

# Comparing the 2026 Green Communities Criteria with the 2020 Edition

## Executive Summary

The 2026 Green Communities Criteria will look quite familiar to anyone acquainted with the 2020 edition. Still, the new standard has changed in critical ways, creating new opportunities to develop healthier and more efficient and resilient affordable housing. Overall, we designed the 2026 version to:

- **Raise the bar** where it counts while maintaining achievability and affordability
- **Align with typical project workflows** to facilitate higher achievement and streamline documentation requirements
- **Offer clear pathways** for prioritizing energy, health, and resilience across the standard
- **Improve clarity and efficiency** with more specific, measurable, and verifiable language

Here is a summary by category:

- **Category 1: Integrative Design.** The mandatory Project Priorities Survey now lays the groundwork for the three wayfinding themes of energy, health, and resilience.
- **Category 2: Location + Neighborhood Fabric.** We consolidated some of the criteria to streamline workflow and made mobility and connectivity options more accessible.
- **Category 3: Site Design.** Site design grew significantly, reflecting the increasing urgency of resilience actions to address extreme heat, floods, wildfires, and storms.
- **Category 4: Water.** We are offering bigger and broader incentives for monitoring water consumption and leaks, and we added whole-home WaterSense certification as an option for both water conservation and efficient plumbing layout.
- **Category 5: Energy.** New approaches and new criteria create an accessible and continuous pathway from holistic planning to efficiency, electrification, resilience, and decarbonization.
- **Category 6: Materials.** We took a fresh approach, encouraging early screening, holistic assessment, and selection of best-in-class products. A new criterion pulls a number of familiar environmental and health priorities into one place for ease of use.
- **Category 7: Healthy Living Environment.** We retained all of the mandatory criteria and added additional ones. Although teams no longer have to select a “Promoting Health Through Design” criterion, some aspects of those criteria have become mandatory.

- **Category 8: Operations, Maintenance, and Resident Engagement.** We made documentation requirements more flexible. We also added a Building Readiness Report as part of emergency planning.

## Table of Contents

Fundamentals.....	4
Retained: Structure and mechanics .....	4
Retained: Integrative process.....	4
Discontinued: “Promoting Health Through Design” track.....	4
New: Themes.....	4
New: Certification tiers.....	4
Category 1: Integrative Design .....	7
Mandatory: Criterion 1.1 Project Priorities Survey .....	8
Other notable changes in Category 1.....	8
Category 2: Location + Neighborhood Fabric.....	8
Mandatory: Criterion 2.1 Ecological Conservation and Safer Sites .....	9
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 2.6 Transit, Mobility, and Walkability .....	9
Other notable changes in Category 2.....	10
Category 3: Site Design.....	10
Mandatory: Criterion 3.2 Site Design for Ecosystem Services.....	10
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.3 Exterior Lighting .....	11
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.4 Surface Stormwater Management .....	11
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.7 Traffic Safety and Mobility.....	11
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.8 Heat-Island Management.....	11
Other notable changes in Category 3.....	12
Category 4: Water .....	12
Mandatory: Criterion 4.3 Water Quality, Part 2 (Legionella Water Management Program) .....	13
Optional: Criterion 4.4 Monitoring Water Consumption and Leaks.....	13
Other notable changes in Category 4.....	13
Category 5: Energy .....	13

Mandatory and optional: Criterion 5.4a All-Electric and Electric-Ready Design: New Construction .....	14
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 5.8 Electric Vehicle Charging .....	14
Optional: Criterion 5.7 Renewable Energy .....	15
Other notable changes in Category 5.....	15
Category 6: Materials.....	15
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 6.2 Reduction of Materials and Waste .....	16
Mandatory and optional: Criterion 6.4 Advanced Material Selection.....	16
Other notable changes in Category 6.....	17
Category 7: Healthy Living Environment .....	17
Mandatory and optional: 7.5 Clean Air: Ventilation.....	18
Mandatory: Criterion 7.6 Clean Air: Indoor Air Filtration .....	18
Mandatory: Criteria 7.9a and 7.9b Managing Moisture in the Building Enclosure .....	19
Mandatory: Criterion 7.13 Personal and Social Safety .....	19
Mandatory: Criterion 7.14 Social Connection and Accessibility: Design for All Ages and Abilities.....	19
Other notable changes in Category 7.....	20
Category 8: Operations, Maintenance, and Resident Engagement .....	21
Criterion 8.2 Emergency Management Manual .....	21
Other notable changes in Category 8.....	21

