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Home builders going green

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By **Jennifer Hiller** - Express-News

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San Antonio home builders are getting greener, and quickly.

A city ordinance approved in March means that starting next January, all newly built homes in San Antonio will have to be 15 percent more energy efficient than current building codes allow.

The new ordinance will make features such as tighter home design, low-flow toilets — and lower utility bills — the norm in the new-home market.

Members of the **Greater San Antonio Builders Association** heard an update Wednesday on the new sustainability provisions, known as Mission Verde, which Mayor Phil Hardberger announced as a goal during the State of the City address this January.

Plans also include a \$100 million venture capital fund to attract sustainable energy and clean technology businesses to San Antonio, as well as still-to-be determined sustainability incentives for builders and homeowners from **San Antonio Water System** and **CPS Energy**.

"You're on the front lines of this new energy system," Larry Zinn, an aide to Hardberger, told home builders. He said 90 percent of the energy used in San Antonio is for operating buildings and homes, while a relatively small percentage goes to industrial use.

Among other changes, the new ordinance for the first time will require builders to have a third party test a home's ductwork for leaks in unconditioned spaces, such as attics, and will attempt to eliminate wasting water in everything from hot water lines to irrigation systems.

"It's a big first step for the city of San Antonio," said Mike Myers, program manager of energy and environmental services with **Lockheed Martin**.

But there are many ways that builders can meet the 15 percent goal, including following an already widely used Energy Star certification program for new home construction.

Energy Star requires that homes be at least 15 percent more energy efficient, so Energy Star builders are already in compliance.

To save water, toilets will not be able to use more than 1.28 gallons per flush on average, while shower heads can have a maximum flow of 2 gallons per minute and bathroom faucets can have a 1.5-gallon-per-minute flow.

Karen Guz, director of conservation at **SAWS**, said builders shouldn't have a hard time finding the fixtures.

"San Antonio is not the only city moving in this direction," Guz said.

Under Mission Verde, in 2012, new homes would be required to use 30 percent less energy than the current code.

Ultimately, by 2030 the goal is to have carbon-neutral homes, meaning they create no greenhouse gases.

The current initiative is only for new houses.

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Imagine Homes in Cibolo's Stonebrook are Energy Star-certified, one way to meet the San Antonio standard.

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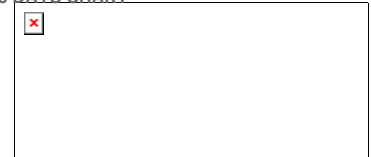
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