

# Cypress

## Environmental and Land Use Planning

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In this edition of the newsletter:

- [\*\*Santa Cruz County Launches "Amnesty" for Non-permitted Construction\*\*](#)

Santa Cruz County Planning Dept. recently announced implementation of its new Construction Legalization Assistance Permit Program (LAPP). During the next two years, the Planning Dept., in cooperation with other plan reviewing agencies in the County, will accept plans for structures that have already been built or remodeled without permits without charging penalty fees. In some cases permit fees will even be reduced! So far only 12 applicants have taken the plunge into the LAPP process. The public and other Planning Departments should watch this program to see if it succeeds.



- [\*\*Siemen's Green Cities Index Shows Many US Cities are Forging Ahead to Address Climate Change\*\*](#)

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The federal government may not be doing much to address climate change, but some of the largest cities are. The Green Cities Index provides both a ranking system and a useful resource for cities wanting to implement policies and practices to reduce their CO2 emissions and become more sustainable urban systems. The top ranked U.S. cities might surprise you.



### **Micro-housing One More Time**

One of the readers of my [Autumn 2014 newsletter](#), Robert Frampton, sent me [this link](#) on micro-housing in response to my article. With interesting images, it shows several creative examples where metal shipping containers have been converted into livable homes. According to the article, there is an excess of shipping containers and they can be purchased for \$2,000/container. If you are interested in this idea, check out the linked article. There's also information on Zigloo, a company that specializes in preparing construction plans for shipping container housing.



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### ***Cypress Mission Statement:***

*Creating project solutions for you while enhancing our environment.*



Cypress is certified as a sustainable practices business by the Monterey Bay Area Green Business Council.

Cypress has been a member of the Santa Cruz Construction Guild since 2010.



## Santa Cruz County Offers “Amnesty” for Non-Permitted Construction



Some cities and counties try new approaches to make Building Code regulations less burdensome on builders and property owners. Every once in a while, some jurisdictions even offer amnesty-like programs for people who constructed buildings without permits. The County of Santa Cruz launched a new 2-year “amnesty” program in late August 2014. The new Construction [Legalization Assistance Permit Program \(LAPP\)](#) offers property owners the opportunity to legalize construction performed without permits. This program applies to any construction, remodel or alteration of single family dwellings, multi-family dwellings, commercial, industrial and agricultural structures.

In California, most construction is governed by the California Building Code (CBC), which is updated every 3 years and has been adopted as law by most cities and counties. The CBC sets minimum standards for construction which must be followed during building. The CBC process begins with submitting construction plans (“blueprints”) for a Building Permit. For some, this is where the rub begins. Some property owners think permit fees are too high or the plan check process too onerous, or just dislike regulation of their work. These people choose to remodel their homes or build new buildings, even homes in remote areas, without a Building Permit with the hope they won’t get caught. People who are caught are subject to large financial penalties. Sometimes CBC “violators” must appear in court. Santa Cruz County is offering an olive branch to people that have built structures without permits by initiating a special process to legalize unpermitted structures. But, will the process work?

Under the new LAPP program, no penalty fees will be assessed for people who voluntarily go through the process. Permit fees will be charged, but at 75% the cost that are charged to others who get Building Permits. The LAPP process begins with submitting a site plan to the Planning and Building counter staff, paying a \$469 fee and scheduling an initial site inspection that assesses what needs to occur to legalize the construction from both a CBC and zoning standpoint. An assessment report is then sent to property owner describing what is needed for plan submittal and what additional fees will be charged to obtain a permit. The LAPP applicants can then decide if they wish to go forward and submit full plans or drop out of the LAPP process. This unusual feature is considered magnanimous by public agency staff but viewed with suspicion by some property owners who have attended public meetings about the program. These people say they don’t believe the County won’t eventually pursue people who have dropped out of the LAPP process. While County staff have stated publicly they will not pursue LAPP “drop-outs”, some people don’t believe it. Once the initial LAPP application is made, there will be a computer record of the non-permitted project which, according to one meeting attendee “the County will use to bust you for not having a permit any time they want”. The success of the program appears to be a matter of trust. Other cities and counties should watch this program to see if it works and determine if it might be applicable to their jurisdiction. More information can be found at the County of Santa Cruz [website](#) or by contacting Cypress Environmental to assist you with your project.

