



A New Green Building Incentive Policy for Arlington

By John Bloom

A substantially updated and strengthened Green Building Incentive Policy takes effect on March 12 in Arlington.

The Green Building Incentive Policy is a voluntary program that rewards commercial developers with the right to build slightly larger buildings in exchange for designing those buildings to emit fewer greenhouse gases and provide other environmental benefits. The last policy update was in 2014.

The policy is complex and provides different levels of “bonus density” (extra square feet of development) for a wide range of environmental commitments, including, at the highest level, “Net Zero” “Passive House” and “Zero Carbon” certification. So far, no commercial building in Arlington has achieved those certifications.

Highlights of the new policy include:

- Requiring developers to attain a minimum of LEED Gold certification, in addition to a number of other specific requirements, in order to participate in the program. The earlier policy set LEED Silver as the minimum.
- Requiring the use of a small amount of renewable energy, with additional rewards available for higher levels of renewable use.
- Imposing a higher minimum level of energy efficiency, with post-occupancy testing to ensure that actual energy performance meets requirements.
- Requiring that a minimum of 15% of parking spaces be wired for and capable of supporting EV charging in the future, and that 4% have an EV charging station in place from the outset.

Climate advocates including the Potomac River Group were disappointed that no amount of building electrification, or preparation for future building electrification, is required by the new policy. Building electrification involves reducing the amount of dirty fossil fuels such as natural

gas burned in a building. This approach reduces greenhouse gas emissions and allows the building to make an early transition to carbon neutrality.

Preparation for building electrification (making a building “electric-ready”) involves taking steps during design and construction to minimize the cost and feasibility of transitioning gas appliances and infrastructure to electric in the future. Developers and County staff said that there is not yet enough agreement about what can be reasonably required in this area. The policy does include electrification measures among a menu of options that developers can choose, and the highest levels of green building certification prohibit onsite burning of fossil fuels.

The County Board decided that the policy should be reviewed in 2023 to see if additional measures can be included at that time.

More information and the full text of the updated Green Building Incentive Policy is available [here](#).

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