80°F in the summer months.		
Non-residential	Ensure building systems (inclusive of mechanical systems, control systems, and building envelope can consistently maintain a minimum of 60°F in the winter months and a maximum of 80°F in the summer months. For industrial buildings, the requirement applies only to conditioned spaces (such as office areas).	Mandatory	Architectural and mechanical plans, including statement from mechanical engineer of record indicating compliance with ASHRAE 55-2017
New Municipal	Same as Non-residential	Mandatory (per City policy)	N/A
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Ensure all regularly occupied spaces in dwelling units meet can consistently maintain a minimum of 60°F in the winter months and a maximum of 80°F in the summer months.. If meeting this standard in each dwelling unit would make the project financially infeasible, provide a central, accessible gathering space (such as a lobby or common room) that meets this standard. Affordable housing projects that are too small to include a central space and can demonstrate that constructing one would make the project infeasible are exempt from this requirement.	Mandatory; exemption for demonstrated financial infeasibility for some projects	Architectural and mechanical plans, including statement from mechanical engineer of record indicating compliance with ASHRAE 55-2017

3.5 Enhanced Air Filtration

Intent: Reduce indoor occupants' exposure to smoke from wildfires, which contain fine particulate matter and other pollutants that can cause respiratory symptoms and aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Ensure ventilation and filtration systems are compatible with MERV 13-rated filtration media. Higher-efficiency filters do not need to be installed at all times but the system must be capable of accommodating them during air quality events.	Incentive	Mechanical plans

Large Scale Residential	Ensure ventilation and filtration systems are compatible with MERV 13-rated filtration media. Higher-efficiency filters do not need to be installed at all times but the system must be capable of accommodating them during air quality events.	Mandatory	Mechanical plans
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Mandatory	Mechanical plans
New Municipal	Same as Large Scale Residential.	Mandatory (per City policy)	Mechanical plans
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential. If meeting this standard in each dwelling unit would make the project financially infeasible, provide a central, accessible gathering space (such as a lobby or common room) that meets this standard. Affordable housing projects that are too small to include a central space and can demonstrate that constructing one would make the project infeasible are exempt from this requirement.	Mandatory; exemption for demonstrated financial infeasibility for some projects	Mechanical plans.

3.6 Cool Surfaces

Intent: Reduce urban heat island effect by increasing shade, incorporating reflective paving materials, and increasing landscape areas. Reducing urban heat island effect reduces airborne toxins, decreases building cooling demand, and improves indoor and outdoor comfort.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Ensure 50% of non-roof hardscape are cool surfaces. Cool surfaces can be highly reflective/light-colored, highly permeable, vegetated, shaded, or a mix of these features.	Incentivize	Site plan
Larg Scale Residential	Same as Small Scale Residential. For vegetation planting standards, refer to VMC 20.770 and 20.925 (Tree and Landscape Requirements).	Mandatory	Site plan

Non-residential	Same as Small Scale Residential. For vegetation planting standards, refer to VMC 20.770 and 20.925 (Tree and Landscape Requirements).	Mandatory	Site plan
New Municipal	Same as Small Scale Residential. For vegetation planting standards, refer to VMC 20.770 and 20.925 (Tree and Landscape Requirements).	Mandatory (per City policy)	Site plan

Notes

Cool surface features for consideration:[2]

- **Highly reflective surface:** Uses high albedo paving materials or with an initial solar reflectance (or albedo) of at least 0.33 or SRI of 29+. Paints with light-colored additives and most types of concrete that meet the reflectance standards may satisfy this requirement.
- **Highly permeable surface:** Uses grid pavement with at least 50% perviousness.
- **Vegetated surfaces:** Uses existing plant material or installs plants that provide shade over paving areas on the site within 10 years of planting. Plants must be in place at the time of occupancy and cannot include artificial turf.
- **Shaded surfaces:** Provide shade with architectural devices or structures. If the device or structure is a roof, it shall have an aged solar reflectance value of at least 0.28. If the device or structure is not a roof, or if aged solar reflectance information is not available, it shall have at installation an initial solar reflectance of at least 0.33. Structures can be covered by energy generation systems such as solar thermal collectors, photovoltaics, and wind turbines.

