Hi, I'm Ronan, and you're watching *This Week's Sustainable Building News*.

Let's start with a small solar system and a surprisingly big question: If you plug it in, is it legal? Plug-in solar—sometimes called balcony solar—can connect a compact solar panel system to a household outlet. It's attracting attention from people who want to make a little of their own electricity without installing a conventional rooftop system. As of October 28, ten states had enacted laws addressing plug-in solar. Four others are scheduled to take effect in 2027. The rules can differ sharply from one state to another. Connecticut's law, for example, exempts certain qualifying portable solar devices from utility interconnection requirements. But it also directs the state to consider safety provisions in future building and fire code updates. Maine allows systems up to 420 watts under one set of conditions, with higher-capacity systems permitted up to 1,200 watts if additional requirements are met, including installation by a licensed electrician. The important point is that just because a state law permits a device, that doesn't necessarily settle every question about how it can be installed.

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/where-is-plug-in-solar-legal-state-by-state-map

Could the housing market's problem be too few buyers, not too few homes? J.P. Morgan strategist David Kelly estimates that slower population growth could mean demand for about 320,000 new homes a year—far below the roughly 1 million built annually during the first two decades of this century. That challenges the familiar housing-shortage narrative, though other estimates point to a substantial gap. The debate turns partly on how population growth, household formation, and vacant homes are counted.

Fhttps://fortune.com/2026/11/02/housing-shortage-too-few-people-immigration-jpmorgan-david-kelly/

For homebuyers, the affordability challenge is showing up in a different way: builders are getting more creative with incentives. In October, 65% of builders surveyed by the National Association of Home Builders said they were offering sales incentives. Forty-three percent reported cutting prices—the largest share in NAHB's 2020-to-2026 series. New-home sales in September were also 5.3% lower than a year earlier. One builder's latest offer puts a different spin on the incentive package. CC Homes is offering an eligible buyer a new Tesla Model 3 with a home purchase at its Maple Ridge community in Ave Maria, Florida. The builder says solar panels are also available as an option, and the promotion is scheduled to run through December 31, subject to restrictions and other terms.

https://www.cchomes.com/buy-a-homes-get-a-tesla-at-maple-ridge/

A Michigan community is testing whether home batteries can help support the grid. DTE Energy and sonnen have launched a two-year virtual power plant pilot connecting nearly 100 homes at Veridian, a 170-home community in Ann Arbor. The homes have solar, heat pumps, and battery systems. The pilot will let DTE evaluate how coordinating those batteries could help meet periods of high electricity demand and support grid reliability. The project offers a look at how individual home systems could be coordinated as part of a larger energy resource.

https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2026/10/29/3391309/0/en/dte-energy-and-sonnen-launch-michigan-s-first-residential-battery-virtual-power-plant-pilot-to-explore-new-ways-to-lower-energy-costs.html

This stat makes the affordability crisis real: Nearly half of U.S. household spending went to housing and food in 2025—the largest share in 15 years. Housing alone accounted for 33.9% of expenditures, according to the latest Consumer Expenditure Survey. That puts the affordability conversation in perspective: a home's purchase price is only part of the cost. Ongoing expenses shape what it takes to live there—and the value a home delivers over time.

Bloomberg's report on the spending data:
https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2026/oct/30/half-of-americans-spending-goes-to-housing-and-foo/

Affordability is also part of the conversation around building codes. The latest development: the 2027 International Codes have completed their development cycle, setting the stage for states and local jurisdictions to consider adoption. Among the approved changes are expanded flood-resistant design requirements that reach the 500-year floodplain, and new provisions referencing standards for off-site construction. Those standards are intended to support more uniform construction and inspection requirements for modular buildings. The code cycle also expands fire code coverage to energy storage systems in homes covered by the residential code.

https://www.nahb.org/blog/2026/08/2027-building-codes-i-code-final-vote

In the latest The Valuation Metric pod, Sara Gutterman talks with sustainability strategist and author Andrew Winston about where the sustainability movement stands amid political headwinds, corporate green-hushing, and renewed pressure for short-term returns. The conversation also examines AI's enormous potential, and its equally significant environmental and social risks, as Andrew makes the case for staying clear-eyed, pragmatic, and optimistic about what comes next. Here's a clip.

https://youtu.be/2VamBk3bq6U?si=b7XCQaQTNhIqWx4R

Now for our Editors' Product Pick: a window-mounted energy recovery ventilator from SWERV Air. The company has opened preorders for its SWERV V3, a compact unit designed to bring filtered outdoor air into a room while exhausting stale indoor air. Unlike a portable air purifier, which typically filters and recirculates indoor air, an energy recovery ventilator exchanges indoor and outdoor air. The unit is designed to recover some heat and moisture from the outgoing air, which can help reduce the energy penalty of bringing in fresh air during cold weather. SWERV says the new model fits several common window types, requires no ductwork, and can be installed without cutting a hole in the wall. The company also says it recovers approximately 85% of heat and moisture from the outgoing air.

https://swervair.com/products/preorder-beta?srsltid=AYCX9vLI1jRQtiyeb9FEVoSIIFCL9C_tdclGSEpilGe_QhAuUBqj_nla

And finally, a new book released this week turns the spotlight to homes and places shaped by their surroundings. *New Natural Living*, by Dominic Bradbury, brings together 20 projects by Michaelis Boyd Architects, with work from the United States, the UK, Europe, and Africa. The publisher describes the book as a look at architecture connected to sustainability and the natural world, with projects that respond to their settings and emphasize the relationship between indoors and outdoors.

https://www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/books/new-natural-living-michaelis-boyd-architects-hardcover

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