

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE INSIGHT & NEWS

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Boston Proposes Zero Net Carbon Building Zoning Initiative

BY JOSEPH R. DUQUETTE • OCTOBER 28, 2022

The City of Boston and the Boston Planning and Development Agency ("BPDA") have put forward a new proposal, known as the zero net carbon building zoning initiative, which would require that newly constructed buildings over 20,000 square feet — including labs, offices, and housing projects with more than 15 units — immediately hit net zero emissions goals. The proposal would also require the new buildings to be certifiable as LEED Gold, a higher bar for sustainability than the City's current requirement.

Boston's proposed zoning changes follow the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER)'s release of final code language for its Stretch Energy Code and Specialized Municipal Opt-in Code regulations, which is the specialized building code standard targeting net zero emissions in new construction by 2050 "primarily through deep energy efficiency, reduced heating loads, and efficient electrification."

Last year, Boston passed an updated version of the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance ("BERDO") requiring larger existing buildings to reach "net zero" by the year 2050. As presently written, the proposal would require projects to be built to minimize emissions "to the maximum extent feasible" with performance targets that vary depending upon the type of building. The proposal accelerates the city's push to reduce buildings' reliance on fossil fuels by several years, as the City is also seeking to join a state pilot program enabling ten Massachusetts cities and towns to ban natural gas hookups, but there is no guarantee that it will be one of the municipalities chosen to participate.

Existing buildings are responsible for almost 70% of the City's greenhouse gas emissions. While many in the commercial development industry recognize the importance of cutting emissions, some fear that a fossil fuel ban could lead to a drastic increase in governmental process and building costs, further complicating and deterring new construction.

The BPDA has begun holding public meetings on the proposed changes to the Zoning Code, with the public comment period ending on October 28, 2022. For more information, see the Boston Planning & Development Agency's website.

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