



Town of Ithaca

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Town of Ithaca Adopts Energy Code Supplement, Requires Net-Zero Construction by 2026

Ithaca, NY - At the June 14 meeting of the Town Board, the Town of Ithaca adopted the Energy Code Supplement (ECS), code requirements for new buildings and major renovations that will substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions while emphasizing affordability.

Town of Ithaca Supervisor Rod Howe praised the landmark achievement, “the Town has demonstrated its commitment to be a leader in sustainability through a number of actions and initiatives. The Town Board accepted the Ithaca Green Building Policy report in 2018 and now, thanks to the work of a number of staff, and via our City of Ithaca partnership, we have achieved a milestone through the adoption of the Energy Code Supplement.”

The new law marks the end of a long process guided by an extraordinary level of community input. Over the last four years, Town staff worked with a consultant team and internal and external stakeholder groups to create regulations that are achievable, affordable, and impactful. The project was a joint venture with the City of Ithaca, which adopted the ECS in early May.

Nick Goldsmith, ECS project manager and Sustainability Planner for both the Town and the City, said, “Collaboration was an integral part of this project. The regulations will cover both the City and the Town, practically doubling the impact, and providing consistency for builders who work across municipal boundaries.”

The rules, which will go into effect on September 13, 2021, require that all new buildings be constructed to produce 40% fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than those built to NYS code. The ECS will become more stringent in 2023, requiring an 80% reduction in emissions. Starting in 2026, net-zero buildings that do not use fossil fuels will be required (with exceptions for cooking and process energy). Partly due to broad community support and the increasing urgency of global climate change, the Town

Board voted to accelerate the implementation timeline from the originally proposed step-up dates of 2025 and 2030.

The ECS is an overlay to the state energy code, not a replacement. All other applicable code requirements must still be met. The Code Enforcement and Zoning Department will oversee implementation and enforcement of the ECS, as they do with state energy and building codes. “We are excited to partner with all of our customers, residents, and contractors to achieve the next level of energy efficiency standards that was approved by the Town Board and their vision for our community,” stated Marty Moseley, the Director of Code Enforcement and Zoning.

The ECS offers the flexibility for builders to comply using the prescriptive Easy Path, which is a customized point-based system, or using the performance-based Whole Building Path. Using the Easy Path, GHG reductions are achieved from electrification of space and water heating (e.g., heat pumps), renewable energy (e.g., community solar), and affordability improvements which reduce construction costs (e.g., efficient building shape).

“The emphasis on social justice and affordability will result in affordable buildings with lower energy costs that are passed on to tenants. The buildings will be more durable, have lower maintenance costs, will last longer, and have eliminated risk of gas explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning,” asserts Ian Shapiro from Taitem Engineering, a member of the consultant team led by STREAM Collaborative. “This is a win for building occupants, a win for building owners, and a win for our environment.”

The Energy Code Supplement is a major piece of the Town’s Green New Deal (GND), which aims to achieve an equitable transition to carbon-neutrality community-wide by 2030. With the ECS now written into law, the Town will soon be discussing other GND components, like the monumental task of shifting the entire community building stock, including all existing buildings, to become net-zero.

The ECS and the Town’s developing plans for existing buildings and the GND are in line with the apparent trajectory of New York State policy. Recent recommendations from the Energy Efficiency & Housing Panel of the State’s Climate Action Council call for energy and building codes that require highly efficient, all-electric new construction by 2030, and the prohibition of fossil-fuel-based equipment installations in existing buildings by 2035.

“The ECS is just one piece of a huge, necessary transformation,” declared Deputy Town Supervisor Bill Goodman. “We hope to inspire other local governments to take strong legislative action to reduce GHG emissions and support international climate goals.”

More information about the Ithaca Energy Code Supplement is available at www.ithacagreenbuilding.com. Additional information will be posted on the Town website.

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