Marine terminal legal/safety conflict exemption.

Industrial properties that support marine terminal operations may be eligible for an administrative adjustment or exception from site-related (vs. building-related) green building standards if the applicant demonstrates that compliance would create a direct conflict with applicable maritime, port, or federal safety and security requirements. To qualify for such relief, the applicant shall submit evidence of the conflict in writing to the Planning Official. Any standards so adjusted or exempted shall be documented in the site plan staff report.

[2] Summarized from information on the Cool Roof Rating Council website.

GOAL 4: ECOLOGY AND NATURAL SYSTEMS

4.1 Bird-Friendly Design

Intent: Provide bird-friendly environments and reduce bird injury and fatalities caused by collisions with buildings.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Nothing required.	N/A	N/A
Large Scale Residential	Design and construct the building, site structures, glazed corners, glazed railings, and fly-through conditions to achieve an American Bird Conservancy's (ABC) threat factor of 30 or below for high collision risk portions of the building. Qualifying bird friendly materials include: • Glazing that incorporates physical signals to birds created by fritting, overlays/applications, and UV coatings; • Non-glazing, opaque and non-reflective materials such as concrete; • Glazing behind qualifying sunshades and screens; and, • Glazing to which materials such as qualifying window films have been applied. The building and fenestration strategies include external screens, decorative grills, screens, netting, louvers, shutters or exterior shades placed close to the outside glass surface, with openings that approximate the 2x4 rule.	Incentive	• Bird Collision Rating spreadsheet • Elevation Plan depicting location of all materials and screening devices with specification details
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	Incentive	• Bird Collision Rating spreadsheet • Elevation Plan depicting location of all materials

			and screening devices with specification details
New Municipal	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory (per City policy)	• Bird Collision Rating spreadsheet • Elevation Plan depicting location of all materials and screening devices with specification details

Notes
For glazing treatments, use only glazing and materials listed in the American Bird Conservancy's (ABC) Threat Factor Database with a Threat Factor of 30 or below, or meet alternative prescriptive criteria outlined by the ABC. All glazed corners or fly-through conditions must also have a Threat Factor of 30 or below.

Resources

- Threat Factor Database. American Bird Conservancy's list of qualifying materials.
- Innovation: for Bird Collision Deterrence. U.S. Green Buildings Council provides steps for calculating Bird Collision Rating

4.2 Dark-Sky Lighting

Intent: Outdoor lighting regulation is required to balance the need for safety and security while minimizing negative impacts such as light pollution, energy waste, and disturbance to wildlife.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Ensure the use of lighting standards, fixtures, luminaries, and lighting designs (including photocells and timing mechanisms to limit lighting when daylight is adequate) adhere to the DarkSky International standards	Incentivized	Electrical and lighting plans
Large Scale Residential	Require the use of lighting standards, fixtures, luminaries, and lighting designs (including photocells and timing mechanisms to limit lighting when daylight is adequate) to adhere to the DarkSky International standards.	Mandatory	Electrical and lighting plans
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	Electrical and lighting plans
New Municipal	Same as Large Scale Residential Additionally, ensure new streetlights are shielded to avoid uplighting and reduce light trespass and that lighting temperatures adhere to the DarkSky International standards.	Mandatory (per City policy)	Electrical and lighting plans
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	Electrical and lighting plans

Notes:
Marine terminal legal/safety conflict exemption.
Industrial properties that support marine terminal operations may be eligible for an administrative adjustment or exception from site-related (vs. building-related) green building standards if the applicant demonstrates that compliance would create a direct conflict with applicable maritime, port, or federal safety and security requirements. Any standards so adjusted or exempted shall be documented in the site plan staff report.

Resources

- Responsible outdoor lighting. DarkSky Association guidelines for responsible outdoor lighting.

