January 22, 2020

2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria

Enterprise Green Communities is transforming the way America thinks about, designs, builds, and rehabilitates affordable housing. We are pleased to announce the release of the 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria, our 15th anniversary edition.

Since our inception, Enterprise Green Communities has taken decisive action to integrate green practices into the affordable housing sector through policy, capital, and programmatic efforts. Enterprise has supported affordable housing organizations across the country in creating and rehabilitating more than 127,000 green, healthy homes; has invested $3.9 billion in the development and preservation of green and affordable homes; and has transformed policies at the state, local, and national level.

The 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria (2020 Criteria) will set the standard for the sector, reflecting best practices while broadening its scope to better address resident priorities, our changing climate, and health.

The Criteria was developed collaboratively by leading national organizations and experts for the purpose of providing a clear, cost-effective framework for improving the quality of all affordable housing development types. Since its inception, the Criteria have been updated on a regular cycle.

Updates to the Criteria respond to technological advances, evaluation outcomes, environmental, industry and policy trends and input from developers and policymakers on specific criterion. Updating the Criteria on a regular cycle maintains relevance for Green Communities in relation to advances in the field, changing codes, and evolving green and energy programs. Updates also provide Green Communities staff and partners the ability to strengthen or diminish various criterion categories and integrate critical recommendations for the nation's affordable housing stock.   Enterprise has relied on the following set of guiding principles in its evolution:

- Achievable for all affordable housing development types (new construction, substantial and moderate rehab; single family, and low to high-rise multifamily);
- Cost-effective and proven green development approaches;
- Designed to deliver significant health, economic and environmental benefits;
- Technically sound and rigorous performance standards that are best in class and comparable to other national and regional green residential programs;
- Measurable and verifiable (whether through paper or field review).

Over the past eighteen months we've coordinated thousands of inputs from community development stakeholders through four key phases of Criteria development:
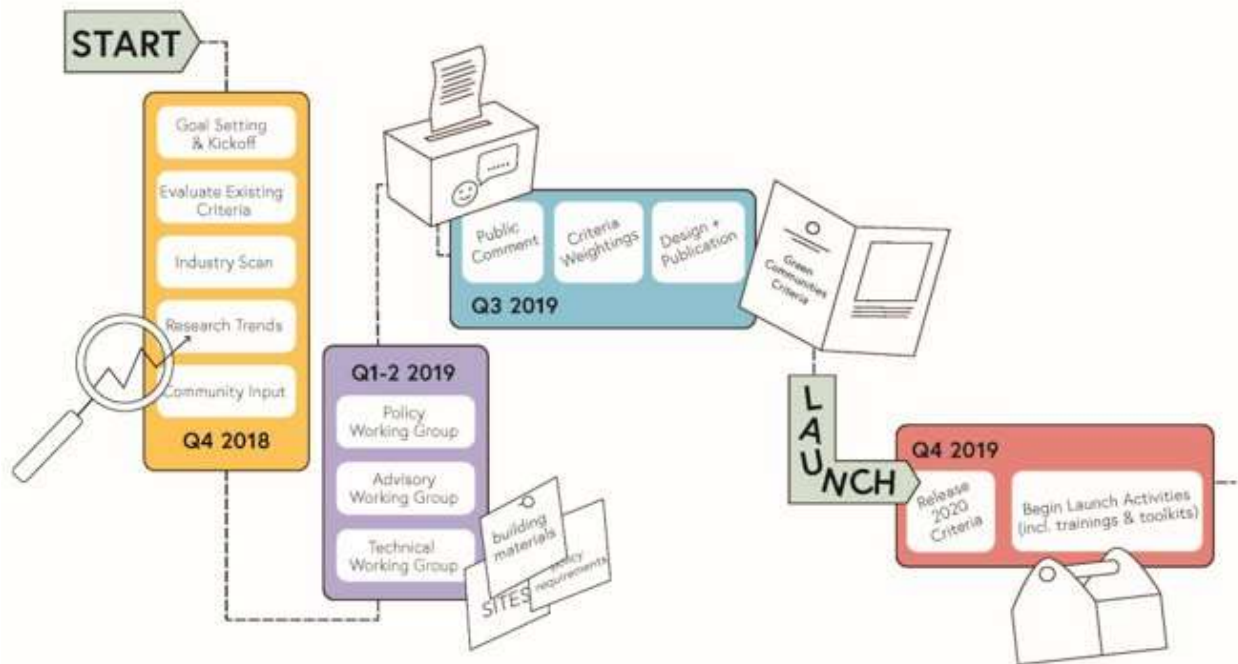
In creating the 2020 Criteria we emphasized integrative design practices to lift up resident priorities and ramifications of our changing climate, developed strategies to drive down carbon emissions, doubled-down on practices to improve resident health and well-being outcomes, broadened our approach to water, and strengthened strategies relating to property resilience. These changes were made within the traditional Green Communities framework which emphasizes a holistic approach to design and construction. Following the 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria ensures that projects will be healthy, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

