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Boston Ready to Go Green

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By Thomas C. Palmer Jr., The Boston Globe

Dec. 20--Boston is expected to become the first major city in the nation to require private developers to adhere to a strict set of so-called green-building standards, officials said yesterday.

The standards will be required before permits are issued for all projects of 50,000 square feet or more. The goal is to make new buildings more energy efficient and environmentally friendly, by promoting, for example, use of efficient heating and cooling systems, recycled building materials, and careful separation and disposal of waste.

City officials said they will ask the Boston Redevelopment Authority tomorrow to incorporate the green building standards into municipal zoning laws, following the recommendations of a task force appointed by Mayor Thomas M. Menino in 2003. The standards are expected to be formally adopted by the Boston Zoning Commission in January after a public comment period.

"There's a big national story here," James W. Hunt III, chief of environmental and energy services for the city, said yesterday. "We'll be the first city to implement green building requirements."

Many other large cities around the US have set green building standards for public buildings or publicly funded projects. Boston would be the first to impose those conditions on privately developed properties, too, Hunt said.

The recommended standards would mandate new buildings meet requirements in at least 26 of about 70 areas of design and construction, such as how they dispose of waste materials and how energy efficient walls and glass are. Developers will have to certify they have met the requirements, and city officials will confirm the builders' measures, Hunt said.

The Boston standards pointedly do not require the buildings be certified under the green building rating system known as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design -- commonly called LEED -- of the US Green Building Council, an industry group.

"The LEED process can be lengthy, onerous in documentation, and costly," said Hunt. "Also, we don't want to rely on a third party to do the certification process."

Boston's certification process will be simpler, though the environmental standards will be almost the same as the LEED list. Boston's list includes additional ways developers can choose to help qualify buildings for certification, including using cleaner diesel construction vehicles, recharging area groundwater, and establishing transportation plans for future building users.

Members of the local development community differed on the new rules' effect.

David I. Begelfer, chief executive of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties' Massachusetts chapter, said the business community will embrace the standards despite the expected increased building costs they will bring.

"The threshold they established is fairly reasonable and should not be that difficult to meet," he said.

But developer Dean F. Stratouly said it would be difficult and expensive to bring a downtown office tower into compliance.

"While no one is against this in principle, it doesn't help the underlying economics of bringing new product to the market," Stratouly said.

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