



Sustainability building codes around the corner

By Aaron Stein - Special to the Express-News

Last spring, the city of San Antonio took a leadership role in establishing enhanced energy codes for future construction based on recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force on Sustainable Buildings. This was a partnership of industry, government, utilities, nonprofit organizations and environmentalists and was drafted into law in March as part of the Mission Verde Sustainability Plan. Its passage is a testament to the power of collaboration and stands as a proud moment in our city's history.

Following this move, the City Council approved a host of new residential and commercial building-related codes in October when they adopted the 2009 International Codes with local amendments. Taken together this represents a sea change toward more efficient building practices and will help us ensure that we meet the goal that all homes built by 2030 will be net-zero energy. This means that they will produce at least as much energy as they consume, as laid forth in the Sustainable Buildings Ordinance.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2010, all new construction will have to adhere to these standards, including enhanced energy performance as well as a number of other code changes not directly related to sustainability. In addition, there will be more rigorous measurement and verification to ensure compliance. While meeting the new standards will initially prove challenging, it is a necessary step in bringing these practices into the mainstream.

This is an ambitious but achievable goal and we are on a path to meet it as we learn more about building science and the cost of high-performance building materials continues to come down. In fact, at Build San Antonio Green we are certifying the first Level 3 Solar Home through our program. This is a fantastic accomplishment for our organization and hopefully represents the first of many similar projects as we work to help the city achieve its long-term efficiency goals.

Fortunately, the foundation upon which these changes will be built is being established through the efforts of our partner organizations. Among these are CPS Energy's Save for Tomorrow Energy Plan (STEP), aggressive conservation measure by SAWS, leadership by city and county officials, the work of the Mayor's Green Jobs Leadership Council, support from the Greater San Antonio Builders Association, and input from nonprofits and concerned citizens. As a result, San Antonio is poised to begin the transition to a more energy conscious economy.

Still, there is much to be done and we must proceed in a spirit of collaboration as we work to meet these goals. Build San Antonio Green is here to help ensure that one day all homes are built to promote healthy, efficient, comfortable and affordable living spaces. The adoption of enhanced energy codes is a step in the right direction and we look forward to being a part of this important endeavor.