2020 Updates

The 2020 Criteria is structured across eight categories, similarly to the 2011 and 2015 Criteria. However, Category 4, "Water Conservation," has been modified as "Water" to reflect that our new strategies address water quality as well as conservation and Category 5, "Energy Efficiency," has been modified as "Operating Energy" to better recognize the impact of energy efficiency strategies and renewables in this category and embodied emissions elsewhere in the Criteria.

1. Integrative Design
2. Location + Neighborhood Fabric
3. Site Improvements
4. Water
5. Operating Energy
6. Materials
7. Healthy Living Environment
8. Operations, Maintenance + Resident Engagement

Within the eight categories, significant changes from the 2015 to 2020 Criteria include a greater focus on integrative design with a new mandatory Project Priorities Survey to shape project goals with resident input, framing goal setting to promote equity and recognition of climate change.

We have also amplified strategies related to carbon reductions with a new "Path to Zero" within Category 5, and a higher tier of certification (Enterprise Green Communities Certification Plus) will recognize projects which have been designed to significantly reduce energy consumption.

While health has been a long-standing focus of Green Communities, the 2020 Criteria takes another step forward: Category 6: Materials begins with new criteria focused on selecting building materials that are transparent about how their ingredients impact health, Category 7: Healthy Living Environments includes a mandatory "Promoting Health through Design" section, and all buildings certified to the 2020 Criteria will also earn WELL certification recognizing the program's impact on resident health and well-being.

Water emerged as a leading theme in the 2020 Criteria. We've moved to a performance based calculation approach to water consumption rather than specifying fixture flow rates, a strategy that will be especially beneficial to rehabs of existing buildings. And, we've added a new criterion on water quality which is designed to help manage the presence of lead and legionella, among other characteristics.

And, finally, resilience is amplified throughout the 2020 Criteria, from a new mandatory basic hazard assessment to refined criteria outlining strategies that ensure access to potable water and power for critical loads.

Three criteria (Electricity Meter, Clothes Dryer Exhaust, and Mold Prevention: Water Heaters) were retired and not migrated into the 2020 Criteria from the previous version, as these have largely become standard practice (Clothes Dryer Exhaust and Mold Prevention: Water Heaters) or accommodated elsewhere in the Criteria.

And, while the 2011 Criteria included a specific approach to projects that could be classified as Rural / Tribal / Small Town for the first time, with the 2020 Criteria, we've significantly modified that approach, given project team feedback over the years. With this iteration of the Criteria, projects that qualify as Rural / Tribal / Small Town will not be required to demonstrate access to transit. Instead, these projects will be required to be "broadband-ready," with optional points available for projects that do include broadband connectivity.

For additional information related to the 2020 Criteria, please contact Enterprise at certification@enterprisecommunity.org.