

Green Development (Building) Standards

Green building standards are **a tool used by municipalities to guide new development** in a manner that considers the principles of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

They are often voluntary and mandatory measures for new development (typically excluding renovations and retrofits).

Some features of a Green Building Standard include:

- Maintaining the existing tree canopy
- Enhancing stormwater quantity and quality
- Energy efficiency requirements for buildings
- Water conservation requirements for buildings
- Waste minimization
- Protecting and integrating green space
- Promoting compact, mixed-use development
- Integrating access to active and public transportation
- Renewable energy generation and storage
- Access to public parks
- Parking spaces for bicycles
- Requirements for the planting of native species
- Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure
- Building resilience
- Bird-friendly design
- Pedestrian Infrastructure
- Conserving cultural heritage
- Material re-use and recycling
- Soil quantity and quality
- Connectivity

Ontario Municipalities with green building standards:

1. Mandatory/Tiered Standards: **Toronto** (since 2010; Tier 1 of the Toronto Green Standard is required through the planning approval process. Tiers 2 to 4 are higher level voluntary standards associated with financial incentives and verified post construction), **Whitby, Halton Hills, and Ajax**
2. Collaborative/Points-Based Systems: **Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and Markham**
3. Other Adoptions/Developments: **Mississauga, Caledon, Hamilton, Aurora, East Gwillimbury, King, Pickering, and Waterloo Region**

More details here:

<https://climateactionpartnership.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Municipal-Green-Development-Standards-July-2024.pdf>

- Buildings built to green standards feature quality doors and windows, water efficient fixtures, good insulation, high-efficiency heating and cooling, and airtightness with good ventilation.
- Municipalities make community planning decisions every day and Green Development Standards are no different.
- Cost varies depending on the building type and community-specific Green Development Standards, but typically it's no more than a 3% incremental cost for the developer. The developer may or may not pass on some or all of this to the initial purchaser depending on local market conditions.
- The regulations can be designed to be flexible for developers, as long as they ensure uptake and are effective at reducing carbon and developing efficient, economical buildings.

Why green building standards?

Buildings are the number one source of urban emissions!

Emissions from buildings make up 45% of all GTHA emissions and predominantly come from natural gas used for space heating and natural gas plants used for generating electricity.

Niagara Region data: Buildings 51.8%
(RMON 2018 Corporate Emissions Distribution by Sector)

Building emissions increased by 1.7%, or 0.4 megatonnes, in 2024.

Natural gas consumption decreased in commercial and residential sectors, while consumption in the industrial sector increased. Commercial and residential reductions are partly due to a warmer winter, and partly a result of efficiencies gained through growing momentum for retrofits, underscoring the importance of sustained funding programs like the oversubscribed Canada Greener Home Grant and local supports like the Durham Greener Homes Program. (The federal government cancelled the Canada Greener Homes Grant in 2025.)

Recommendations:

Set a net-zero vision

This practical approach gives industry the flexibility to improve performance at its own pace, with near-zero emissions as a final goal. A clear timetable for raising standards will give developers direction and the regulatory certainty needed to cost-effectively construct high-performance buildings.

Reward leadership

Developers more often volunteer to achieve higher performance standards when incentives reflect their investment. Municipalities should provide meaningful incentives to go beyond the minimum standard, such as a partial development charge rebate, density bonuses, or expedited permitting. Regardless of the form, it should be meaningful in relation to the incremental cost of exceeding the minimum standard.

Make it mandatory

Developers' willingness to comply with voluntary standards has been very low in the GTHA to date. Municipalities must advance mandatory green standards to achieve real impact.

Design for health, comfort and convenience

Homes should be built for the contemporary homeowner, ready to charge their electric cars, and optimized for health, comfort, and convenience. Embodied carbon and ecologically sustainable building materials should be factored into their design and construction.

[Source: <https://taf.ca/green-development-standards/>]