## Fundamentals

### Retained: Structure and mechanics

The structure and mechanics of the new criteria are largely the same as in the 2020 edition:

- **Eligibility:** Multifamily and single-family developments can still use the program as long as they include affordable dwelling units.
- **Typologies:** Definitions of construction scope (new, substantial rehab, moderate rehab) and locations (urban/suburban and rural/tribal/small town) remain the same.
- **Structure:** We retained eight high-level categories, and each criterion has the same 4-R structure (Rationale, Requirements, Recommendations, Resources).
- **Mandatory and optional criteria:** Each type is included as well as criteria with both mandatory and optional parts.
- **Points:** New construction projects must still achieve at least 40 points from optional criteria; rehabs must still achieve 35.

### Retained: Integrative process

The new version preserves the overall process familiar to teams, laid out primarily in *Category 1: Integrative Design* and *Category 8: Operations, Maintenance, and Resident Engagement*. In response to user feedback, the 2026 version clarifies expectations and streamlines documentation, but the overall process is virtually identical.

### New: Certification tiers

The 2026 standard has three levels of certification, compared with just two in the 2020 Criteria:

- **Green Communities Certification:** Implement all applicable mandatory criteria plus the minimum number of points from optional criteria.
- **Certification Plus:** These highly efficient and all-electric properties achieve specific options of Criterion 5.3 Advanced Building Performance and Criterion 5.4 All-Electric and Electric-Ready Design.
- **Certification Plus Zero Emissions:** Achieve Certification Plus and demonstrate through Criterion 5.7 Renewable Energy that all building site energy comes from clean sources.

### New: Themes

Certain underlying concepts have always held the criteria together. With the 20<sup>th</sup>-anniversary edition, we've taken it a step further and created three wayfinding themes:

- **Energy:** reducing energy use, cost, and emissions

- **Health:** enhancing the health and well-being of residents and communities
- **Resilience:** preparing now for livability in light of future hazards and risks

The new themes and their icons are a great way to navigate the goal-setting and planning process for your project, helping project teams surface priorities, explore solutions, and encourage engagement across disciplines.

The themes helped the criteria development team bring additional priorities into focus, leading to new approaches and criteria. We also opted to reference updated versions of new standards in most categories and added new ones. See each category summary below to learn about new approaches, criteria, and reference documents.

*Table A. Stat Check: Green Communities Criteria, 2020–2026*

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
Certification levels	2	3
Categories	8	8
Themes	0	3
Criteria	75	72
Mandatory criteria	41	44
Points available: New Construction	306	293
Points required for certification: New Construction	40	40
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	308	371
Points available: Moderate Rehabs	320	368
Points required for certification: Rehabs	35	35
Points available: NYC Overlay New Construction	315	298
Points required for certification: NYC Overlay New Construction	60	65
Points available: NYC Overlay Substantial Rehabs	317	382

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
Points available: NYC Overlay Moderate Rehabs	329	379
Points required for certification: NYC Overlay Rehabs	35	35

*Table B. List of New 2026 Criteria, Mandatory & Optional*

Category	New mandatory criteria	New optional criteria
Category 3: Site Design	3.7 Traffic Safety and Mobility	3.9 Resilient Site Design: Wind 3.10 Resilient Site Design: Flood 3.11 Resilient Site Design: Wildfire
Category 5: Energy	Newly mandatory: Criterion 5.4a All-Electric and Electric-Ready Design: New Construction 5.8 Electric Vehicle Charging	5.1 Energy Planning 5.5 Peak Demand Control 5.9 Passive Survivability
Criteria 6: Materials*	—	6.1 Product Category Screening
Category 7: Healthy Living Environment	7.6 Clean Air: Indoor Air Filtration 7.13 Personal and Social Safety 7.14 Social Connection and Accessibility: Design for All Ages and Abilities	7.15 Access to Nature and Biophilic Design (spun off from Option 3 of Healing-Centered Design) 7.16 Healing-Centered and Culturally Responsive Design (spun off from Option 4 of Healing-Centered Design) 7.18 Place-Based Wealth Building (partially spun off from Local Economic Development and Community Wealth Creation criterion)

