



City of Seattle Priority Green and Built Green Partnership to Meet Carbon Reduction Goals

Through its Priority Green Expedited Permitting Program, the City of Seattle offers faster permitting as an incentive for certified green building developments. Seattle relies on independent third-party green rating systems to set the baseline for Seattle's green building standards. Built Green, a local Seattle organization, is the certification program most utilized for earning incentives. The partnership between Built Green and the City coordinates existing resources and processes towards high but achievable thresholds for energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and indoor air quality.

Seattle City Goals

The City of Seattle has established a Climate Action Plan to move towards a carbon-neutral community by 2050. In support of this goal, former Seattle Mayor Gregory Nickels and a local committee explored new ways to incentivize green building projects. The Built Green certification program stood out as a strong framework for green construction performance, given its wide adoption across other Western Washington jurisdictions and its alignment with the City's own sustainability goals.

Seattle established the Priority Green Expedited Program in 2009, which offers faster construction permit processing to projects designed, constructed, and certified per Built Green 4-Star standards or higher. This partnership is highly attractive to developers and supports the City's goal for buildings to use 15% less energy as compared to the Seattle Energy Code (SEC). It also improves metrics for water conservation, indoor air quality, and recycling rates.

CASE STUDY PURPOSE

Demonstrate the impact of local government and home certification program partnerships in driving successful energy efficient home development.

LOCATION

Seattle, Washington

PARTNERSHIP ROLES

City of Seattle, WA: Provides staff resources to shorten building permitting processing time for eligible Built Green-certified projects at the 4-star or better certification level. Seattle also offers incentives in their Land Use Code, providing greater capacity (e.g., floor area or density) for developments that meet Built Green (among other similar) standards.

Built Green: Provides resources to complete project verifications and certifications.



To meet Seattle's climate goals, we partner with many organizations, but it is great working with local organizations like Built Green, and getting the added community value.

JESS HARRIS, CITY OF SEATTLE, PRIORITY GREEN PROGRAM MANAGER

PARTNERSHIP RESULTS

- Over 1,000 expedited permits issued from 2010 to mid-2017
- Green building growth across the community, with developers building to higher standards to access expediting permitting and development bonuses

Built Green's collaboration with the City of Seattle has been tremendously successful, with a sharp increase in Built Green certifications and a shift toward higher star-levels. These results are proof that thoughtful green building partnerships can lead to benefits not just for the parties involved, but for the broader community as housing is greened.

LEAH MISSIK, BUILT GREEN, PROGRAM MANAGER

A Built Green Partnership

The Built Green program encourages environmentally responsible building practices by certifying homes that meet its multi-tier rating system across diverse areas: energy efficiency, site and water conservation, health and indoor air quality, materials efficiency, and building operations and maintenance.

Project performance is rated across each category to determine which level of certification is attainable – 4 through 5-Star, based on modeled energy performance and committed energy saving action items. To be eligible for expedited permitting, Seattle projects must achieve Built Green 4-Star certification or higher.

The Seattle program shortens the time for projects to receive a new construction permit and provides privileges such as a personal point of contact within the City, priority in scheduling the intake appointment, faster initial review of the plans, and faster routing of the plans. Typically, projects receive their construction permit approximately four weeks earlier for single-family and other small residential projects, and two weeks earlier for multifamily and nonresidential projects. Recent data shows that projects are receiving permits about 2 months earlier than comparable projects not using Priority Green.

The City of Seattle and Built Green teams have a robust and collaborative working relationship. Seattle has included the expedited permitting incentive as part of its regular business practices.

The Built Green team and its third-party verifiers conduct Seattle project verifications and report certifications to the City for expedited permitting. The City and Built Green also work to promote each other's efforts and successes through external communication platforms (e.g., websites, newsletters, etc.).

Long-term Community Benefits

By introducing the Priority Green Expedited Program in partnership with Built Green, the City of Seattle has ushered in important community benefits:

- Key contributions to City energy efficiency and sustainability goals, through the expansion of local green building across a greater number of projects and at higher certification levels.
- Greater community access to and market share for Built Green homes, which are designed to be comfortable, durable, environmentally friendly, and cost-effective to own and operate.
- Exemplary partnership model, enabling rapid adoption and proliferation of sustainability benefits.
- City leadership in establishing and fostering relationships with organizations that have a common goal.
- City incentives that work within existing processes and avoid new legislative and financial burdens.
- City participation in Built Green Executive Committee, enabling the City and Built Green to share constructive feedback and ensure their goals remain well-aligned.