

2012 Seattle Energy Code Draft – Summary of Significant Proposals

Significant changes proposed for the 2012 Seattle Energy Code, intended to move new and existing buildings towards the targets in the Comprehensive Plan and Climate Action Plan:

1. Target Performance Path. This optional energy code compliance path allows the design team, contractor and owner to determine the most effective methods achieve energy efficiency. Rather than complying with all the details of the Seattle Energy Code, the designer of any of several common building types will be permitted to submit an energy model demonstrating that the proposed building will meet an assigned energy use target. Subsequently, the building must operate within that predicted energy use level for a full year after occupancy. This is the first such code in the nation.

2. Enhanced Commissioning. Requires a commissioning plan to be submitted with the permit application, and a separate Commissioning Permit to be obtained before the Certificate of Occupancy is issued, for any delayed testing or correction of deficiencies. In addition, any conflict of interest between the commissioning agent and the contractor must be revealed.

3. Substantial alterations. This proposal adds energy code compliance requirements for most “substantial alterations” projects. Existing buildings undergoing substantial alterations will be required to meet most, but not all, of the energy performance requirements for new buildings. Landmark buildings are protected, and several compliance paths are provided.

4. Renewable Energy and “Solar-Ready” roof. Cuts the required size of renewable energy (generally photovoltaic) systems by half, adds new compliance alternatives and removes the Renewable Energy Credit (REC) alternative. In addition, the proposal requires most new low-rise buildings to designate a clear rooftop “solar zone” for future solar energy arrays.

5. Metering. These amendments incorporate the new Washington State metering code provisions, while maintaining most of Seattle’s existing requirements. Application of the code to existing buildings has been simplified. Electrical sub-metering dashboards will be provided for full-floor tenant improvement in new and existing buildings.

6. Plug load controls. This rule requires that half of all general-purpose electrical outlets in offices and classrooms be controlled by occupancy sensors or automatic time clock controls, so that desk lamps, computer monitors and other non-essential equipment plugged into the controlled outlets will be turned completely off on nights and weekends.

7. Increased glazing area. This option allows additional glazing (beyond the 30% prescriptive limit in the base code) for building types such as high-rise offices that have traditionally provided larger glazing areas. To maintain the energy efficiency of the code, this additional glazing is required to have better thermal performance.

8. Periodic energy audits (potential future ordinance). To complement these code provisions, in late spring of 2014 we will begin consideration of an ordinance requiring larger buildings to undergo an audit of their energy-using systems every five years, or to subscribe to a remote energy tracking service.