

Bayou Architecture for Climate Resilience, Cities Get Permitting Support, and Can Heat Pumps Lower Electric Rates?

Hi, I'm Ronan. You're watching *This Week's Sustainable Building News*. Let's get into this week's stories.

Could heat pumps help lower electricity rates? A new report from RMI says strategic installations could make better use of grid capacity that sits underused in winter. The analysis estimates that about 109 million U.S. homes could use heat pumps within today's available winter headroom. In summer-peaking states, adding heat pumps could spread grid costs across more electricity sales, putting downward pressure on residential rates. RMI estimates rate reductions averaging 6% with all-electric heat pumps, or 13% with a mix of all-electric and hybrid systems. RMI recommends tailoring heat pump incentives and electric rates to each state's seasonal grid capacity, while encouraging heat pumps when air conditioners are due for replacement.

<https://rmi.org/resources/the-opportunity-for-heat-pumps-to-put-downward-pressure-on-electricity-rates/>

Who would have thought bayou architecture could offer such timely lessons for designing in a changing climate? Shaped by flooding, heat, and humidity, Gulf Coast building traditions have long worked with those conditions. A new feature in ArchDaily looks at how those lessons are informing contemporary design. Raised foundations help keep living spaces above flood-prone ground. Deep roofs and porches shed rain, provide shade, and make room for breezes. Courtyards, operable windows, and moisture-resistant walls help buildings respond to heat and humidity. The landscape matters, too. Rain gardens, bioswales, permeable surfaces, and preserved vegetation can slow runoff and support natural drainage. As flood exposure and coastal change increase, bayou architecture offers a way of thinking: Observe the place, work with its conditions, and design for change.

<https://www.archdaily.com/1186701/architecture-between-land-and-water-design-lessons-from-the-bayou>

With mortgage rates above 7% and existing-home sales below a 4-million annual pace for a second month, many homeowners are choosing to improve the homes they have

instead of moving. In a new COGNITION's Retrofits Survey, 48% say they'd rather improve their current home, while 27% are looking to save money through energy efficiency. Long-term savings top the list of remodeling motivators, followed by health and wellbeing, home value, and resilience. Energy upgrades are gaining ground: reported solar installations rose from 9% in 2024 to 47% in 2026, while battery storage climbed from 3% to 45%. Homeowners are also investing in insulation, windows, roofing, and HVAC to reduce energy use—and in backup power and fire-resistant products to prepare for climate risks. Green Builder Media, Datavations, and Kohler will explore these shifting priorities in a webinar on Wednesday, October 28, at noon Eastern. You can register at [GreenBuilderMedia.com](https://www.greenbuildermedia.com) or use the link in the notes.

<https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/home-improvement-spending-increases>

A new Bloomberg Philanthropies initiative is helping cities cut through local bottlenecks that can slow housing construction. Up to 30 cities and counties will receive funding and hands-on support to speed digital permitting, offer pre-approved home designs, and bring agencies together to move stalled projects forward. The program draws on approaches used in San Diego, Austin, and Atlanta. Alexandria, Virginia, was among the first cities selected. It expects up to \$750,000 to help cut approval times in half and double the number of accessory dwelling units in its pipeline within two years. The initiative focuses on tools local governments can control: how quickly projects are reviewed, what housing can be built, and how residents can add homes such as backyard cottages or garage apartments.

<https://alexandrialivingmagazine.com/news/alexandria-picked-for-bloomberg-housing-initiative-to-speed-/>

What kind of future are we building with artificial intelligence? In his new book, *Rescuing the Future: Reimagining Artificial Intelligence in a World on the Edge*, futurist Jeremy Rifkin argues that AI could reinforce an extractive, centralized model—or help communities build technology rooted in local ecosystems and shared stewardship. Rifkin's challenge is to rethink our relationship with the living world, and to consider how the choices we make about AI could shape the planet's future. It's a timely question as the technology rapidly expands.

<https://prairielights.com/book/9781509564422>

Our editors' product pick this week is more of a distribution advancement than a new product: Weyerhaeuser is expanding the reach of wood-fiber insulation through a new U.S. partnership with TimberHP. The company will market and distribute TimberHP's TimberBatt and TimberBoard products through its lumber and building materials network. TimberFill blown-in insulation will remain under its current distribution structure.

Made in the U.S. from softwood residuals, the products offer builders another option for energy-efficient, wood-based insulation.

<https://www.building-products.com/weyerhaeuser-to-market-timberhp-wood-fiber-insulation/>

A smaller home doesn't have to mean less value—but what should it give back? Architect Bill Ramsey talks with Sara Gutterman about designing for that tradeoff: a larger kitchen island instead of a formal dining room, or shared green space when a private yard isn't possible. He also explains why price per square foot misses what matters over time, from livability and community to utility and maintenance costs. Watch the new episode of *The Valuation Metric*. Enjoy this clip.

<https://youtu.be/syNDaBG7bK4>

Climate risk is changing what homeowners expect from a home—and what they're willing to invest in. A new COGNITION Smart Data report, *A Growing Resiliency Economy: Addressing Upfront Cost Challenges*, explores why resilient homes are becoming a stronger value driver. Homeowners want features that protect their families, reduce long-term costs, and provide peace of mind. But upfront costs remain a major barrier, even as insurance incentives begin to influence decisions. What features are buyers starting to expect—and how can builders make resilience more attainable? You can download the free report using the link in the show notes.

<https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/a-growing-resiliency-economy-addressing-upfront-cost-challenges?hsCtaAttrib=220888787613>

Flood-resistant design is looking beyond the 100-year floodplain. FEMA's new guide explains how the updated ASCE 24-24 construction standard extends to the mapped 500-year floodplain for most buildings, including homes. It ties required elevations to building use, accounts for at least 50 years of sea-level rise, and addresses foundations, materials, and utility protection. For builders, resilience starts with where a home sits, how high it's built, and what's below that elevation. The standard has been proposed for the 2027 International Codes, offering a preview of where flood-resistant construction is headed.

https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_highlights-of-asce_24-24.pdf

Free building science training is getting easier to fit into a busy schedule. Learning Edge is launching complimentary, one-hour Short Courses, with multiple morning and afternoon sessions offered across two consecutive weeks. The first course, *Becoming a Building Science Expert*, covers heat flow, diagnostic testing, insulation, air barriers,

ventilation, and how homes work as a system. It's designed for builders, contractors, code officials, architects, raters, and other building professionals. Part 1 runs October 27 or 29; Part 2 runs November 3 or 5. You can pick morning or afternoon start times. The Zoom training is free, and continuing education credits are available for purchase. Learn more and sign up at Learning Edge or hit the link in the notes.

<https://www.learningedgellc.com/complimentary-training#buildingscience1>

That's it for the news this week. Thanks for watching. I'll see you next Wednesday.