

City plan would pay a bonus for `green roofs'

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Mayor Richard Daley, an avowed environmentalist and "green roof" advocate, plans to offer a new financial incentive to encourage landlords to plant their roofs with gardens.

Under a measure to be introduced at Wednesday's City Council meeting, owners of downtown buildings who choose to go green could get matching grants from the city.

The proposed pilot program is designed to draw more attention to the benefits of green roofs, said Connie Buscemi, a spokeswoman for the city's Planning Department.

Daley's plan would allocate \$500,000 from a Loop economic development fund to match private landlords' rooftop investments up to \$100,000 each.

Green roofs soak up rainwater that otherwise would flow into the city's sewer system, and they absorb heat from the sun, helping to reduce temperatures in the surrounding area, Buscemi said.

The special roofs also help landlords cut summer air conditioning costs, she said.

Daley helped pioneer the green-roof movement in Chicago in 2001 when City Hall's roof was turned into a garden, something that Buscemi said has reduced the rooftop temperature by as much as 70 degrees, roughly in half, on hot days. The Chicago Cultural Center is the most recent major public building to go green.

In between, more than 200 buildings in the city have been constructed with green roofs totaling 2.5 million square feet, Buscemi said. Some developers installed the greenery voluntarily, while others were required to do so because their projects received city financial assistance. Chicago has more green roofs than any other U.S. city, Buscemi said.

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