

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

San Jose considers citywide 'green building' rules

DEVELOPERS WORRY ABOUT COST

By John Woolfolk
Mercury News

Article Launched: 11/08/2007 01:35:16 AM PST

San Jose leaders are considering whether to hold private development projects such as offices and apartments to the same rigorous environmental standards now required for new city buildings - a proposal that has business leaders anxious and council members divided.

City council members who joined in unanimously endorsing Mayor Chuck Reed's aggressive new environmental goals a week ago support the idea of extending the "green building" policy to private development, but they disagree over whether to make it a requirement. Business leaders fear a costly and cumbersome government mandate and say it could chill investment and job growth.

"We really encourage the city of San Jose to use an approach that is voluntary," Beverley Bryant, an official with the Home Builders Association of Northern California, told a key city council committee Wednesday.

But Reed, who has cast himself as the "green mayor," believes some environmental building standards are unavoidable - and not necessarily in conflict with his goal of making San Jose more

business-friendly.

The council's rules committee, which Reed chairs, voted Wednesday to have the city administration study the concept and bring recommendations to the council in January. Reed noted that with the state moving aggressively to tackle global warming, future development approvals are likely to involve requirements to reduce pollution and energy use anyway.

"Mandates are coming," Reed said. "We may be ahead of the curve in how we implement them."

San Jose adopted a "green building" policy for its own construction projects in 2001 and toughened it in March. The policy now requires all municipal buildings over 10,000 square feet to achieve at least "silver" certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program.

Under the LEED program, the building council rates projects on a point scale based on their energy and water efficiency and their use of sustainably produced construction materials. Projects that go beyond requirements for basic certification are given progressively higher ratings of silver, gold or platinum.

While steps such as wastewater recycling or locally harvested construction materials tend to increase construction costs up front, Reed and other advocates say the reduction in energy and water use delivers more savings over time.

San Jose already has begun holding some private developers to similar standards. At the urging of Reed and newly elected Councilman Kansen Chu, the council in August required owners of the 120-acre San Jose Flea Market site in Berryessa to meet LEED silver standards as a condition of rezoning the land

Advertisement

MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

(800) 870-NEWS

Subscribe today!

www.mercurynews.com



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

to allow up to 2,818 housing units.

This week, Chu, who represents the district, and three other council members proposed that San Jose look into adopting the standard citywide.

At the same time, two other council members, Pete Constant and Pierluigi Oliverio, called for the city to explore an incentive-based rather than mandatory policy and to consider other standards in addition to LEED.

"When you start mandating and regulating in a haphazard way, there's no way the market is going to respond well," said Constant.

But Chu and others said the current city policy already includes incentives for private development that have largely gone ignored.

"While we certainly need to look at incentives, we need to take it a step further," said Councilman Sam Liccardo, who backed Chu's proposal. "This isn't the time to be timid."

Contact John Woolfolk at jwoolfolk@mercurynews.com or (408) 975-9346.

Advertisement

MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

(800) 870-NEWS

Subscribe today!

www.mercurynews.com



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™