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# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## Guest Comment

# Green projects take patience

Philadelphia Business Journal - June 22, 2007 by [Shari Shapiro](#)

Green building projects large and small must obtain permits from local governments, but the regulatory environment is in flux. In many places the zoning and building codes were developed in response to the health and safety issues of a century ago, and certainly not developed with green building in mind. In others, because of lack of action on the federal level, local governments are creating new regulations to encourage sustainable development. As old regulations are being adapted to new technologies and new regulations are developed, it is critical to plan to navigate local regulatory hurdles as part of a green building project.

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

- Start early -- Allow for sufficient time to research the local issues, consider various strategies, submit plans and revise or supplement where necessary.
- Explore local government incentives or barriers -- While some local regulations can create impediments to building green, increasingly local governments are providing tax incentives and expedited permitting to encourage sustainable development.
- Establish lines of communication -- Working with local officials during design will allow you to identify potential trouble spots and to learn what you can provide to win approval of the project.
- Provide adequate supporting documentation -- If you are looking to introduce new technologies or require any special exceptions or variances for your project, you will need to make your case.
- Provide local government contacts -- Studies of code officials have shown that providing contacts in other localities where proposed projects or technologies have already been implemented makes it more likely your project will win approval.
- Educate -- Green building is a new frontier, and all of the participants in the green building process are on a steep learning curve. You need to be prepared to educate your team and local officials.
- Be patient and persistent -- Developers of green building projects that have been rejected by local authorities are more likely to remove the green component and re-submit for approval. However, it is important that developers of green projects be patient and persistent to advance technologies.

Recently, Al Gore attempted to install solar panels on his mansion in Belle Meade, Tenn. Zoning and building codes categorized the solar panels as "generators," requiring them to be placed at ground level. After Gore's negotiations with the town, Belle Meade lawmakers passed an ordinance

allowing solar panels, which went into effect April 1. With proper planning and guidance, however, you don't need to be Al Gore to successfully receive local government approval of your green building project.

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