\*See Category 6 below for elements of mandatory and optional Criterion 6.4 Advanced Material Selection that are newly mandatory in the 2026 version.

*Table C. List of All Retired 2020 Criteria, Mandatory & Optional*

Category	Retired mandatory criteria	Retired optional criteria
----------	----------------------------	---------------------------

Category 2	Preservation of and Access to Open Space for Rural/Tribal/Small Town	Increased Compact Development
		Passive Solar Heating/Cooling
		Advanced Certification: Site Planning, Design and Management
Category 3	Environmental Remediation	—
Category 5**	—	Moving to Zero Energy: Photovoltaic/Solar Hot Water Ready
		Achieving Zero Energy
Criteria 6	—	Ingredient Transparency for Material Health
		Chemical Hazard Optimization
		Recycled Content and Ingredient Transparency
		Regional Materials
**The following 2020 criteria were integrated into mandatory Criterion 5.2b Building Performance: Rehabilitation: 1) Sizing of Heating and Cooling Equipment, 2) ENERGY STAR Appliances, and 3) Lighting		

## Category 1: Integrative Design

**Summary:** The only significant updates appear in the mandatory Project Priorities Survey that project teams complete during predesign. It now lays the groundwork for three wayfinding themes: energy, health, and resilience.

**New criteria:** none

**Retired criteria:** none

**Table 1. Changes to Category 1: Integrative Design**

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		none
Retired criteria		
Points available: New Construction	33	26

Points available: Substantial Rehabs		
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		

### Mandatory: Criterion 1.1 Project Priorities Survey

**Goal of the updates:** Ensure the Project Priorities Survey, which is still mandatory, yields valuable, actionable insights.

The mandatory Project Priorities Survey (PPS) for 2026 explicitly integrates the three themes of energy, health, and resilience, requiring assessment and prioritization of each. This sets up project teams for success by referencing and aligning with themed pathways throughout the criteria for implementing optional criteria related to those early discoveries.

- *Energy:* The energy assessment in the PPS now leads directly into Criterion 5.1 Energy Planning (new and optional), which focuses on electrification and operating emissions. It requires teams to think proactively about the potential for fuel switching as well as the costs and benefits of electrification. The energy section of the PPS no longer includes an embodied carbon assessment; that has moved to Criterion 6.1 Product Category Screening (new and optional).
- *Health:* The health assessment in the PPS has no substantive changes, but project teams are no longer required to choose any specific criteria from Category 7: Healthy Living Environment.
- *Resilience:* The resilience risk assessment in the PPS has a similar approach to that of the 2020 version. But now, instead of a generic evaluation that ranks each hazard as a low, medium, or high priority, project teams will simply identify three priority hazards.

### Other notable changes in Category 1

**Optional: Criterion 1.5 Adaptive Planning for Resilient Communities.** Although similar to the 2020 criterion (Resilient Communities: Multi-Hazard Risk/Vulnerability Assessment), the 2026 version takes a different approach. Teams must implement strategies for all three priority hazards identified under Criterion 1.1 Project Priorities Survey. They can choose from resilience-themed criteria throughout the 2026 standard or implement other strategies to address these hazards.

## Category 2: Location + Neighborhood Fabric

**Summary:** We consolidated some of the criteria to streamline workflow. We also made substantive changes regarding sensitive site protection and made mobility and community connectivity options more accessible.

