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A Green Path Forward

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In the absence of national leadership, state and local governments nationwide are adopting aggressive goals and enacting sensible strategies to reduce the impact of skyrocketing energy costs on their residents and businesses. Mayors from more than 800 cities, including Albuquerque, have signed the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. The city of Albuquerque is leading by example, by adopting the Architecture 2030 Challenge, and requiring new or renovated city buildings to achieve a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver rating. These actions will help make Albuquerque and other forward-thinking cities more sustainable, and help demonstrate a path forward for national programs to address climate change.

The development and adoption of the Albuquerque Energy Conservation Code (AECC), is an important step toward achieving the city's green-building goals for residential and commercial buildings. The city's enhanced energy calls for sensible, cost-effective actions that will achieve significant energy cost savings in new or renovated homes, businesses and public buildings, including K-12 schools. The buyer of a new home built to the requirements will save \$500 annually in energy costs – enough to cover the gas costs for the average Albuquerque commuter for six months. The homeowner starts saving from the first day they move into their new home, because the energy savings of their efficient home outweigh the cost of the improvements by a factor of three. Small businesses would also save. A small business that owns or leases retail space in buildings built to the new code would save more than \$1,000 annually in energy costs.

The energy code is about more than saving energy, though. Highly efficient buildings deliver better occupant comfort, achieve greater employee productivity and help maintain healthier indoor air quality. National studies have shown that the majority of homebuyers, when offered a choice, prefer energy-efficient homes. Energy Star or LEED-certified commercial buildings command higher rental rates and occupancy levels and have lower tenant turnover. Albuquerque schoolchildren and teachers will benefit too – studies have shown student achievement increases by 20 percent or more in 'green schools' that include energy-efficient features, such as daylighting, proper temperature and sound control, and adequate ventilation levels.

The code was scheduled to become effective for all new construction projects on July 1. The city has chosen to delay the effective date to allow for a 90-day review.

The Albuquerque energy code requirements can be met using today's technology and construction practices, such as more efficient heating and cooling equipment, better insulation and air sealing, and Energy Star lighting and appliances. Many homes and commercial buildings have already been built in New Mexico that meet or exceed the standards established by the Albuquerque code. The

AECC offers flexible compliance options, including a voluntary 'Green Path' in which builders can receive expedited permitting and recognition for exceeding the city's minimum code requirements. 'Green Path' projects will also be eligible for federal and state tax incentives, including the New Mexico Sustainable Building Tax Credit. A 10,000-square-foot office building that achieves LEED-Gold certification and 50 percent energy savings would be eligible for nearly \$50,000 in state tax incentives. Mayor Martin Chávez and the Albuquerque City Council have demonstrated bold and much needed leadership to address global climate change. The city's programs are already having a measurable impact – creating walkable communities, attracting jobs and creating economic development opportunities, and providing important investments in transportation infrastructure when gas prices are at an all-time high.

We encourage the city to adopt the 2008 Energy Conservation Code without making further amendments that would diminish these energy and cost savings.

SWEEP is a nonprofit (501c(3)) organization that promotes energy efficiency in the Southwest United States. Steve Dunn is a senior associate and Tammy Fiebelkorn is the New Mexico representative.

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