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Chapel Hill News

# Council OKs incentives for green construction

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**CHAPEL HILL** The Town Council approved a four-year rebate program this week to encourage water- and energy-efficient construction in the Ephesus-Fordham development district.

Projects must score a 75 or higher on the Energy Star 1-100 scale, meet or exceed the state's water performance levels for public buildings and submit to a post-construction site visit to verify that efficiency measures are working correctly.

Those who meet the requirements could earn a permit fee rebate of up to 35 percent.

The pilot program applies to new construction and renovations. John Richardson, the town's sustainability officer, said the rebates could run \$600,000 over the first four years. The town expects Ephesus-Fordham redevelopment to generate average permit fees of \$432,250 each year.

More efficient buildings can boost occupancy rates and market values, Richardson said, repaying the town's investment with higher revenues over time. Ephesus-Fordham redevelopment could boost property tax revenues by roughly \$1.3 million in the first four years, according to town staff.

The council will receive periodic updates and, at the end of four years, consider whether to continue the program.

Council member Matt Czajkowski voted for the incentives Monday night, but not without some criticism.

The town gave density to future developers in the Ephesus-Fordham district instead of trading it for energy-efficient buildings, he said. Now it's giving up dedicated fee revenues to ensure efficient buildings. The council previously heard developers would not use incen-

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## INCENTIVES

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tives, he said.

"It comes to the fundamental question that was raised when we did Ephesus-Fordham," Czajkowski said, "which is why didn't we require levels of environmental efficiency or put in much broader incentives from the outset as we have done over and over again in the (special-use permitting) process when we've negotiated."

While the state doesn't let towns require energy- or water-efficient construction, the council could add efficiency incentives to form-based code. Code amendments wouldn't apply to submitted or approved projects.

The council approved the form-based code in May to streamline the development process in the district by specifying how buildings should look and fit their surroundings. The goal is to en-

courage the redevelopment of aging strip malls and parking lots, while growing the commercial tax base.

## In other business

### NOISE RULES CHANGED

The Town Council changed local noise rules Monday to let commercial golf courses operate landscaping equipment earlier in the morning.

The decision was made in response to a recent petition submitted on behalf of the Chapel Hill Country Club; Oaks 1, 2 and 3 Homeowners' Association; and Finley Golf Course.

The town's noise rules normally restrict the use of mowers, leaf blowers and other equipment in residential areas to the hours of 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends.

Commercial golf courses, under the new rules, will be able to operate lawn equipment daily from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Golf course equipment also will not have to meet decibel standards, limited to 65 decibels or less when within 50 feet of the property line.

### COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

The council also discussed a report on evaluating the financial impact of development projects.

Developers seeking a special-use permit would contribute financial information about the project. Town staff would include the cost estimates for providing services to the site, and the council would decide who pays for the work.

Council members asked for more information about how closely previously approved projects have met expectations and how to make sure that the information developers provide is accurate.

Council member Matt Czajkowski also asked staff to keep in mind the town's population growth and how it might trigger bigger-ticket needs, including new firetrucks and police facilities. Those costs are not caused by one project, he said, but many approved over a long period of time.

The council does not vote on form-based code projects, leaving approval to the town manager with a recommen-

dation from the Community Design Commission.

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