New criteria: none

Retired criteria: 4

**Table 2. Changes to Category 2: Location + Neighborhood Fabric**

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		none
Retired criteria		<p>Increased Compact Development (optional version)</p> <p>Preservation of and Access to Open Space for Rural/Tribal/Small Town (mandatory version)</p> <p>Passive Solar Heating/Cooling</p> <p>Advanced Certification: Site Planning, Design and Management</p>
Points available: New Construction	64	
Points available: Substantial Rehabs		41
Points available: Moderate Rehabs	66	35

### Mandatory: Criterion 2.1 Ecological Conservation and Safer Sites

Goal of the updates: Align the process with standard industry practice.

The 2020 version (Sensitive Site Protection) required project teams to map out and conserve Ecological Resource Protection Zones (ERPZs). The 2026 version eliminates this step to better harmonize with typical project workflows. In addition, the criterion no longer contains protections for prime farmland.

### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 2.6 Transit, Mobility, and Walkability

Goal of the updates: Enable customized, community-specific mobility and connectivity solutions.

This criterion combines two 2020 criteria: 1) Access to Transit and 2) Improved Connectivity to the Community. It also expands connectivity options to include walkability features, such as wayfinding, street trees, seating, and wide sidewalks. Many of these new walkability features complement requirements and options found in new mandatory Criterion 3.7 Traffic Safety and Mobility (see Category 3, below).

### Other notable changes in Category 2

- **Mandatory: Criterion 2.9 Access to Broadband.** The 2026 version is newly mandatory in common spaces of all multifamily properties in all locations. Broadband readiness is acceptable if there is no broadband availability on the parcel at the time of certification.
- **Optional: Criterion 2.5 Access to Open Space.** This criterion is no longer mandatory for Rural/Tribal/Small Town properties. Also, in order to comply with Option 2: On-site open space, at least 20% of the designated area must be shaded.

## Category 3: Site Design

**Summary:** The Site Design category (previously Site Improvement) grew significantly, reflecting the increasing urgency of resilience to protect people, communities, and access to affordable housing. Hazards addressed here include extreme heat, floods, wildfires, and wind.

New criteria: 6

Retired criteria: 1

*Table 3. Changes to Category 3: Site Design*

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		3.3 Exterior Lighting 3.7 Traffic Safety and Mobility 3.8 Heat-Island Management 3.9 Resilient Site Design: Wind 3.10 Resilient Site Design: Flood 3.11 Resilient Site Design: Wildfire
Retired criterion		Environmental Remediation
Points available: New Construction		
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	16	59
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		68

### Mandatory: Criterion 3.2 Site Design for Ecosystem Services

Goal of the updates: Provide site features that benefit residents, communities, and ecosystems.

This criterion is newly mandatory for all projects — not just those that include landscaping — and it takes a fundamentally new approach to site design. The focus has broadened, now emphasizing ecosystem services rather than simply restricting what can be planted. Project teams must now restore all disturbed areas to natural conditions. A name change (formerly Ecosystem Services/Landscape) reflects the expanded scope and fresh approach.

#### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.3 Exterior Lighting

**Goal of the updates:** Conserve energy and mitigate the potential impacts of exterior lighting on ecosystems and our health.

Modeled on requirements found in 2020's energy category, this new criterion is mandatory for all properties that include exterior lighting in the scope of work. It requires automatically controlled and dimmable exterior lighting and references the current industry standard for measuring and managing light pollution, the BUG rating, which is based on backlight, uplight, and glare.

#### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.4 Surface Stormwater Management

**Goal of the updates:** Reduce the potential for rainwater flooding on affordable housing sites and in nearby communities.

This criterion has much stricter requirements than its 2020 counterpart. Properties larger than 1 acre must now have capacity to retain the 80th percentile storm event, and to accomplish this, teams must use low-impact development and green infrastructure whenever possible. Smaller properties hold steady at the 2020 level, referencing the 60th percentile storm.

#### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.7 Traffic Safety and Mobility

**Goal of the updates:** Protect vulnerable road users in areas where vehicular and pedestrian traffic intersect.

This new criterion is mandatory for new construction and substantial rehabs and is optional for moderate rehabs. Project teams must assess the property for five traffic-safety hazards, and if any of the conditions apply, the site design must implement prescriptive guidance to address the condition that poses the highest potential risk to residents. Projects can earn points for addressing more than one traffic hazard.

#### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 3.8 Heat-Island Management

**Goal of the updates:** Conserve energy and mitigate health risks associated with extreme heat.

This new criterion, which is mandatory for new construction and substantial rehabs and optional for moderate rehabs, is similar to options found in 2020's Environmentally Responsible Material Selection criterion. Teams must design the property's roofing or paved areas (or both, for optional points) to reduce the likelihood of heat islands, which are areas where hard surfaces contribute to a localized temperature spike.

#### Other notable changes in Category 3

- **Optional: Criterion 3.9 Resilient Site Design: Wind**
- **Optional: Criterion 3.10 Resilient Site Design: Flood**
- **Optional: Criterion 3.11 Resilient Site Design: Wildfire**

Although these new criteria are optional, the 2026 standard strongly encourages project teams to implement adaptive measures if the assessment completed under Criterion 1.1 Project Priorities Survey found wind, flood, or wildfire to be significant hazards for the property. Criterion 1.5 Adaptive Planning for Resilient Communities can help teams follow up on critical discoveries and determine whether and how to select among the available resilience criteria.

### **Category 4: Water**

**Summary:** We are offering bigger and broader incentives for monitoring water consumption and leaks. We also added whole-home WaterSense certification as an option for both water conservation and efficient plumbing layout. The update also includes more specific and verifiable Legionella requirements.

**New criteria:** none

**Retired criteria:** none

**Table 4. Changes to Category 4**

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		none
Retired criteria		none
Points available: New Construction		55
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	35	63
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		

### Mandatory: Criterion 4.3 Water Quality, Part 2 (Legionella Water Management Program)

**Goal of the updates:** Provide clear, detailed guidance on managing water systems for *Legionella*.

As in the 2020 version, all projects that include a centralized hot-water system, a cooling tower, or a building that is 10 or more stories must have a Legionella water-management program. The 2026 version newly specifies five features the program must include and references a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention toolkit and the Green Communities Water-Management Program template for further guidance.

### Optional: Criterion 4.4 Monitoring Water Consumption and Leaks

**Goal of the update:** Strongly incentivize water conservation and resilience and reduce the risk of hidden moisture damage and mold growth.

The 2026 version of this criterion has three options, with a potential point total of 10 points for new construction or 18 points for rehabs (only 4 points were available under the 2020 version). Option 2: Prehabilitation leak assessment is for rehabs only. New construction and rehabs are eligible under Option 1: Leak detection with automatic shutoff and Option 3: Advanced water metering — and teams earn bonus points for doing both.

### Other notable changes in Category 4

- **Optional: Criterion 4.2 Advanced Water Conservation.** Added Option 2, Whole-home water certification.
- **Optional: Criterion 4.3 Water Quality, Part 3 (Water testing and remediation).** Properties served by a public water supply are newly eligible to pursue testing and remediation of arsenic, nitrates, and coliform bacteria. This part of the criterion was formerly just for properties with private wells.
- **Optional: Criterion 4.5 Efficient Plumbing Layout and Design.** There are two new compliance options: a performance path (Option 1) to help teams right-size the plumbing system and a certification path (Option 2) through whole-home WaterSense certification. The volumetric path (Option 3) most closely resembles the 2020 version of this criterion but is more stringent.

## Category 5: Energy

**Summary:** New approaches and new criteria create an accessible and continuous pathway from holistic planning to efficiency, electrification, resilience, and decarbonization.

