

Tapping the Zoning Code to Enable Greener Buildings and Communities

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Many communities are opening up their zoning codes to [identify and remove barriers](#), and adopting language that will encourage greener building and greener living outcomes. You wouldn't be surprised to hear that Portland, Oregon has been greening its zoning code for several years including a handful of [updates](#) this year. You might be surprised that other cities and counties, such as the [City of Buffalo](#), NY and [Will County](#), Illinois, are doing (or have done) the same through a community-focused comprehensive look at how the zoning code could better encourage the development of a greener community. In these last few weeks of 2011, both Philadelphia and New York are at milestones worth celebrating.

The City of New York is the most recent to jump into the ring of rethinking the zoning code with their announcement last week of "[Zone Green](#)." With a backdrop of many other successful initiatives related to Mayor Bloomberg's [PlaNYC](#), this initiative will be one worthy of following in 2012. Zone Green is an outgrowth of the extremely successful efforts of the [Green Codes Task Force](#), coordinated by the [Urban Green Council](#). The Green Codes Task Force, which put forth 111 policy recommendations in a 2010 report, now claims 29 of those recommendations as victories, a few of which were [adopted just last week](#). Last week's code upgrades will improve building air quality, stop certain streams of wastewater from construction sites, and repurpose spent concrete into most new pavings.

This week Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter will sign the City's new zoning code that was adopted by the City Council last week. This is the City's first zoning code update in 50 years. Among the long [list](#) of sustainability elements in the Zoning Code Commission's [final report](#) are incentives for increased development density for commercial buildings that earn LEED Gold and Platinum. These LEED incentives are a popular way to encourage [green building development](#), and are an important part of the City's strategy to leverage the power of the zoning code to facilitate more sustainable development. Other areas of focus include: encouraging water conservation, promoting renewable energy and building energy efficiency, reducing vehicle miles travelled, promoting healthy, active lifestyles, and encouraging urban food production.

There's a lot to be optimistic about in the green building world in Philadelphia. The City is home to President Obama's \$129 million dollar investment in identifying and deploying energy efficient building technologies, policies and methods (see: [Greater Philadelphia Innovation Cluster](#)). USGBC's local chapter organization – the [Delaware Valley Green Building Council](#) – is one of the strongest in our network. Philadelphia School District was awarded [top spot](#) amongst cities greening their school facilities in a [Best of 2011](#) list released last week by the Center for Green Schools at USGBC. And if that weren't enough, while in a restaurant in Center City two weeks ago before [Cities Alive 2011](#), a waitress told me (effectively un-prompted!) that energy efficient, green, LEED buildings were all over the place, and that green real estate was the only thing renting or selling these days.

If the wait staff in restaurants in your home town aren't talking about a [greener community](#) (and even if they are), you probably have some things to gain from removing barriers and creating opportunity for green buildings, infrastructure and neighborhoods.

LEED for Neighborhood Development looks at this scale of building, planning and development and metrics in the rating system can serve as guidelines to achieving local or regional sustainability goals. Open up USGBC's [resource page](#) for local governments addressing community-scale planning and policy to see how the principles of LEED for Neighborhood Development can help you leverage the power of the zoning code to make sustainability happen in your own backyard.p>

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