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Published June 24th, 2009

Lafayette Considers Green Building Ordinance

By Cathy Tyson

If the Planning Commission and City Council adopt the suggestions of the Environmental Task Force on a proposed Green Building Ordinance, future remodelers and home builders will have to abide by certain "Build it Green" guidelines. For example, a new single family residence must get a minimum of 50 points on the green point scale. In categories ranging from site, foundation, landscaping, building envelope, insulation, HVAC, appliances and more - each green measure is assigned a point value, based on its benefits. Points can be given on the choice of a particular kind of toilet or using renewable flooring. Remodeling projects that are less than 500 square feet must submit a GreenPoint Existing home checklist with plans.

This is part of the City of Lafayette Environmental Strategy that was adopted in November of 2006. "One of the tasks for the Environmental Task Force is to initiate the development of City guidelines and incentives for sustainable building practices and a green building ordinance," notes a staff report on the matter prepared by Senior Planner Greg Wolff.

In a recent presentation by the Environmental Task Force to the Design Review Commission, the Draft Green Building Ordinance Proposal was uniformly well received. "You don't have to bend over backwards to reach the 50 point level. There's a large menu of choices, pick what you like," said Commissioner Tom Lee. "It does seem pretty reasonable, our office has been using these processes pretty consistently," said Vice Chair Andre Ptaszynski. The goal here is to encourage homeowners to explore design and material alternatives, and to be smart options from the beginning of a project. According to Environmental Task Force member Tom Chastain, "It's about fundamentally good architecture. My own sense is that it starts to make people much more aware of the choices they're making." He also feels there should be adjustment for house size, the larger the footprint of the house the greater the responsibility of the owner.

While the program is not punitive, there will be costs associated with becoming GreenRated. The proposed fee is \$400 for a single family residence plus a GreenRaters verification fee; considerably cheaper than becoming LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

The timing couldn't be better, since California Code of Regulations Title 24 which regulates building efficiency standards will become stricter in August of this year. The Draft Green Building Ordinance Proposal still has a few hoops to jump through before it's enacted.

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