

WHAT WE HEARD: BUILDING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Introduction

To inform the development of a Building Performance Standard in Columbus, the City hosted five focus groups to hear the priorities and concerns of residents and building owners. These focus groups were held virtually and in-person, compensated participants for their time, and were attended by over 50 participants.

Here are the common themes that were shared in these focus groups:

Energy bills are rising. Both residents and building owners are feeling the impact.

Both residents and building owners reported substantial - between 50% and 100% - increases in energy costs over the last few years.

- Residents described energy costs as unpredictable and difficult to understand.
- Many households reported altering behaviors, such as limiting heating and cooling.
- Building owners shared that rising energy costs are straining operating budgets.
- Increased utility costs are being passed on to tenants and customers, creating downstream affordability impacts.

Energy affordability and availability are top of mind.

- Tenants reported that utility costs are now an important consideration when deciding where to live.
- Tenants expressed feeling “stuck” in less efficient homes, as they lack the ability to invest in energy-efficient upgrades themselves.
- Building owners reported that energy reliability is extremely important. Some building owners have considered adding additional emergency generation capacity, while some already have backup generators.

“I used to appreciate features like vaulted ceilings in an apartment, but now I think about the energy needed to heat or cool that extra space.”

“We will pay whatever the [utility bill] amount is, but then we pass that cost on to the customer, and then they pass it on to their customer.”

Building owners are already tracking energy usage.

The majority of building owners who participated in the focus groups reported that they were already benchmarking their buildings' energy usage via ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager. Some participants mentioned using benchmarking as a way to prioritize which buildings should receive energy-efficiency improvements.

From a budgeting standpoint, building owners emphasized that cutting expenses was just as important as increasing revenue.

"Wasting energy costs us money. Anything we can do to save energy, we do."

Technical and financial support are paramount to successful energy policy implementation.

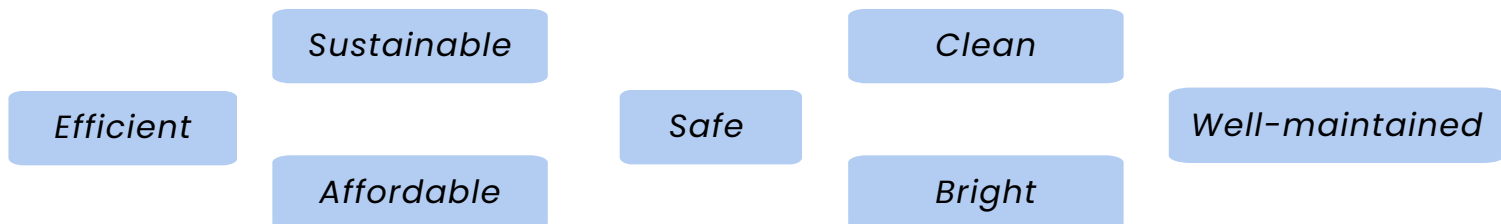
Building owners expressed a need for incentives, rebates, and clear ROIs to accelerate the adoption of energy-efficient appliances and retrofits.

Competing capital needs, operational constraints, and uncertainty around long-term savings can delay or deprioritize projects. Energy efficiency investments are typically evaluated based on return on investment and payback timelines.

While the majority of building owners expressed an interest in using less energy in their buildings, they were concerned about the amount of financial support available to support energy-efficiency investments.

What is a healthy building?

Residents were asked to share one word or phrase that they associate with a healthy building.



Conclusion

Columbus residents and building owners are feeling the impacts of rising utility bills due to increased energy demand. While lessening the amount of energy a building needs through policies like a Building Performance Standard could address these concerns, it is imperative that the policy is accompanied by technical and financial support for building owners.

