

Green Building Series: Part 4



Up until recently, there were few Green Building construction options for multi-family residential buildings. As the article below outlines, the first residential green building rating system to undergo the full consensus process and receive ANSI approval is now available. This is an exciting new option for the multi-family sector. Details are below:

National Green Building Code Debuts

The code directs mid-rise and low-rise developers to follow the National Green Building Standard.



By the Code: Alliance Residential's 935M in Midtown Atlanta is one of the first multifamily buildings to seek certification under the National Green Building Standard

Credit: Alliance Residential

It just got easier for cities and jurisdictions to mandate green building practices.

Monday marked the official release of the International Green Construction Code (IGCC)—the country's first set of model codes and standards for green building. The code is sponsored by the International Code Council (ICC); the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE); the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC); and the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IES).

So what does this new code mean for multifamily developers? [IGCC](#) was primarily designed for commercial buildings, including multifamily high-rises, four or more stories. IGCC directs developers of low-rise multifamily communities to follow the [National Green Building Standard](#) (ICC 700-2008)—the first residential green building rating system to undergo the full consensus process and receive ANSI approval. (The four threshold levels—Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Emerald—allow builders to achieve entry-level green building, or the highest level of sustainable “green” building incorporating energy savings of 60 percent or more.) The IGCC also states that high-rise developers can continue to build to the NGBS instead of following IGCC provisions.

Paula Cino, director of energy and environmental policy at the Washington, D.C.-based National Multi Housing Council, says IGCC is a positive step for the multifamily industry as the code provides owners and builders with a complete toolbox of green construction guidelines for all types of multifamily housing.

“The idea behind the NGBS was as jurisdictions increasingly look to mandate green building requirements or tag incentives to some sort of green standard, you really need something that is code compatible,” says Paul Cino,

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director of energy and environmental policy at the Washington, D.C.-based NMHC. “The USGBC’s LEED criteria had never been developed along those lines. So the NGBS was the residential sector’s answer to that problem, and the IGCC is the commercial sector’s answer to that problem as well.”

Getting Technical

The IGCC offers the ANSI/ASHRAE/USGBC/IES Standard 189.1, *Standard for the Design of High Performance, Green Buildings Except Low-Rise Residential Buildings*, as an alternate path of compliance. Standard 189.1, which launched in January 2010 as a partnership between USGBC and ASHRAE, is a set of technically rigorous requirements that (like the IGCC) covers criteria including water use efficiency, indoor environmental quality, energy efficiency, materials and resource use, and the building’s impact on its site and its community.

Fred Schreiber, vice president of development for Chicago-based AMLI Residential, applauds the new code, saying that uniform codes and standards help level the playing field. He has not yet had time to fully digest the code but hopes that the code provides ample flexibility.

“It’s important that any code, especially green building codes that address energy efficiency or water use, allow for flexibility and the developer to come up with innovative solutions that still meet the overall intent so every project doesn’t have to follow the same prescriptive path,” Shreiber says.

IGCC does offer such flexibility, attests Brendan Owens, USGBC’s vice president of LEED technical development. “Flexibility is incorporated throughout,” he says. “IGCC content and Standard 189.1 have mandatory requirements and performance options.”

USGBC expects jurisdictions to adopt these codes sooner rather than later. “My sense is that people have already been taking LEED and using it as code-intended documents,” Owens says. “So we have over 200 jurisdictions around the country that are already in a position to not have to reeducate their building code officials and their policy makers about the benefits of being green, and they can immediately transition to the IGCC.”

The big question: If the announcement of the IGCC encourages more developers to mandate green, will developers continue to pursue LEED certification on top of meeting the IGCC (or NGBS?) requirements?

Schreiber, for one, plans to. AMLI already has developed several LEED-certified communities and plans to continue pursuing LEED certification on upcoming projects. “I think there will still be demand, especially on the investment side, for that extra level of certification whether it be LEED or a regional program,” he says. “I don’t think the NGBS or IGCC will replace these other certifications that are meant to be recognition for the over-achievers.”

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By: Rachel Azoff
Multifamily Executive.com

