

City of Decatur High Performance Building Standard

A unified development ordinance incorporating green building certification



Decatur, Georgia, was founded in 1823 as the DeKalb county seat and is known for its traditional neighborhood development (TND). It became better established as a suburb after the turn of the 20th century. The prevalence of historic Craftsman-style architecture is still expressed in modern construction, as in these contemporary high-performance homes.

Project Overview

Making homes and businesses more efficient is a great way to cut energy consumption and reduce our impact on the environment. The city of Decatur is no stranger to these practices and in 2014 crafted a city-wide *High Performance Building Standard* for all residential and commercial building projects. The standard is part of the unified development ordinance (UDO) that requires that all new construction—as well as improvements, renovation and additions—meet a set of energy efficiency standards outlined by the ordinance.

To act as an extra set of eyes, the City of Decatur recruited EarthCraft, LEED for Homes, Green Globes and National Green Building Standards certification programs to provide technical assistance and to verify that green goals are met on every project. These programs target a number of energy-efficient design aspects, including site-planning, building materials, water usage, HVAC efficiency and waste reduction to improve overall building performance.

Code and manufacturers requirements provided a baseline for the criteria, including:

- Blower-door testing, already a Georgia requirement
- Grade 1 insulation quality, a standard manufacturer's requirement
- Other code requirements

Southface assisted the city staff on this initiative, mostly on the residential side, providing in-depth knowledge about certification program requirements, engaging in stakeholder meetings and testifying in favor of the ordinance before the city commission prior to their vote.

Ultimately, the city integrated the high-performance standard into the unified development ordinance (UDO) in 2015, excepting residential renovations for further study.

Benefits of the Ordinance

Since Decatur is a very walkable community, many of the location and site points prescribed by green building programs were very easily obtainable. Cost analysis revealed that there was minimal if any additional cost, other than the verification and certification fees, to meet most program requirements.

These changes will financially benefit home and business owners by lowering operating and maintenance costs and cutting utility bills. Most importantly, however, this ordinance will help to limit resource consumption and reduce the city's environmental footprint.

Online resources

www.southface.org/the-journal/earthcraft-breathes-decatur/
www.greenbuildingadvisor.com/article/a-new-green-building-ordinance-in-decatur-georgia