- International DarkSky Association Fixture Seal of Approval. Provides DarkSky Compliant resources, retailers, and database.

4.3 Tree, Vegetation, and Soil Conservation

Intent: Enhance tree planting, vegetation, and soil quality to improve air quality, increase tree canopy coverage, increase biodiversity, and minimize urban heat islands.

Applicability	Approach	Status	Submission Requirements
Small Scale Residential	Not required.	N/A	N/A
Large Scale Residential	Use plantings with sustainable features like long-lived, large form, drought-tolerant, climate-resilient, low irrigation, and/or native to the Pacific Northwest. Achieve the City's recognition for Silver Leaf Status. **Incentive:** achieve Gold Leaf Status for tree coverage.	Mandatory + Incentive	Site plan
Non-residential	Same as Large Scale Residential. For industrial sites, achieve Silver Leaf Status.*	Mandatory + Incentive	Site plan
New Municipal	Use long-lived, large-form, drought-tolerant, and climate-resilient plantings, preferably native to the Pacific Northwest, that require minimal irrigation, while retaining the existing mature canopy where possible. For commercial or residential sites, achieve the City's recognition for Gold Leaf Status for tree coverage. For industrial sites, achieve Silver Leaf Status.	Mandatory (per City policy)	Site plan
Deed Restricted Affordable Housing	Same as Large Scale Residential	Mandatory	Site plan

Large and/or multi-building developments	Planned residential/commercial developments are required to achieve the City's recognition for Silver Leaf Status for tree coverage.	Mandatory	Site plan

***Notes:**
Marine terminal legal/safety conflict exemption.
Industrial properties that support marine terminal operations may be eligible for an administrative adjustment or exception from site-related (vs. building-related) green building standards if the applicant demonstrates that compliance would create a direct conflict with applicable maritime, port, or federal safety and security requirements. Any standards so adjusted or exempted shall be documented in the site plan staff report.

Resources

- Tree Canopy Achievement Program. The City of Vancouver's guidance to achieving tree canopy Bronze, Silver and Gold Leaf statuses.
- Tree Plan/Tree Removal. The City of Vancouver's submittal checklist for tree plans. This document will be updated to reflect the requirements.

Green Building Incentives

The Green Building Program includes a set of proposed incentives designed to encourage developers to voluntarily incorporate green building features at the levels described in this document. These incentives will initially apply to all green building features (see Table 1) until VMC 17 (Building Code) and VMC 20 (Land Use and Development Code) are updated to specify which features are mandatory. Once those updates occur, incentives are intended to only apply to optional features.

Additional incentives may be added over time as they are identified, vetted by staff, and approved by Council.

Eligibility for Incentives:
Prior to adoption of the above-referenced code updates, all types of projects not subject to a development agreement will be eligible for the full suite of incentives - as adopted - if all features noted below as "required" are provided plus at least two "optional" features.

The current suite of incentives includes:

1. Expedited Land Use, Engineering, and Building Permit review
2. 20% building permit fee rebate (maximum $20,000)
3. Deferral of System Development Charges (SDC) payment until Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO)
4. Deferral of Park Impact Fee (PIF) payment until TCO
5. Deferral of Transportation Impact Fee (TIF) payment until TCO
6. 12-foot height bonus where allowed by the Federal Aviation Administration
7. Eligibility for the City Green Building Design Awards Program

Optional vs. Required Features

Table 1 identifies which green building features are intended to be mandatory once VMC 17 and 20 are updated and which features will remain optional and eligible for incentives.

Eligibility for Incentives:
Prior to adoption of the above-referenced code updates, all types of projects not subject to a development agreement will be eligible for the full suite of incentives - as adopted - if all features noted below as "required" are provided plus at least two "optional" features.

Development Agreements Exception:
In projects governed by development agreements, Council may apply the "future" required features as project requirements, exercising discretion through the agreement. Council may also decide which incentives the project that is subject to the development agreement may receive.

