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County beefs up green building rules with higher standards, new incentives

By [Daily Journal of Commerce](#)



Photo by Ned Ahrens

Bow Lake Recycling and Transfer Station in Tukwila is on track for a LEED gold rating. County officials said the \$88 million project was on time and \$4 million under budget.

King County is stepping up its commitment to green building with a new ordinance approved by the Metropolitan King County Council to replace rules that expire Dec. 31.

Under the ordinance, all county government construction and major renovation projects — including transfer stations, bus shelters, roads and bridges — will be required to seek a LEED platinum rating. Developers will get incentives to build greener projects.

For the past five years, county projects were required to meet LEED gold standards.

Patti Southard, project manager for the county's GreenTools program, said the ordinance was developed with input from developers and people from the design, construction and green building industry.

The new policy is intended to help King County meet several long-term targets, including cutting in half the total greenhouse gas emissions from government operations by 2030 and reducing by at least 80 percent the overall greenhouse gas emissions countywide by 2050. The targets are based on 2007 emissions levels.

The legislation requires that county building projects comply with environmental standards if they can be met within certain cost constraints.

“King County's commitment to green buildings balances two kinds of green, protecting both the environment and tax dollars, by ensuring project costs aren't substantially increased in order to meet environmental building standards,” said Councilmember Larry Phillips, in a statement.

Other changes include:

- Ensuring that design, construction, maintenance and operation of any capital project is consistent with the latest green building and sustainable development practices.
- Encouraging responsible stewardship of public funds through life-cycle cost analysis.
- Establishing minimum performance requirements for energy, emissions, stormwater management, and diversion of construction and demolition materials.
- Including green building on county-funded affordable-housing projects.
- Adding alternative green building rating systems, including Built Green, Evergreen Sustainable Development Standard, Salmon Safe and Living Building Challenge.

While the county will be required to follow stringent green-building standards where possible, it will take a different tack for private development. In response to community input, Southard said the county prefers to encourage green construction by creating incentives rather than rules.

Another goal is to help align green building codes throughout the county so developers don't have to work with different standards.

One barrier to green development is regulations that discourage innovative practices, Southard said. The county will create a technical advisory board to evaluate green proposals, potentially clearing the way for projects that could face code hurdles for innovative practices, such as recycling wastewater.

The county's ultimate goal, Southard said, is to achieve carbon neutrality.

“Every project should be a Living Building project,” she said.