**New criteria:** 4

Retired criteria: 2 (plus three consolidated into another criterion)

**Table 5. Changes to Category 5: Energy**

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		5.1 Energy Planning 5.5 Peak Demand Control 5.8 Electric Vehicle Charging 5.9 Passive Survivability
Retired criteria		Moving to Zero Energy: Photovoltaic/Solar Hot Water Ready Achieving Zero Energy Sizing of Heating and Cooling Equipment, ENERGY STAR Appliances, and Lighting (partially spun off as Criterion 3.3 Exterior Lighting; the rest incorporated into Criterion 5.2b Building Performance: Rehabilitation)
Points available: New Construction		
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	63	82
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		

**Mandatory and optional: Criterion 5.4a All-Electric and Electric-Ready Design: New Construction**

**Goal of the updates: Reduce the risk of exposure to harmful combustion by-products.**

This new, partially mandatory criterion replaces two optional 2020 criteria, 1) Moving to Zero Carbon: All-Electric Ready and 2) Moving to Zero Carbon: All Electric. The mandatory portion requires electric cooking equipment in dwelling-unit kitchens. It also requires that any in-unit space heating and water heating be either all electric or all-electric ready.

Criterion 5.4a is exclusively for new construction. The companion criterion for rehabs, 5.4b All-Electric and Electric-Ready Design: Rehabilitation, is optional.

**Mandatory and optional: Criterion 5.8 Electric Vehicle Charging**

**Goal of the updates: Expand EV ownership opportunity in low-income communities.**

This new criterion is mandatory for all multifamily new construction and substantial rehabs providing parking that is under the developer's control. At least one parking space must have a

Level 2 EV charger installed. For projects with 20 or more spaces, 10% must be at least EV capable, meaning they have appropriate electrical capacity and conduit installed. There are exceptions based on feasibility.

All multifamily projects with more than four parking spaces, including moderate rehabs, are also eligible for points.

#### Optional: Criterion 5.7 Renewable Energy

**Goal of the updates:** Appropriately incentivize direct and local ownership of renewable energy alongside responsible clean-energy procurement from the grid.

This fundamentally restructured criterion replaces Moving to Zero Energy: Renewable Energy from the 2020 standard. The tiered point structure prioritizes siting of renewables on the property and/or procuring clean energy from community solar projects. Projects can also earn points, but fewer, for direct clean-energy procurement or for purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs).

#### Other notable changes in Category 5

**Optional: Criterion 5.1 Energy Planning.** This new criterion heavily incentivizes phased decarbonization over a 20-year period and offers a roadmap based on annual operations and maintenance needs, typical equipment replacement cycles, and recapitalization activities.

### Category 6: Materials

**Summary:** We took a fresh approach, encouraging early screening, holistic assessment, and selection of best-in-class products. A new criterion pulls a number of familiar environmental and health priorities into one place for ease of use.

**New criteria:** 1 (plus one criterion moved into the category)

**Retired criteria:** 4 (plus three criteria moved out of the category)

#### *Table 6. Changes to Category 6: Materials*

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		6.1 Product Category Screening 6.3 Reduction of Lead Hazards in Pre-1978 Buildings (moved from 2020 Category 7: Healthy Living Environment)
Retired criteria		Ingredient Transparency for Material Health Recycled Content and Ingredient Transparency

	Chemical Hazard Optimization Bath, Kitchen, Laundry Surfaces (moved into Category 7: Healthy Living Environment) Regional Materials Managing Moisture: Foundations and Managing Moisture: Roofing and Wall Systems (moved into Category 7: Healthy Living Environment)	
Points available: New Construction		
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	58	43
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		

### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 6.2 Reduction of Materials and Waste

**Goal of the updates:** Support circularity by incentivizing material reduction, salvage, and reuse as well as design for deconstruction.

Building on and expanding 2020's Construction Waste Management requirements, this mandatory criterion can now be applied across the project life cycle. Teams must reduce material use and waste by selecting from a list of 12 strategies — one strategy for moderate rehabs; two for new construction and substantial rehabs. To help teams identify approaches that align with project priorities, the criterion groups them into three life-cycle phases: 1) material reduction through design, 2) construction waste reduction, and 3) future waste reduction.

### Mandatory and optional: Criterion 6.4 Advanced Material Selection

**Goal of the updates:** Streamline product selection, specification, and procurement by combining material health, carbon, and environmental attributes in one place.

This criterion integrates key elements of 2020's Chemical Hazard Optimization, Healthier Material Selection, and Environmentally Responsible Material Selection criteria. It newly lists requirements by product category, reflecting the holistic mindset, integrative process, and cost-benefit analysis that green product selection often demands.

