



# THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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## Faster permitting for green projects part of Bellingham's Ten in '10 effort

JARED PABEN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - The house Grant Myers plans to build is environmentally friendly, incorporating everything from wider-spaced studs to save wood to a central air system that stays within the insulated part of a house, saving energy.

But perhaps the most amazing thing: He submitted the building permit application on Thursday, April 15, before he went on vacation, and it was ready on Tuesday, April 20.

"I never expected the permit would be ready before I got back," he said.

The project qualified for what city officials are calling a "bin-bump-up," meaning it scored high enough on an environmentally friendly construction rating system to qualify for expedited permit review. That's part of the Ten in '10 initiative, where the city will do 10 things this year to encourage green-building techniques.

The "bin-bump-up" is a pilot project that began March 1 and will run through Oct. 31. Myers' house, a two-story, 1,428-square-foot home along King Street near Hardware Sales, was the first to qualify for expedited review. The city had seven days to review the permit; it typically has 28 days for a house.

"The city has been blasted for years about permit turnaround," said Nick Hartrich, green building and smart growth program manager at Bellingham-based nonprofit Sustainable Connections. That's why this speedier review is so exciting, he said. Past studies have shown builders value expedited review as an incentive.

The nonprofit helped the city develop the Ten in '10 initiative.

"We now have an example to draw from or point people towards when we have people come in and ask 'what's up?'" city planner Steve Sundin said.

City staff may decide to alter requirements when making the program permanent, he said. To qualify for expedited review, a project currently must aim for a gold standard under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards or four stars under Built Green standards, both commonly used industry standards.

Myers said he intends to hit five stars with his house. It took a lot of work, said his builder, John Nelson.

"The reason people don't do it is it's really, really hard," Nelson said, involving lots of conserving of materials. For example, they're reusing all but one-quarter of the house currently on site, for the same cost as sending it all to the landfill, he said.

Making the house green added about 5 percent to their costs, he said, and it took him about 100 hours of effort to keep it to 5 percent. But reducing waste means they can price the home so that a working person with a salary can afford it, he said.

Nelson and Myers believe they could charge more for a green home, which will reduce living costs for the buyers, but they don't know how much more. Myers intends to start construction soon.

There is demand for green homes, Myers said. People here buy Toyota Priuses, which are more expensive than conventional cars of the same size, he noted, because they know they'll save over the long run.

"I think there are people interested in doing the right thing around here," he said.

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## **TEN IN '10 PROJECTS**

City planners will do 10 things in 2010 to encourage green building. The first, expedited permit review for green projects, has already started. The rest of the steps are in various stages, but most have yet to be rolled out this year:

- "Bin-bump-up" pilot project: Expedited review for permits began March 1 and goes through Oct.31.
- Construction waste recycling pilot project: Staff will create policies aimed at reducing construction and demolition waste to the landfill.
- Green code adoption: The city plans to adopt the International Green Building Code, which is still under development. That will remove some barriers in current law to green buildings.
- Transportation mode shift incentives: The city will look at incentives to get people to not drive their cars and use alternate modes of transportation.
- Subject-to-field-inspection permits: The city will issue simple permits after a field inspection, reducing permit times.
- Sustainable water management program: Create rules and policies aimed at reusing household water and collecting rain water for use.
- Green roof initiative: Study the effectiveness of the Lightcatcher building's green roof and provide quicker permit reviews for green roofs citywide.

- Compile public and private utility incentives: Create a one-stop shop for information on incentives for reducing utilities usage.
- Staff training for review and inspections of green buildings: This is ongoing.
- Advanced materials and methods: Provide guidance and requirements for doing things like waterless urinals, solar water heaters, composting toilets and porous concrete.

## **LEARN MORE**

- For more information, go to [Sustainableconnections.org/greenbuilding](http://Sustainableconnections.org/greenbuilding) or go to cob.org and click on "City launches ten green building initiatives in 2010" under "News" at the right. You can also go to [cob.org/services/environment/lid/green-building.aspx](http://cob.org/services/environment/lid/green-building.aspx) for more information.
- To see the Built Green checklist filled out by home builder John Nelson for the first home to go through the city's expedited permitting program, .

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2010/04/24/1399911/faster-permitting-for-green-projects.html#ixzz0mE5cnBEt>