

Author: David Kaiser, Independent Consultant - former building code official

Presentation Title: The Energy Code Stepping Stone To Decarbonization

Abstract: Building energy codes are a key component of many climate change mitigation plans from mayors to presidential candidates. However, after 6 years in the trenches of minimum building energy code enforcement, this former building code official bears all to provide a guard-rail to others who might "fall" for the building energy code. On its face, the energy code is a great thing. It takes place when owners are installing equipment anyway, meaning the incremental costs are low. The building energy code saves the occupants/ owners money. It reduces utility demand in the summer. And of course, it assists in the long-term carbon reduction. However, it quickly falls apart at the implementation as a result of 6 "C"s: Case-load, Competition, Complexity, Cognizance, Conformity, and Coordination. Local governments are constantly strapped for cash and stretch their dollars as far as possible: meaning a large case load for each employee. When the energy code is in league with the fire code, the structural code, the electrical code, mechanical code, and zoning code, it is in competition with them and takes a back seat every time. Additionally, every building lacks conformity and they cannot be sampled the same way factory-manufactured products can. The effort needed to verify is high. Furthermore, the energy code is complex consisting of around 100+ provisions. Lastly, the responsibility of the energy code is split amongst many non-coordinated parties. When so many people are responsible for any one code measure, then no one is. So how do we use this to scale jump to a low carbon economy? Firstly, understand what is a shaky foot-hold before you put your weight on it. Either shore it up with heavy federal funding, or find a different foot-hold. What looks like a stronger step? Carbon taxes and quick increases in federal minimum efficiencies.