The following elements of Criterion 6.4 Advanced Material Selection are newly mandatory in the 2026 version:

- **Adhesives and sealants** applied inside the air barrier: Verified low indoor emissions for 80% by volume

- **Flooring:**
  - No carpet with intentionally added PFAS “forever chemicals”
  - No flooring made with tire-derived crumb rubber
- **Insulation:**
  - Limited use of spray polyurethane foam applied on the site
  - Blowing agents with low global warming potential
- **Interior paints and other coatings** applied on the site: Verified low indoor emissions for 90% by volume
- **Wallcoverings:** No vinyl

The criterion also introduces tiers in several product categories that highlight best-in-class, intermediate, and minimum performance. The tier system can help teams identify and prioritize multiple ways to improve their material selections.

#### Other notable changes in Category 6

**Optional: Criterion 6.1 Product Category Screening.** This new criterion encourages project teams to begin research early to maximize their opportunities to select better materials. Teams screen three product categories for embodied carbon and three for material health. The screening does not require a reduction in embodied carbon or chemical hazards, but it can help teams achieve portions of Criterion 6.2 Reduction of Materials and Waste and 6.4 Advanced Material Selection.

### Category 7: Healthy Living Environment

**Summary:** We retained all mandatory criteria and added new ones. In the 2020 standard, project teams had to choose one criterion from three “Promoting Health Through Design” criteria in Category 7 (Active Design: Promoting Physical Activity; Beyond ADA: Universal Design; and Healing-Centered Design). All of these criteria remain in some form, and some aspects of them have become mandatory within Criterion 7.13 Personal and Social Safety and Criterion 7.14 Social Connection and Accessibility: Design for All Ages and Abilities.

**New criteria:** 5 (plus three moved into the category)

**Retired criteria:** 0 (except one moved out of the category)

**Table 7. Changes to Category 7: Healthy Living Environment**

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		<p><b>7.10, 7.11, and 7.12 Managing Moisture</b> (moved here from Category 6: Materials)</p> <p><b>7.6 Clean Air: Indoor Air Filtration</b></p>

	<p>7.13 Personal and Social Safety</p> <p>7.14 Social Connection and Accessibility: Design for All Ages and Abilities</p> <p>7.15 Access to Nature and Biophilic Design (spun off from Option 3 of Healing-Centered Design)</p> <p>7.16 Healing-Centered and Culturally Responsive Design (spun off from Option 4 of Healing-Centered Design)</p> <p>7.18 Place-Based Wealth Building (partially spun off from Local Economic Development and Community Wealth Creation criterion)</p>	
Retired criterion	Reduction of Lead Hazards in Pre-1978 Buildings (moved to Category 6: Materials)	
Points available: New Construction	37	53
Points available: Substantial Rehabs		48
Points available: Moderate Rehabs	49	60

### Mandatory: 7.3 Clean Air: Garage Isolation and Vehicle Pollution Management

**Goal of the updates:** Reduce the risk of exposure to particulate pollution.

We added a mandatory anti-idling policy, signage, and communication to staff and residents.

### Mandatory and optional: 7.5 Clean Air: Ventilation

**Goal of the updates:** Set clearer system requirements to promote better indoor air quality.

Mechanical ventilation remains mandatory for new construction and substantial rehabs and optional for moderate rehabs. The following details are new or more stringent for 2026:

- Performance testing and verification of both new and existing equipment
- Cleaning, sealing, balancing, and right-sizing of rooftop fans for existing central ventilation systems and ductwork
- Real-time volume measurements with data logging and alarms for high-volume systems

### Mandatory: Criterion 7.6 Clean Air: Indoor Air Filtration

**Goal of the updates:** Reduce the risk of exposure to particulate pollution.

This new criterion is mandatory for all projects installing new central HVAC systems, including substantial and moderate rehabs. It requires MERV 13 filters for such systems.

