



New York City's Local Law 87: More than a path to compliance - by David Sachs

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The “Greener, Greater Buildings Plan” is designed to increase the energy efficiency of New York City’s large buildings. With its creation came new regulations to help building owners reduce their energy and water usage. Among those regulations was Local Law 87 (LL87), the energy auditing and retro-commissioning law. With the recent Climate Mobilization Act and Local Law 97, many building owners are wondering how LL87 relates to Local Law 97 (LL97).

LL87 requires NYC buildings larger than 50,000 s/f to perform an energy audit and retro-commissioning every 10 years. The on-site energy audit, performed by an energy professional, gives building owners an evaluation of their building’s energy performance, how effectively their equipment is functioning, and what improvements could reduce energy usage and increase building comfort. Retro-commissioning is a tune-up for the building to ensure that the equipment is operating as intended.

How LL87 Relates to LL97 and LL33

An LL87 audit should provide a roadmap to achieve carbon emissions targets in LL97. The retro-commissioning that is required in LL87 should help capture low-cost carbon savings. An experienced energy auditor should give you an idea of your carbon emissions and what actions you will need to take if your emissions are over the limits. LL87 audits should also focus on identifying measures that would maximize carbon emissions reductions and energy saving measures.

For rent-regulated buildings, there is overlap between the prescriptive measures in LL97 and the required retro-commissioning measures in LL87. Regardless of your building size or occupant type, those prescriptive measures are generally lower cost and have an immediate impact on your building’s performance and tenant comfort.

While LL87 and LL97 are separate from Local Law 33 (requires buildings above 25,000 s/f to post an energy efficiency grade at public entrances beginning this year), the required retro-commissioning and energy efficiency measures uncovered in your audit will help increase your Energy Star Portfolio Manager score and building’s city grade.

Selecting an LL87 Provider

It may seem daunting to find an expert. What questions should you ask? Here’s a list of questions

you can ask potential vendors. The answers should help you get the most value out of LL87 and set you up for LL97 compliance.

How long have you been providing LL87 services? Those who have been providing these services for over five years will have a strong understanding of the law and what actions will produce a real solution.

How quickly can you get my energy audit and retro-commissioning study done? While you might want speedy action, be wary of providers that say they can complete everything in just a few weeks. It takes longer to complete a comprehensive audit and retro-commissioning study. Depending on the time of year and your building's need for a heating and/or cooling test, the provider may not be able to complete the study until the weather reaches certain temperatures. You should plan for the entire process to take at least six months.

Do you have a Professional Engineer (PE) or Registered Architect (RA) on staff? The proposed changes to LL87 include a requirement where a registered design professional needs to sign off on all energy audit and retro-commissioning reports. Make sure your provider has a PE or RA on staff.

What is your approach to retro-commissioning and energy auditing? An experienced retro-commissioning auditor looks at the building and its systems together. Your partner should help you plan for the future by approaching the building holistically. Most buildings will have multiple retro-commissioning deficiencies.

What do you do once LL87 is complete? A provider should guide you to select the highest impact improvements that will keep you in compliance and keep LL97 in mind. Whether they turnkey the improvements themselves or provide consulting services for the improvements, they should not leave you hanging.

Can you help install/sign off on the list of prescriptive measures in LL97? Like us, some providers may combine their LL87 and LL97 prescriptive measures services into one package.

What's your approach to high-performance buildings? Even high-performance buildings need tune-ups. An experienced agent will have worked with various systems and be able to share examples of when they optimized high-performance systems, like my colleague shares in his retro-commissioning blog.

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