

September 28, 1999

TO: The County Board of Arlington, Virginia

FROM: William T. Donahue, County Manager *WTD/pw*

SUBJECT: Adoption of a Pilot Green Building Incentive Program

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Adopt the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) Green Building Rating System as a pilot project to evaluate special exception site plan requests for bonus density consistent with Section 36.H.5. a.(1) of the Zoning Ordinance. The pilot project will commence on ~~January 1~~, April 3, 2000, with a three-year sunset provision.
2. Request the County Manager to convene a working group to evaluate the results of the pilot project and develop recommendations for a long-term comprehensive green building program in Arlington.

SUMMARY: Arlington County is looking to join other forward-thinking localities in encouraging developers to incorporate green building components in buildings built or renovated in Arlington. Staff proposes to do this by establishing a pilot program in which developers' requests for bonus density, in conjunction with a proposed new, or major amendment to an existing, special exception site plan project, may be analyzed for providing environmental amenities by meeting the requirements of the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) Green Building Rating System. The current version of the LEED™ Standards 2.0 (see attached) is being finalized and will be voted on by the U.S. Green Building Council's members in October 1999 with an effective date of March 29, 2000. As a member of the U.S. Green Building Council, Arlington County is involved in the drafting and approval of the LEED™ model. As the standards continue to evolve for the LEED™ program, we will incorporate these changes into Arlington's program.

The pilot project would commence operation with special exception site plans approved on or after ~~January 1~~, April 3, 2000, before which time the Department of Environmental Services (DES), Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development (DCPHD), Office of Support Services (OSS), and the Department of Economic Development (DED) would identify the LEED™ bonus threshold level appropriate for Arlington and develop a formula by which bonus density may be

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Reviewed by County Attorney: *CWM*

assigned at the various levels of the LEED™ program. The pilot green building program would “sunset” after three years.

Finally, the County Manager would convene a working group, including community and building industry representation, to monitor the process and evaluate the various issues related to implementing a long-term comprehensive green building program in Arlington. This group would make recommendations to the County Manager for a permanent program in no more than three years.

BACKGROUND: Green buildings are defined as structures and their surrounding landscapes designed, constructed, operated, and dismantled in an environmentally responsible manner to minimize short and long-term negative impacts on the environment. Green buildings not only provide owners and occupants with energy and water savings, good indoor air quality, and healthy, pleasant and productive surroundings, but also benefit the community by being resource efficient and by conserving energy.

Green building practices, as well as the use of green products and processes, can result in short- and long-term economic and environmental advantages for local governments and communities. With the mobility of our society, the attractiveness of an area and its facilities for relocating businesses and families has become an important arena in which communities are competing. Stimulated by a growing awareness of the cumulative impacts of development on the environment, green building practitioners and advocates have started to create a variety of innovative implementation tools at the local, regional, and federal level. Some local governments that have implemented green building programs include Austin, Texas; Santa Monica, California; Portland, Oregon; San Diego, California; Seattle, Washington; and Hennepin County, Minnesota.

Several buildings incorporating green concepts have made their debut in Arlington. These include recent projects designed and built by Arlington County’s Office of Support Services, including Fire Stations 9 and 2 and the planned Walter Reed Community Center. Development incorporating significant green building components includes the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) building and the Nature Conservancy building, both located in Ballston.

Interest in adopting a green building policy in Arlington was further inspired by a recent tour of the Natural Resources Defense Council offices in Washington, D.C. County Board members, County staff, and members of the building industry attended the tour and were impressed by the efficiency and functionality of this green office space. As a result of the tour, several County Board members asked staff to develop a green building policy to encourage developers in Arlington to include green building concepts in site plans.

The goal of Arlington's pilot green building program is to encourage environmental stewardship by providing an immediate incentive for developers to incorporate more sustainable building practices in their construction projects in Arlington. As outlined by the draft LEED™ Green Building Rating System 2.0, these practices could include measures to conserve energy, water, and other natural resources, to provide good indoor air quality, to use recycled-content materials during construction, and to reduce overall waste generation and resulting pollution. The proposed green building program would provide the option of bonus density to developers who incorporate specific levels of green technology in their construction. This green building enhancement could be considered an environmental amenity that would justify modifications of use under the provisions of Section 35.H.5.a (1) of the Zoning Ordinance.

In order to standardize the evaluation of green buildings, the U.S. Green Building Council is refining the LEED™ Green Building Rating System. Experts from all segments of the building industry are included in the development of the rating system, including product manufacturers, environmental groups, building owners, building professionals, utilities, local government, research institutions, professional societies, and universities. The LEED™ Green Building Rating System is a voluntary, consensus-based, market-driven building rating system based on existing proven technology. It evaluates environmental performance from a "whole building" perspective over a building's life cycle, providing a definitive standard for what constitutes a "green building".

LEED™ is based on accepted energy and environmental principles and strikes a balance between known effective practices and emerging concepts. LEED™ is a self-certifying system designed for rating new and existing commercial, institutional, and high-rise residential buildings. It is a feature-oriented system where credits are earned for satisfying each criterion. Different levels of green building certification (bronze, silver, gold, and platinum) are awarded based on the total credits earned. ~~A system of certified professional reviewers evaluate green building programs and establish a rating for award determination.~~ The developer submits to the U.S. Green Building Council plans and drawings for the building outlining the project's green components. The U.S. Green Building Council evaluates the submission and certifies the project at a specific award level. The system is designed to be comprehensive in scope, yet simple in operation.

The benefits to Arlington in adopting the LEED™ Green Building Rating System are significant. First, the LEED™ system is a comprehensive, industry-based rating system that is the pre-eminent effort at setting professional standards and evaluation criteria for assessing green building initiatives. Adopting the system allows Arlington to move forward quickly with implementation, using an industry-acceptable system, while avoiding the costly and staff-intensive effort to develop a stand-alone system for evaluation at this time.

Second, use of the network of certified analysts already established by the Green Building Council allows us to implement a program without the substantial cost of developing in-house, technical review capacity. Under the LEED™ program, the cost of review is paid for by the applicant and the technical staff for U.S. Green Building Council review is already in place.

Therefore, we recommend that Arlington County adopt a green building policy as follows:

1. Use the LEED™ Green Building Rating System and self-certification program as a standard for evaluating green buildings in Arlington. This would be a three-year pilot program beginning on ~~January 1~~, April 3, 2000 with a sunset date of ~~January 1~~, April 3, 2003. Developers seeking modifications of use regulations for green building compliance would have their building plans certified as described in the LEED™ guidelines. This final written certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, along with the plans and/or documents to support the certification, would be submitted and reviewed as part of the Administrative Regulation 4.1 site plan process.
2. Prior to the ~~January 1~~, April 3, 2000, start date, staff will analyze the value of the different LEED™ rating levels as they would apply in Arlington to determine how much bonus credit could be given for each rating level, and what is an appropriate “compliance” threshold for Arlington. These administrative guidelines would be established for use in site plan review.
3. The County Manager will convene a working group to evaluate the various issues related to implementing a long-term comprehensive green building program in Arlington and to recommend any changes or enhancements to the adopted pilot program and the LEED™ rating system. This group will report to the County Manager and the County Board prior to the expiration of the pilot project.

A copy of the draft LEED Green Building Rating System™ Version 2.0 is attached for your information.