#### *Mandatory: Criteria 7.9a and 7.9b Managing Moisture in the Building Enclosure*

**Goal of the updates:** Ensure that all certifying projects, including rehabs, have adequate moisture-management strategies to help prevent mold growth and moisture damage.

These criteria are newly mandatory for all projects, regardless of foundation type, and they include considerable prescriptive detail. The 2020 versions were in Category 6: Materials.

**Criterion 7.9a Managing Moisture in the Building Enclosure: New Construction** addresses the fact that the Energy Star whole-home new construction standard no longer requires water management for roof and wall assemblies. The criterion specifies how to design and install overhangs, drainage, membranes, flashing, and other details, but project teams can instead consult a preferred resource and then implement and document that approach.

**Criterion 7.9b Managing Moisture in the Building Enclosure: Rehabilitation** newly requires a thorough preconstruction assessment of all buildings (for substantial rehabs) or envelope assemblies (for moderate rehabs) that are in the scope of work. It also provides prescriptive guidance for retrofitting roof and wall assemblies.

#### *Mandatory: Criterion 7.13 Personal and Social Safety*

**Goal of the updates:** Ensure project teams consider residents' safety needs and have customizable strategies to meet those needs.

This new criterion is mandatory for multifamily new construction and substantial rehabs; teams must implement two strategies from a list of nine. Compared with the 2020 standard, where Option 1 of Healing-Centered Design was the closest counterpart, it has a new approach to personal and social safety that is both more customizable and more verifiable. To help teams identify strategies that align with project priorities, the criterion groups them into two design principles: 1) navigation, visibility, and defensibility; and 2) reliability, control, and consistency.

#### *Mandatory: Criterion 7.14 Social Connection and Accessibility: Design for All Ages and Abilities*

**Goal of the updates:** Ensure project teams consider residents' specific needs regarding social connections and accessibility and have customizable strategies to meet those needs.

This new criterion is mandatory for all projects. Teams must implement two strategies from a list of 16. Strategies impacting dwelling units must be implemented in 25% of units. Compared with the 2020 standard, where Beyond ADA: Universal Design was the closest counterpart, it

promotes a new approach to social connection and accessibility that is both more customizable and more verifiable. To help teams identify strategies that align with project priorities, the criterion groups them into four design principles: 1) universal wayfinding and sensory sensitivity, 2) opportunities for social connection, 3) universal mobility and dexterity support, and 4) universal fit.

### *Other notable changes in Category 7*

- **Optional: Criteria 7.12a and 7.12b Sensory and Rest Friendly: Noise Reduction.** These two optional criteria are more heavily weighted than in 2020 (up to 13 points for new construction and up to 8 for rehabs), reflecting the severe impact noise can have on sleep, concentration, and mental well-being. They reference current standards to align the requirements with code.
- **Optional: Criterion 7.18 Place-Based Wealth Building.** This new criterion encourages homeownership and equity opportunities for residents. It also incorporates local economic support during the construction phase (covered in the 2020 version under Local Economic Development and Community Wealth Creation).

## Category 8: Operations, Maintenance, and Resident Engagement

**Summary:** The most significant update is the addition of a Building Readiness Report as part of emergency planning.

**New criteria:** 0

**Retired criteria:** 0

*Table 8. Changes to Category 8: Operations, Maintenance, and Resident Engagement*

Criteria feature	2020 standard	2026 standard
New criteria introduced		none
Retired criteria		
Points available: New Construction		
Points available: Substantial Rehabs	0	0
Points available: Moderate Rehabs		

### Criterion 8.2 Emergency Management Manual

The required materials for Criterion 8.2 Emergency Management Manual now include a Building Readiness Report, a template that helps on-site staff organize critical building information. This template is part of the [Enterprise Business Continuity Toolkit](#). Recommendations for Criterion 8.2 suggest using the full toolkit to prepare for emergencies with strategies to minimize damage to the property, support residents, and maintain operations before, during, and after an event.

### Other notable changes in Category 8

Language throughout the category clarifies that required materials, provided they meet criteria specifications, can be part of a developer's existing framework or manual for documenting and communicating operations and maintenance information about the property.