

Developers find creative solutions to city's stormwater management regs

By: Andrew Valenti, Reporter August 2, 2016 0

Developers have seen a multitude of changes since New Orleans instituted its new Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance last August. Now they are encountering issues implementing the city's new stormwater management regulations.

Article 23 of the CZO says that developers must create conditions that allow detention and infiltration of stormwater runoff onsite through the use of pervious paving, open vegetated areas, green roofs, blue roofs and other methods.

The ordinance also stipulates that additional stormwater runoff should be detained or stored, and runoff in excess of the first 1.25 inches should exit the site through surface or subsurface drainage.

City of New Orleans Chief Resilience Officer Jeff Hebert said it's an effort to manage overall stormwater in the system.

"Precipitation is going to be increasing in the next several decades," he said. "There is only so much infrastructure that we can put into the ground and only so much pumping that we can do, so moving toward a system that retains or slows some of that water onsite is a part of our ability to manage flooding in the city."

Much of the construction in the city is renovations or repurposing of old buildings in densely packed neighborhoods on a tight footprint, forcing developers to think outside the box on how to retain excess stormwater onsite.

Palmisano Contractors is handling the construction of a \$30 million, 207-room Homewood Suites hotel at 317 N. Rampart St. The new development takes up a full city block on the edge of the French Quarter, with no green space in front of the building. This forced Palmisano Contractors to get creative on how to retain excess rainwater onsite.

Palmisano Group President Wesley Palmisano said his company built a subsurface stormwater storage system that is underneath the building's foundation. The excess water is stored in box culverts, which are large, concrete pipes that slowly release it back into the city's drainage system.

"There are some people who are considering storing the excess water in a courtyard or on the roof," Palmisano said. "That concept is called either a green roof or blue roof, so you're actually storing the water on the building rather than underneath the building. There are various ways to accomplish this with new construction."

Palmisano added that this project was the first one permitted for the new stormwater management requirement, and his company has now gone through this process with four separate projects.

City officials have held multiple seminars with developers and contractors on the new system and an overview of the implementation process, the application process for stormwater plan reviews, featured projects and future goals the city has to develop a greener infrastructure. Hebert said the most common concern he's heard from the development community is not being able to design a water retention system onsite, no matter how creative the design team can get with it.

Hebert said that's why the City Planning Commission is also in preliminary talks for a "fee-in-lieu-of" payment structure. If the development team can't design a system to store excess stormwater onsite, a fee would be paid into a stormwater management fund to offset what excess water could not be captured.

"So if you can get 70 percent there of what's required and we agree with you on that, then there should be some other flexible system you could opt into," Hebert said.

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