

Green building program offers faster permit review

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The City of Bellingham's permit center launched a seven-month pilot program in March to encourage and support green building projects by reducing building permit review time for certified green projects and assigning them to a new green project review team.

"The City is committed to promoting sustainability by supporting projects that conserve resources and minimize impact on the environment," said city building official Jim Tinner in a statement. "This pilot promotes green building projects by providing incentives at the permitting stage."

The pilot program — known internally as the "bin-bump-up" program — will decrease standard permit review times for eligible projects by one "bump-up." For example, a project that typically would be eligible for 28-day review will be bumped-up to a seven-day review if it meets all applicable requirements, Tinner said.

Those projects also will be eligible to schedule a design meeting with the City's new green project review team to identify potential code conflicts between the project's concepts and City building codes.

The pilot project has been coordinated with the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County's (BIAWC) Built Green Program, with support from Sustainable Connections.

These permit review incentives will be offered for new buildings and residences that achieve either a Built Green 4- or 5-star standard or a U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) LEED gold or platinum standard. Project registration with the BIAWC or the USGBC is necessary to be eligible and third party verification will be required at the time of project completion to ensure that the project was built to the eligibility threshold. Other equivalent green programs may be eligible, as determined by the City's planning director or building official.

The pilot program will conclude on October 31. City officials will use the experience gained through the pilot project to create permanent policies to encourage green building, Tinner said, adding that this is the first of several 2010 initiatives aimed to increase conservation, energy efficiency and green building.