

FIVE/12 Agenda - six month report

The FIVE/12 Agenda aims to reduce real and perceived barriers to green building by creating at least five tangible green building success stories over 12 months and create a sense of momentum towards fewer green building barriers and more incentives in 2010.



The Scope

The FIVE/12 Agenda employed a two pronged approach. Firstly, Sustainable Connections worked with City of Bellingham staff to identify five goals that could be achieved and adopted in 2009. Secondly, a survey was developed and implemented to gather input from private sector leaders in the green building field. This survey, it is anticipated, will help to inform future decisions about where to focus efforts.

The FIVE

City of Bellingham staff has integrated components of the FIVE/12 Agenda into their 2009 strategic plan. The FIVE are:

Develop a green permit review team

An interdepartmental team has been established to review BuiltGreen, LEED, and comparable “green” building designs and applications. A designated lead for the team serves as project manager for green building projects which will result in a more coordinated and efficient review. Team members are familiar with green building techniques and will take advantage of educational opportunities to keep up with the industry.

Create system for reducing permit review time

The dedicated green permit review team will review green building projects in an integrated, rather than linear process. With the built-in project manager and dedicated team, the permit review process yields greater efficiency and improved outcomes. In addition, because of the anticipated increase in weatherization and energy efficiency projects funded by federal stimulus money, the Permit Center is developing helpful guidelines that clarify when a permit is needed or not. This is intended to offer predictability to the permit process and avoid delays.

Identify, analyze, and make available to the public alternative methods for green construction

Alternative methods and materials for green construction will be developed into policy once the permanent Building Official is hired (anticipated in 2009). Which alternatives will be developed into policies will be based, in part, on methods/materials commonly requested, such as open loop hydronic heating systems. The intent of the policy is to streamline the allowance of these alternatives by avoiding repetitive interpretations, thereby providing greater predictability to the public. Already approved is the waterless urinal.

Incorporate LEED-ND prerequisites and other sustainable frameworks into Urban Villages

Urban Villages comply with the essential components of LEED-ND, due in large part to the mixed-use design and the transit and pedestrian orientation that are an innate part of this development approach. The Samish Way Urban Village was analyzed for its compliance with the LEED-ND guidelines, and this analysis helped shape the associated development regulations. A similar analysis will be conducted for the Fountain Urban Village. A proposal is being made in the Comp Plan update to use LEED-ND as a tool to measure the long-term sustainability of proposed Urban Village master plans.



Analyze effectiveness of "Green Factor" program

The Green Factor is a scorecard for low impact development techniques and landscaping requirements that results in an increase in the quality and quantity of landscaping provided with new development. The Green Factor is being proposed as the landscape code for the Samish Way Urban Village, in the Urban Infill Toolkit for townhomes and courtyards, and possibly as a requirement for the expansion of big-box retail stores.

Plus TWO!

Two bonus incentives have been initiated by the City of Bellingham will be pursuing a water right permit for rainwater catchment for non-potable indoor/outdoor uses within designated areas. The City will also continue work on updating their existing draft of a rainwater catchment policy.

Research

Sustainable Connections conducted a detailed survey to identify and better understand the barriers to sustainable development and provide recommendations for potential incentives to be used in the City of Bellingham. City of Bellingham, Sustainable Connections and the private sector building community collaborated to develop an initial series of potential incentives and identifiable barriers to sustainable building practices at the local level.

Each incentive/barrier was ranked and discussed in a 45 minute face-to-face interview with over 50 members of the development community in Bellingham. Follow-up from each survey provided for accurate analysis aiding in both the qualitative and quantitative reports. The survey is intended to understand the challenges green builders face and to identify the most effective opportunity for change. The group found the regulatory barriers associated in commercial and residential buildings and have focused efforts on refining the municipal areas that can work towards regulatory reform.

Findings

The complete results of the survey will be published soon. The following are the most frequently reported comments by the interviewees and the findings:

(1) Consistent code interpretation would increase the absorption of green building in our local market. (2) Increasing code flexibility for LID techniques would improve the accessibility and increased usage of these techniques. (3) There is interest in gaining easy access to information on current incentives and acceptable building techniques. (4) Creating an integrated interdepartmental permit team would provide a more holistic review, ultimately decreasing the amount of time necessary to process a permit. (5) It is important to find an equal balance in parking standards that encourages affordable development while increasing pedestrian and public transit activity. (6) Third party verification of claimed green standing should be required to address the possible abuse of incentives.

Next Steps

The last six-months of 2009 will be dedicated to supporting City of Bellingham staff in implementing these seven commitments and reporting success stories. We will also be developing a plan to build on these successes and keep building momentum.

Could there be **TEN in '10?**

Acknowledgments

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