

# Are green building codes accessible for the greater Boston area?

Can low-income communities afford green buildings? What are green building codes? How much does it cost to get buildings up to code?



Photo from CU Denver News

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As Boston heads toward making a green city, something still very much in the works, is the greenification of schools. As with other buildings in order to gain a green passing grade, the [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design](#) (LEED) needs to certify the building. But it's much easier to be green when the building is new, in 2022 Boston opened the new [Boston Arts Academy](#). This is a 5-story, \$137 million project supported by the City of Boston and the Massachusetts School Building Authority, with a highly energy-efficient design that received LEED silver standard requirements.

This budget is not the standard for most schools, and many schools around the historical city of Boston are over 50 years old. Much like the [West Roxbury Educational Complex](#), which opened in 1972 and hasn't been well kept. It is resulting in many infringements on both students' and teachers' safety as well as LEED standards. In 2019 the school closed; taking four years for the city to raise money to demolish and rebuild the school, which was approved in June 2023. But schools are not the only thing being effected.

With the introduction of green building codes, Boston housing has become even more disproportional for low-income communities. [MIT-Wentworth](#) Study found that the net zero code, if widely adopted, could add up to \$23,000 to the cost of an average home, leaving an additional 33,000 Massachusetts residents priced out of the market.

Green building typically costs between 1% and 12% more than a similar non-green building project. Green buildings can reduce [water consumption](#) by 20% to 30% and CO2 emissions by up to 35%. The average operating cost savings in the first year for new green buildings is 10.5% higher than the average living costs.

Boston initiated its Carbon Free Boston plan in 2022, which lays out steps to a carbon-neutral Boston by 2050. The main foundations of the green building codes, fall under Article 37 of the [Boston Zoning](#). When going about new construction projects all parties must ensure that all planning, designing, constructing, and management is done in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts.

The buildings themselves must fall within [certain standards](#) to get the green mark of approval. Depending on the type of building, and its needs LEED will set different levels of needs for green buildings. LEED offers a foundation for green buildings that are

healthy, effective, and cost-effective and are accessible for almost all building types. Globally recognized as a mark of leadership and success in sustainability, LEED certification.

There are three levels of LEED certification, each with a different price range. On average it is about 1%-12% more expensive to build green. For many, this can be unobtainable, and even if your home isn't made green the market value of homes throughout Boston will continue to rise. This ['green gentrification'](#) as researchers call it, will only become a greater issue as more districts within Boston are beginning to go green. An [MIT](#) study found that the seriousness of this issue is rising since it adds to the already existing climate injustices experienced by racial and working-class neighborhoods.

With the pricy endeavor of reaching a greener Boston by 2050, [Mayor Michelle Wu](#) has launched an initiative that provides \$50,000 loans to small property owners who want to gain green marks on their structures. Owners of two to four-unit owner-occupied properties can receive monetary assistance through the Healthy & Green Retrofit Pilot Program to "jumpstart... decarbonization and electrification," according to a statement from Wu's office.

"With almost 80% of Boston's buildings requiring deep energy retrofits and decarbonization, our new Healthy & Green Retrofit Pilot Program signifies a pivotal movement toward achieving our city's carbon neutrality aspirations," Wu said at the launch of the program back in September 2023, "By targeting the most common building type and preserving affordability, we are paving the way for a greener, healthier future for all Bostonians."

This new program will surely help reach the green goal of 2050, and help make greener homes and schools more obtainable to low-income communities.