

Hi, I'm Ronan and you're watching This Week's Sustainable Building News. There's a lot happening in housing this week, from falling home starts and AI's growing influence on home buyers to new approaches to energy, resilience, and affordability. Let's get into it.

The latest housing numbers aren't encouraging. Single-family starts fell nearly 10% in July and are down almost 16% from a year ago as high financing and construction costs continue to sideline builders. But one state is bucking the trend. Oregon housing starts jumped 11.3% during the first half of 2026, with more than 50,000 future homes now in the pipeline. State officials credit efforts to improve financing and remove regulatory barriers, including unnecessary fees, administrative delays, and redundant processes. And that distinction matters. We need to make housing easier and less expensive to build, but that shouldn't mean weakening energy efficiency or building performance. With housing production struggling nationally, Oregon offers an interesting case study: remove the barriers that add cost without adding value, while preserving the ones that deliver better homes.

<https://ktvz.com/news/2026/08/17/oregon-housing-starts-rise-11-3-in-first-half-of-2026-outpacing-national-trend/>

Do you know what AI is saying about your floor plans, finishes, prices, and services? Because there's a good chance your buyers are asking AI about them before they ever talk to you. Consider this recent story from Inman. A homebuyer fed an inspection report into an AI tool and asked it to estimate repair costs. The answer? About \$250,000. The buyer believed it and canceled the real estate contract. Two licensed contractors later evaluated the property and estimated the repairs at just \$17,000 to \$19,000. That's an extreme example, but there's a lesson here for builders. AI is quickly becoming another source buyers use to evaluate homes, products, prices, features, and value. So it may be time to ask a new marketing question: What does AI know about your homes, and is it getting the story right?

https://www.inman.com/2026/08/03/the-230k-ai-repair-estimate-that-almost-killed-my-deal/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter&utm_term=amheadlines&utm_content=1126901_dek_2_20260804&message_id=46862290.1470

Factory-built housing is getting some help from Washington, but one of its biggest barriers remains. A new federal housing law eliminates the permanent steel-frame requirement for manufactured homes, potentially saving \$5,000 to \$10,000 per home. It also directs HUD to address financing barriers for modular construction and study a standardized federal building code. That last piece is important. Modular homes still face a patchwork of state and local codes, making it difficult for factories to build

standardized products at scale. And today, modular represents only about 3% of U.S. home completions. Industry leaders say the law is a positive step, but studying a national code isn't the same as creating one. If factory-built housing is going to make a meaningful dent in America's housing shortage, scale is the opportunity, and regulatory consistency may be the key to unlocking it.

<https://www.wsj.com/real-estate/new-housing-law-boosts-prospects-for-factory-built-homes-3ae6bece>

Virginia is betting that solar and farming don't have to compete for land. A new state law officially defines agrivoltaics, allowing agriculture and solar production on the same property. Virginia is only the fourth state to do so. The timing matters. Virginia is the nation's data center capital, with electricity demand soaring even as farmland disappears. Agrivoltaics could address both. Crops can grow and livestock can graze around solar arrays, keeping land productive while generating additional income for farmers. One Virginia operation already grazes 1,500 sheep across 4,000 acres of solar farms. As AI drives electricity demand higher, Virginia is asking a smart question: Why choose between clean energy and farmland when the same land can provide both?

<https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/food-and-farms/virginia-solar-with-farming?>

New research from Drexel University argues that the way we calculate a building's environmental footprint is missing something important: what happens when that building fails during an extreme weather event. Traditional life cycle assessments account for materials, construction, and operations, but often overlook the carbon and resources required to repair or rebuild after floods, fires, extreme heat, wind, or other disasters. That means a building designed to survive an extreme event could appear no greener on paper than one that requires extensive rebuilding afterward. Researchers are proposing that avoided damage, repairs, displacement, and reconstruction become part of the sustainability equation. It's a compelling idea for the building industry: the greenest building may increasingly be the one that's built to last.

<https://drexel.edu/news/archive/2026/August/building-life-cycle-assessment-extreme-weather>

America's homebuilding industry is getting bigger and more consolidated. The latest example: Dream Finders Homes acquiring Beazer Homes in a \$2.2 billion deal that will create the sixth-largest homebuilder in the country. There are clear advantages to that kind of scale, especially when America desperately needs more housing. But as climate disasters become more frequent and destructive, Green Builder Media's President Ron Jones argues that small, local builders may be one of our most important—and overlooked—resilience resources. When a wildfire, hurricane, or flood destroys a community, rebuilding happens one home and one neighborhood at a time. Local

builders know the codes, permitting officials, trades, suppliers, lenders, insurers and, importantly, the communities themselves. Large builders are essential to increasing housing production. But when disaster strikes, the small builders already embedded in our communities may be the ones we need most.

