Climate Migration, ADU Loopholes, and Permitting Gets Political

The Senate has passed a permitting overhaul that the Union of Concerned Scientists says could weaken environmental protections and community input. The Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026 passed November 19 by a vote of 62 to 33. Supporters say faster permitting could help get energy projects built and lower costs. The bill covers major infrastructure, including transmission lines and renewable energy projects. But UCS warns the measure could also weaken protections under the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act, making it easier to advance fossil fuel projects with less scrutiny. The organization says those changes could mean more pollution and less transparency for communities already facing a heavy burden. UCS supports expanding transmission to carry renewable electricity to more communities. But David Watkins, the organization's director of federal government relations for climate and energy, says the bill's environmental concessions aren't the right way to do it. The legislation now goes to the House. UCS is urging lawmakers to reject it in January and revisit permitting reform in the new Congress, with stronger community protections and better support for renewable energy.

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/senate-permitting-overhaul-pushes-fossil-fuel-agenda-ucs-warns

Could Cincinnati become a destination for people looking for more affordable housing and lower climate risk? In a Forbes article, Jennifer Castenson looks at the city's effort to prepare for potential climate migration. Realtor.com data cited in the article puts Cincinnati's median listing price at $340,000—18% below the national average. An analysis of climate risk found about only 5% of local properties face severe damage risk over the next 30 years. The city is changing zoning rules and developing pre-approved designs to encourage more housing. But challenges remain. The city will need resilient infrastructure, better access to transportation, and housing that longtime residents can afford.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/jennifercastenson/2026/11/16/affordable-housing-lower-climate-risk-is-cincinnati-the-future/

Homeowners who have experienced a climate event put resilience ahead of savings. In a new COGNITION Smart Data survey, 39.2% of those homeowners ranked resilience as their top priority, compared with 22.8% who prioritized saving money. Across all

homeowners, the pattern reverses: 33.6% prioritize savings, while 27.5% prioritize resilience. That shift shows how a climate event can change the way people define a home's value. But the housing industry shouldn't wait for a disaster to make resilience matter. Builders, manufacturers, developers, and insurers can bring protective features into the conversation earlier—as part of what a well-designed home should deliver. There are signs of growing demand: 62.9% of building professionals surveyed said requests for resilient features have increased in the past three years.

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/resilience-shouldnt-require-a-disaster-to-prove-its-value

North Carolina's housing debate reflects a national challenge: estimates of the U.S. housing shortage range from 2 million to 5.5 million homes, depending on how the gap is measured. A new study commissioned by the North Carolina Home Builders Association finds that newly built homes generate more state and local tax revenue than the added public service costs they create. It estimates $1.48 in annual revenue for every dollar spent on services such as schools, transportation, and public safety—about $87 million more in revenue than costs. The report also estimates that homebuilding generated nearly $46 billion in economic activity and supported about 261,000 jobs in North Carolina in 2025. These are statewide estimates, and the impact of a specific project depends on local infrastructure and school capacity. Still, the findings add a useful perspective to a national question: how can communities expand housing supply while paying for the services that growth requires?

https://www.carolinajournal.com/study-nc-housing-generates-more-tax-revenue-than-public-costs/

Can investments in nature help protect communities and make financial sense? Public agencies are finding ways to measure both. In Virginia, the Department of Transportation evaluated 36 projects and found that a $1.7 million investment in resilience could deliver $97 million in quantified benefits. West Sacramento took a nature-based approach to flood protection, creating a levee setback and restoring floodplain habitat. The project now helps protect 60,000 residents, 4,000 businesses, and billions of dollars in assets. The value isn't only what can be counted in dollars. San Francisco's waterfront planning also weighs community disruption, open space, and habitat benefits alongside traditional economic measures. Agencies are comparing marshes, floodplains, and other nature-based solutions with conventional structures like seawalls and revetments. The strongest case may come when a project can reduce

flood risk, protect infrastructure, and improve the surrounding environment at the same time. Read the full story at Smart Cities Dive.

https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/building-financial-case-resilient-infrastructure/874896/

A high-performance home depends on more than windows and insulation. The building envelope has to keep air and water from slipping through the seams. That's why this week's product pick is from the VISION House Transcend, a net-zero, all-electric home in the Colorado Rockies. Featured there is PROSOCO's Cat 5 system, which helps seal and protect that envelope. The fluid-applied, vapor-permeable system uses different products to fill sheathing seams, seal around windows and doors, and coat the wall surface. That combination is designed to block air and water while allowing moisture vapor to escape the wall assembly—helping reduce the risk of trapped moisture and damage. PROSOCO says the Cat 5 system is designed to withstand wind-driven rain at pressures associated with winds above 155 miles per hour. It's an example of how an often-hidden layer of a home can support energy performance, durability, and resilience.

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/an-invisible-hero-in-high-performance-homes

Kick back and take a trip back in time with Ron Jones, Green Builder Media's CEO, in a new show on the Green Builder Media Network: *Have Green, Will Travel*. In the first episode, Ron looks back to the Texas Panhandle, where his childhood world stretched from a small house on cement blocks to wheat fields, garden rows, and big piles of dirt from a home addition. Those dirt piles became mountains, roads, and whole imaginary towns—built one Tonka truckload at a time. It's a quiet, personal story about growing up around the work of building, and how those early memories can stay with you long after the house itself is gone. Find *Have Green, Will Travel* on the Green Builder Media Network. Here's a clip.

https://youtu.be/S638siH5UxU

California's push to build more housing is producing some unusual results in Atherton, one of Silicon Valley's wealthiest towns. Bloomberg CityLab reports that since 2018, Atherton has approved hundreds of accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, to help meet the state's housing requirements. But some of these "homes" reportedly function as pool houses, gyms, or personal spas, with sleeping areas added to qualify as ADUs. Few are occupied, and the town's vice mayor says some occupied units house homeowners' relatives rent-free—allowing them to count as deeply affordable housing. The town's plan, which the state certified, allows at least

348 new homes. But the story raises a bigger question: Are housing rules creating places people can actually live, or giving wealthy homeowners another way to expand their estates?

https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2026-silicon-valley-compound-expansion/

Want to build confidence with the 2021 Energy Code? Learning Edge is offering a free, one-hour short course to help building professionals navigate the 2021 IECC with more confidence. Part 1 covers the code's history and key requirements for insulation, windows, air sealing, building systems, lighting, and more. Choose a Zoom session on Tuesday, December 1, or Thursday, December 3, at 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. Mountain Standard Time. The course is designed for builders, architects, contractors, code officials, inspectors, raters, and other building professionals. Part 2, on compliance, testing, inspections, and documentation, takes place December 8th or 10th. There's no registration fee. Continuing education credits are available, but participants must complete both parts to receive credits for the full course. Find registration details at LearningEdgeLLC.com or click the link in our notes.

https://www.learningedgellc.com/complimentary-training#code2021-1

Don't forget Sara Gutterman's annual State of the Industry webinar will be held next week. Hit the show links to register for this popular free event.

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/2026-state-of-the-industry-webinar-the-new-affordability-equation?hsCtaAttrib=228012346759

That's the news. I hope you'll subscribe and share it to help us spread the Sustainability Word. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving, and I'll see you next week!