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## Green Cities Move Ahead to Reduce Greenhouse Gases in the Face of No National Climate Policy.



San Francisco (at left) and several other major U.S. cities are taking steps to do their part to reduce climate change and, as a result, foster good urban planning. While no rating system is perfect, the [Siemens Green Cities Index](#) provides a useful score card on how major cities are becoming more sustainable urban networks, even though there is little guidance on the federal level.

According to president and CEO of Siemens Corp, USA, Eric Spiegel, "despite the fact that we do not have a federal climate policy in the United States—and no federal carbon standard—21 of the 27 cities in the Siemens Green Cities Index have already set their own carbon reduction targets. These 21 major North American cities are creating comprehensive sustainability plans and are utilizing current technology to reduce their carbon footprint". The Index should not be confused with a list of the most desirable cities to live in, but rather the cities that are taking the largest steps towards creating sustainable urban systems while simultaneously lowering their overall greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions.

Here are a few highlights. San Francisco ranks as North America's greenest city in the Index. It has a 77% recycling rate, one of the highest in the world, made possible through city mandates requiring the separation of recyclable and compostable materials from regular garbage. Number 2 ranked Vancouver, Canada, scored high due to, in part, the city's emphasis on promoting green energy and its use of hydropower. Vancouver has vowed to reduce emissions by 33% by 2020. The Index puts New York at #3. Its high score is a reflection having the highest population density and highest percentage of workers commuting by public transport, bicycle or walking. Close behind, #4 ranked Seattle leads in low-energy building construction. Seattle, an early embracer of [LEED](#), has one the most active LEED programs on the continent. All cities in the ranking have adopted their own Climate Action Plans which help direct public and private sector efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Of course, many of these programs, such as constructing and improving bicycle transportation facilities (bike paths, etc.), not only reduce carbon emissions, but are wise planning policies for large urban centers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



### What is the Green Cities Index?

The [Siemens Corporation](#), a global powerhouse in electronics, energy and urban infrastructure, is headquartered in Berlin. It created the Green Cities Index based on 31 individual indicators in 9 categories. The categories include reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, transportation options, wise water and waste management and adopted environmental policies.

The Index currently ranks the top U.S. and Canadian cities as:

1. San Francisco
2. Vancouver, Canada
3. New York
4. Seattle
5. Denver
6. Boston
7. Los Angeles
8. Washington, D.C.
9. Toronto, Canada
10. Minneapolis
11. Chicago
12. Ottawa, Canada

Not included in the Green Cities Index are the several medium and smaller sized cities that are implementing sustainable policies and projects. A similar ranking of medium-sized U.S. cities (pop. = 100,000--200,000) by EcoWatch's [MyLife Project](#) ranks Alexandria, VA and Hayward, CA as #1 and #2. Both cities have developed using a sprawling suburban form. However, both are implementing a series of Climate Action Plan policies that make them leaders in recycling, alternative transportation and related efforts. No. 3 ranked Pasadena, CA received its high score, in part, due to its more sustainable urban form that promotes more walkability to commercial areas and other major destinations.

The Index also ranks major cities in other continents. In Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark is ranked #1 due in part to its reliance on wind energy and its impressive system of bicycle transportation facilities. Even in cold Danish winters, it's common for many residents to use bike transportation as seen in the image below. The Green Cities Index is an excellent resource for any city that wants to become "greener". Look at the Index and ask yourself: "What is your city doing to become more sustainable and to help reverse climate change?"

*At right: A typical commute in Copenhagen during a winter work day. The Green Cities Index ranks this Danish city #1 in Europe. It is followed by #2 ranked Stockholm.*



Other top leading cities on other continents are:

- Curitiba, Brazil – #1 in Latin America
- Capetown, South Africa – #1 in Africa
- Singapore – #1 in Asia

*The Siemens Green Cities Index summary provides interesting insights from their research that can be used by other cities wishing to become "greener".*

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