

DATE OF MEETING SEPTEMBER 23, 2024
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SUBJECT SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING POLICY

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with the opportunity to adopt a new Sustainable Building Policy. |

Recommendation

That Council adopt Policy Number COU-229 – Sustainable Building Policy.

BACKGROUND

As part of the policy renewal project, the existing Green Building Strategy was identified by Staff for an update. The existing policy was adopted in 2006-MAY-29 and last updated 2011-MAR-28 and applies only to new construction or substantial additions to city-owned and operated facilities. Currently, new city facilities greater than 500 square meters in size are to be certified LEED® Silver, and new city facilities greater than 900 square meters in size are to be certified LEED® Gold. Certification can be opted out of with Council approval. While the existing Green Building Strategy has been in effect, seven city facilities were constructed, two of which were certified under LEED®. The remaining five buildings pursued green-building practices but forewent the certification. Neither of the two originally certified buildings have been recertified since original construction.

LEED® was developed about 25 years ago as a way to measure and define green building. Since that time, several other proprietary initiatives have gained notoriety including Canadian Green Building Council's Zero Carbon Building Standard, Passive House, Well Building Standard, Green Globes, BOMA Best, and others. Each of these proprietary rating systems provide design and construction guidelines, and project certifications. Collectively they cover several different building archetypes in residential, commercial, industrial, and public infrastructure. Certifications are generally reached by implementing design and construction strategies that align with various goals which are then awarded points or credits. Different thresholds of point-totals equate to different levels of certification.

Since the original Green Building Strategy was adopted, there have been significant advances in the codification of energy and efficiency requirements for new buildings. Recognizing the adoption of the zero-carbon step code, and acceleration of the BC Energy Step Code by Nanaimo, using the targets included in these documents provides a good starting point for new buildings in the corporate portfolio. Although many of the building archetypes the city would build are not required to meet either the ZCSC or higher levels of the BC Energy Step Code due to their occupancy classification, consideration of these targets is prudent and shows leadership of the requirements the development community must meet.

In 2022, with the adoption of City Plan: Nanaimo ReImagined, Council provided community-specific, strategic direction that included not only construction related green goals, but also community-oriented sustainability goals. Many of these sustainability goals reflect available credits offered in LEED® and other proprietary certifications.

DISCUSSION

Environmentally responsible construction needs to consider many factors, including: the building users, operations, longevity, durability, functionality and the purpose for which it was built. “Green” long ago became a marketing strategy for many manufacturers and suppliers and is a label that is inconsistently applied and has limited enforcement. Truly sustainable construction requires a holistic approach, considering all facets of the building’s life cycle, and many decisions beyond just the energy source and emissions.

The proposed Sustainable Building policy provides a framework for each project team to apply the goals laid out in City Plan. This allows the City Plan principles to shape design principles, construction, and operating systems while maintaining the flexibility for each project to incorporate the City Plan goals that best align with the project being built. The proposed policy update is intended to focus on fit-for-purpose construction, at a project level, on a project-by-project basis, by the project team. Moving towards the goals of City Plan will happen while still meeting the existing requirements for development such as development and building permits, design guidelines, input from the Design Advisory Panel, and the building’s form and character.

The guidance document (see Attachment B) is intended to be a technical reference for the project team, assisting in the application of the principles of City Plan through building standards and design guidelines. While not all topic areas of City Plan are directly referenced in the guidance document, the topic areas that have corresponding industry standards, codes, and guidelines are included, e.g. National Energy Code of Canada for Buildings (NECB), American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). The guidance document also includes an introductory statement for each of the design criteria covered. These introductions provide examples of leadership within the various categories to help guide the project team. Some leadership examples are rooted in LEED®, others are in the Zoning Bylaw, or the Canadian Green Building Council’s Zero Carbon Building Standard. The guidance document is intended to be a more nimble response to the changing landscape of sustainable buildings and design. The guidance document can be updated on its own more readily than the policy. These updates may be needed to reflect changes in zoning bylaws and design guidelines where it is appropriate for corporate facilities to follow those guidelines.

Nanaimo was ranked among the top five fastest-growing regions in Canada during the last census. With growth comes increased demand for services and infrastructure. Instead of following a proprietary, point-focused path to sustainable construction, the proposed Sustainable Building Policy builds on the goals and strategic direction laid out in City Plan and focuses on areas important to the community but not requiring a certain number of points.

OPTIONS

1. That Council adopt Policy Number COU-229 – Sustainable Building Policy.
 - The advantages of this option: an updated approach for sustainable building aligned with the objectives of the Official Community Plan and one that holistically considers the inherent trade-offs of construction. Decoupling from LEED® certification allows fit-for-purpose design considerations that can respond to variable project needs and better suit community requirements.
 - The disadvantages of this option are that the reliance is placed on the project team to guide the sustainability process and balance the project demands. There would also be less regional, national, or global recognition of the sustainable building efforts without the project listed in a proprietary register.
 - Financial Implications: Sustainability initiatives have varying impact on the cost of buildings, some of which have life cycle pay offs, while others provide tangible community and quality of life improvement. Proprietary certifications have fees associated, and significant costs to assemble reporting requirements. By forgoing a proprietary certification, these costs no longer apply. The actual financial implications for each project are unknown and would be heavily reliant on the specifics of the project.

2. That Council provide Staff with alternate direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The initial Green Building Strategy was adopted in 2006.
- The proposed Sustainable Building Policy shifts away from a proprietary certification.
- Nanaimo's OCP provides holistic, community focused sustainable initiatives that should be applied to design and construction of corporate facilities.
- Sustainable building should consider the totality of the design, construction, operations, and de-construction of the building.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Sustainable Building Policy – Policy Number COU-229
- Attachment B – Guidance Document Support the Sustainability Policy for City-Owned Buildings
COU-229 Sustainable Building Policy
- Attachment C – Sustainable Building Policy Presentation |

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