



Cracking the energy code

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The fall of 2014 was groundbreaking to both global and local energy and climate change initiatives. Days after the People's Climate March in September, Mayor de Blasio announced a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in New York City by 35% in 2025 and 80% by 2050 below 2005 levels. To reach these substantial targets, we will have to be ever more aggressive in decreasing our energy consumption as approximately three quarters of these GHG emissions result from powering, heating and cooling our city's structures. Through an imperative support of these goals, the Department of Buildings rolled out the 2014 NYC Energy Conservation Code (NYCECC) on January 1st this year setting crucial energy efficiency standards for new constructions and renovations. The month following the Mayor's new policy, the USGBC broadcast that projects vying for LEED certification would be able to register under LEED v3 rating systems until October 31, 2016. This shifts the full adoption of the more stringent standards of LEED v4 by just over a year.

Although the two policy changes originate from different administrations, their goals are set in tandem. LEED rating systems reference ASHRAE Standard 90.1 for their energy performance credits. LEED v3 requires new buildings to demonstrate a 10% improvement (and 5% improvement for major renovations) in building performance when compared with a baseline case of ASHRAE 90.1-2007. The 2014 NYCECC, under which all new jobs will be reviewed, calls for compliance with the even more energy conscious standard of ASHRAE 90.1-2010. This later version represents a considerable increase in efficiency from the 2007 standards as well as new requirements not previously addressed. ASHRAE 90.1-2010 regulates more equipment like computer loads, elevators, escalators and domestic water booster pumps. Organizations have quantified the difference between the two versions to be an estimated 19% increase in energy cost savings by adopting ASHRAE 90.1-2010.

With this in mind, the cost accompanying LEED certification is one of the primary reasons building owners are hesitant to apply for the green building standard. As the NYCECC mandates compliance with energy standards more stringent than those required for LEED v3, the higher associated design costs are significantly reduced. These code requirements can reignite the discussion of pursuing the revered LEED certification for new projects across our city. The new energy code will provide buildings with the benefits of lower operating costs and positive environmental impacts.

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