Table 1. Proposed Optional (Incentivized) vs. Required Features

Green Building Feature	Required or Optional	Required Under D.A.?

Bird Friendly Design	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Renewable Energy Generation	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Building Refuge Area	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Use of Low-Carbon Construction Materials	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Use of Sustainable Building Materials	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Cool Roofing	Optional	Subject to Council discretion
Indoor Temperature Control	Required*	Yes
Dark Sky Lighting	Required	Yes
EV Charging (tracked separately)	Required	Yes
Cool Site Surfaces	Required	Yes
All-Electric Ready Buildings	Required**	Yes
Climate Adapted Vegetation	Required	Yes
10%+ Improved Energy Efficiency over State Standard	Required	Yes
Air Filtration – MERV 13 Compatible or Equivalent	Required***	Yes

* Except for industrial uses; affordable housing projects with 100% units at 80% AMI may satisfy this requirement through a central accessible gathering space with temperature control.
** Except for restaurant or light/heavy manufacturing uses, for which all-electrification would be incentivized.
*** Affordable housing projects with 100% units at 80% AMI may satisfy this requirement through a central accessible gathering space with air filtration.

Implementation of Incentives

The Green Building Program will be implemented in phases, beginning with adoption by Council and continuing through updates to the City's land use and building codes. Some of the proposed incentives will require subsequent action by City Council to implement. The schedule below outlines key milestones and incentive-related actions.

December 2025
Council adoption of the Green Building Program by resolution, establishing policy direction and implementation steps, including the initial incentives.

- Until green building features are made mandatory through amendments to VMC Title 17 or Title 20, the program will remain incentive-based to encourage voluntary inclusion of green features.

- To qualify for the full suite of incentives prior to mandatory adoption, projects must provide all features listed as "required" in Table 1, plus at least two additional optional features.

December 2025 – February 2026

- Council adoption of key incentives by ordinance:
  - Deferral of System Development Charges (SDC) to Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO)
  - Deferral of Transportation Impact Fee (TIF) to TCO
  - Deferral of Park Impact Fee (PIF) to TCO
  - Building permit fee rebate
- Expedited Land Use, Engineering, and Building Plan review to be administratively implemented by all development review-related departments (Community Development, Public Works, Fire) for projects providing all "required" features plus at least two "optional" features.
- Creation and promotion of the City Green Building Design Awards Program by Community Development Department.

May – June 2026 (TBD)

- Adoption of site-related requirements through the comprehensive update to VMC Title 20.
- Adoption of the 12-foot height bonus incentive as part of the Title 20 update.

January – March 2027 (TBD)

- Adoption of building-related requirements through the next scheduled update of VMC Title 17 (City Building Code), following the State Building Code Council's adoption of the 2024 State Building Code updates (currently scheduled for November 2026).

November – December 2027

- Announcement of the first City Green Building Design Awards for 2026/27 projects.

Looking ahead

As we move forward with implementation of the Green Building Program, city staff will keep a close eye on development applications to see how these policies work in practice. Staff will continue meeting with builders,

property owners and other stakeholders to understand what's working well and what needs adjustment. This ongoing feedback will help us make sure the program is practical, effective and achievable.

Right now, our ability to offer financial or procedural incentives for green building is limited. With fewer federal incentives, such as those for residential solar installations, it's important that we look for new funding options at the state or local level. Finding creative funding opportunities and building partnerships will help keep sustainable development within reach for more projects and more people.

The City will also keep investing in education and local capacity. That means helping builders and developers learn about new technologies, encouraging the use of locally sourced, low-carbon materials and supporting training programs that prepare workers for green jobs. By building knowledge, skills and stronger local markets, we can help create a community where sustainable development is the standard—not the exception.

Attachment A

Initial Green Building Program proposal (Prepared by Sustainable Solutions Group, Inc.)
Prepared by Sustainable Solutions Group, Inc.
January 2025

Attachment B

Green Building Financial Analysis
prepared by BAE Urban Economics

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415 6th St. | Vancouver, WA 98660 | cityofvancouver.us