FRONTRUNNER: CITY OF SAN RAFAEL PURSUES COLLABORATION IN ITS DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION OF A FLEX PATH RESIDENTIAL REACH CODE

The county seat of Marin County, the City of San Rafael is a thriving hub in the North Bay. Home to more than 60,000 residents, the city is recognized for its striking architectural landmarks, including the historic Mission San Rafael Arcángel and the Marin County Civic Center, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The city received a state designation for its downtown arts district in 2017.


RAFAEL
TRICK OR TREAT

COLLABORATION IS KEY IN REACH CODE DEVELOPMENT

San Rafael has a tradition of strong collaboration with its stakeholders as well as fellow jurisdictions and county government in Marin County. So it was natural to continue this tradition as the city staff focused on developing a new reach code following the repeal of its all-electric reach code in the wake of the Berkeley decision. Notes Cory Bytof, Sustainability Program Manager, “it was important for the city to include the perspectives not only of its own residents, but of stakeholders across the county. We’ve been fortunate to have committed partners in government both at the county level and in other cities around Marin. Our Chief Building Official has a strong working relationship with local architects and construction firms, which helps us understand how regulations will work on the ground.”

The city staff also worked to develop a measure that would be both effective in helping achieve its long-term climate goals but also achievable for homeowners, since single family homes make up just over 50% of San Rafael’s existing housing stock and will be key in reducing emissions. “We focused on creating an entire process that would be flexible enough for our residents, paired with education and tools that simplified compliance,” added Bytof.

The resulting measure, adopted by the City Council in June 2024 and approved by the California Energy Commission in September 2024, provides a flexible path for single-family remodel projects over 500 feet^2 that were built before 2010. This “Flex Path” seeks to increase energy efficiency and encourage electrification in homes, while the homeowner is already making significant changes to their homes.

A LOOK AT THE FLEX PATH

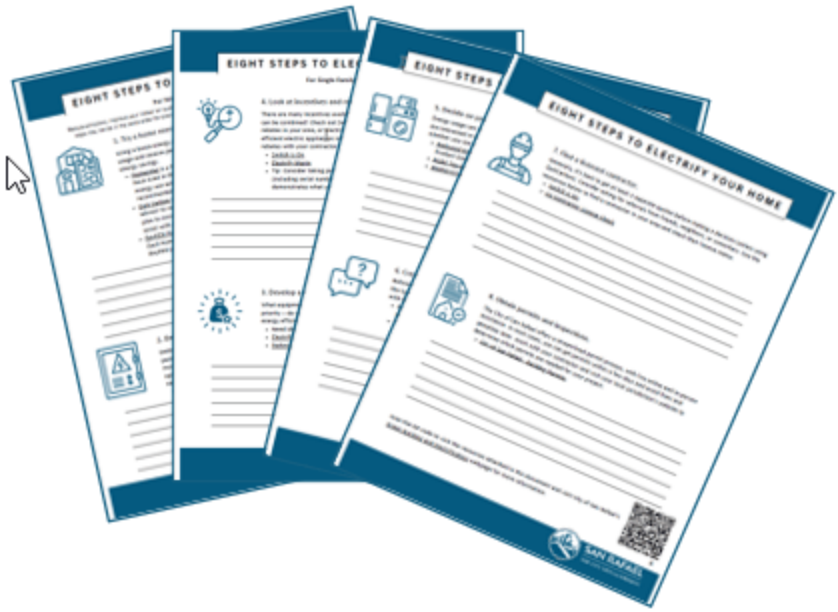
The measure offers a menu of energy saving options that homeowners can choose from that have been verified for cost-effectiveness. Each option has an associated point value based on site energy savings. The higher the energy savings from implementation, the higher the score for the option. One section focuses on envelope related efficiency measures such as insulation, windows, and duct sealing, the next section focuses on heating, venting and air conditioning (HVAC) and water heating electrification options, and the final section consists of solar options.

The City has set a target score for each vintage in a way that preferences but does not force electrification and would be achievable through multiple combinations of other measures such as envelope improvements and solar. Each homeowner can choose which measures work best for them and their budget. In this regard, the San Rafael

measure differs from the measure adopted in Marin County, which provides a single target score regardless of vintage. Bytof notes the housing stock in San Rafael is quite diverse so the range of vintages, each with a separate target score, made sense for the city's stakeholders.

TOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The City staff recognized the implementation process can be challenging for homeowners, so simplifying the process and providing comprehensive information on planning and compliance resources, financial incentives and FAQs was vital. They developed an online hub that contains multiple resources, both those provided by the City, such as the 8-Step Guide to Electrify Your Home as well as other resources from Marin County (Electrify Marin), the State of California (Building and Home Energy Resource Hub), and national organizations such as Rewire America (Electrify Everything guide). The City has also published a simple compliance checklist for applicants on their Green Building and Electrification web page. The City is offering the 8 Steps Guide to other jurisdictions to personalize for their own use. Interested individuals may contact Sustainability@cityofsanrafael.org.



RESOURCES

City of San Rafael Green Building and Electrification Webpage

City of San Rafael Staff Report

City of San Rafael Single-Family Cost-Effectiveness Report

City of San Rafael Reach Code Policy Snapshot

City of San Rafael Ordinance No. 2036

8-Step Guide to Electrify Your Home

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