<https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/wanted-small-builders>

On the real estate front, here's a new trend reflecting how home shoppers think: Redfin is now showing buyers childcare costs and availability before they buy a home. The company has added nearby daycare and preschool information to its listings, including tuition, distance, licensing, and even financial aid availability. And the reason is striking. New Redfin data finds the typical working family now spends 52% of its income on housing and childcare combined. In Los Angeles, that figure approaches 97%. In more affordable markets like Little Rock, it's closer to 40%. This is part of a larger shift in how buyers evaluate homes. They're increasingly looking beyond price and square footage to understand the total cost and quality of living in a community. For builders and developers, that's worth paying attention to. Affordability isn't just the price of the house anymore. It's the life that comes with it.

<https://www.inman.com/2026/08/17/redfin-childcare-listings-neighborhood-insights/>

The housing market may be stuck, but homeowners are still investing in the homes they already have. Home Depot says second-quarter sales rose 5.7%, driven in part by continued demand for smaller home improvement projects. The trend makes sense. With home prices near record highs and mortgage rates still hovering well above 6%, many homeowners are staying put rather than moving. And while borrowing costs are also putting major renovations on hold, smaller remodeling projects remain active.

<https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/home-depot-sales-small-projects-housing-costs>

America's struggling malls are finding a new kind of anchor tenant: housing. Across the country, developers are adding apartments to former department stores, underused parking lots, and aging shopping centers, turning them into mixed-use neighborhoods. In fact, an analysis of 153 mall redevelopments found that housing was the most common new use, appearing in more than half of the projects. One former Sears outside Seattle is now a 328-unit apartment community with ground-floor retail, while New Jersey's Garden State Plaza is adding 575 apartments as part of a larger transformation into a walkable town center. Not every mall can make the transition. But with housing in short supply and huge amounts of commercial land already served by

roads and infrastructure, yesterday's shopping centers could become tomorrow's neighborhoods.

<https://www.multihousingnews.com/the-mall-gets-a-residential-address/>

The old real estate mantra has always been “location, location, location.” But affordability may be rewriting that rule. Our COGNITION Hot Take of the week finds that more than 70% of home buyers would move to find a more affordable home. More than 38% would relocate to a nearby state, 15% would move to an entirely different region, nearly 17% would move anywhere in the U.S and 5% would even leave the country. Remote and flexible work are making that mobility possible, while housing costs are making it increasingly necessary. For builders, there's a big takeaway: your buyer may no longer be local. Entry-level and downsizer communities could attract buyers from hundreds or even thousands of miles away, opening the door to entirely new marketing strategies. Because increasingly, buyers aren't just asking where they want to live. They're asking: Where can I afford the life I want?

<https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/home-buyers-are-no-longer-limited-by-geography>

What if the water solutions we need here on Earth are already being tested in space? On the latest Impact Series, Mike Collignon talks with Colorado State University's Dr. Sybil Sharvelle about her work developing water recycling systems for space missions and what those lessons can teach us as water scarcity intensifies here at home. They dig into water reuse, the water-energy nexus, agriculture, and some of the difficult choices facing the increasingly water-stressed West. Here's a clip:

<https://youtu.be/OGMX6L9QPVU>

In other state news, Colorado just became the 12th state to adopt IAPMO's Water Demand Calculator as an alternative method for sizing water supply piping in single- and multifamily buildings. Instead of relying on decades-old assumptions about water use, the calculator uses modern fixture data and statistical analysis to more accurately predict peak demand. For builders, that can mean smaller pipes, lower construction costs, less water and energy waste, faster hot-water delivery, and reduced stagnation. This is the kind of code change worth watching: better data replacing outdated assumptions—and potentially lowering costs at the same time.

<https://iapmo.org/newsroom/press-releases/colorado-approves-water-demand-calculator-as-alternate-standard-for-sizing-water-supply-piping>

Managing HVAC across a multifamily portfolio can get complicated fast. ecobee SmartBuildings brings thermostat management into one centralized platform, giving property managers remote HVAC control, automated alerts, scheduling, reporting, and portfolio-wide visibility. Operators can choose a turnkey Fleet Management platform or use the SmartBuildings API to integrate thermostat controls and data into an existing PropTech ecosystem. The payoff: simpler operations, greater control, improved resident comfort, and opportunities to reduce energy consumption across multifamily properties.

[ecobee SmartBuildings for Multifamily](#)

Did you know you can access our webinars on demand on our website. Last week's webinar was particularly popular. Green Builder magazine Editor-in-Chief Matt Power facilitated Beyond the Code: Smart Ventilation Strategies for Healthier Homes with experts in ventilation from Panasonic. Click the link below to watch at your leisure.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s422ESK9YTY&feature=youtu.be>

That's it for this week. Thanks for watching This Week's Sustainable Building News—see you next Wednesday.