Summarized Sustainability Guidelines for Developments and Housing

The following guidelines serve as an abbreviated version of the comprehensive guidelines linked here.

Site Planning & Building Design

Energy

I. Energy Efficiency & Conservation

Use passive design strategies like cross-ventilation (Citywide Design Guidelines), daylighting, natural shading, double-glazed windows (Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles), and insulation. Consider carving out building mass with courtyards and light wells whenever floor plates exceed 40 ft. Integrate electric heat pumps for heating and cooling to enhance energy efficiency. Conduct shading studies for buildings over 40 ft and require light-colored or reflective roofing materials (cool roofs) to combat urban heat islands. Additionally, provide shading with awnings, balconies, trees, or movable screens, or add roof gardens and green walls. Consider using vegetation to address seasonal energy needs, such as deciduous trees for summer shade and winter sun exposure (Use Vegetation to Increase Energy Efficiency.) Prioritize durable, low-carbon, locally sourced materials and design for adaptability.

II. Clean & Renewable Energy

Leverage technology to move us toward clean, renewable energy. Install all-electric appliances in new buildings, or circuit-ready wiring for future electrification retrofits (See 2019 local energy ordinances and a housing electrification study commissioned by LADWP.) Plan for rooftop solar readiness (or ideally solar installation) for all eligible structures under existing California law and install battery storage. Set minimum thresholds for EV charging infrastructure in all new developments. Target higher certifications (LEED, Passive House, etc.) and surpass what California Title 24 requires on building efficiency as well as CALGreen Tier 1.

Water

I. Runoff & Permeability

Plan to use permeable paving for all surfaces and retaining walls (Measure W incentivizes this). Use bioswales, rain gardens, underground cisterns, while avoiding large or steep, unnecessary grades for retaining walls. Use compost or other organic amendments to increase water retention (SITES). Avoid construction materials that pollute runoff (e.g., copper, zinc roofs and housing elements, galvanized materials, treated lumber) and protect existing streams, including intermittent flows, during construction (Citywide Design Guidelines). Utilize stormwater as a resource (Planning and Development Handbook for Low Impact Development (LID)), using low-impact development (LID) and green infrastructure as tools.

II. Water Efficiency & Conservation

Plan for non-potable water use (e.g., rainwater or AC condensate) for irrigation in large developments. Incorporate efficient irrigation systems that can utilize alternative sources such as rainwater, air-conditioning condensate, or treated greywater for landscaping tasks (LADWP, Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance). Enforce water metering for irrigation and require drought-tolerant, native, or adaptive plants in all landscaping plans.

Look for species that comply with Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) and are suited for the site's specific soil type and volume requirements, climate, and microclimate. Improve soil organic content to retain water naturally. Install water filters in units to reduce bottled water use.

III. Water Reclamation

Include rainwater and greywater capture systems for commercial and multi-family buildings (California's Water Reuse Guideline). Request long-term maintenance plans for stormwater features (LAMC Section 12.41). Design stormwater features for accessibility and aesthetics. Install dual plumbing for toilets with stubs for future recycled water connections to support long-term reclaimed water use (City Clerk of LA).

Nature

I. Wildlife & Biodiversity

Preserve mature trees through construction buffer zones and prohibit pruning during nesting season (City Clerk of Los Angeles). Implement wildlife corridors and fencing that allows animal passage, especially in suburban and hillside developments. Use bird-safe glass treatments and other design practices and implement fully shielded outdoor lighting to reduce disruption to nocturnal wildlife. Establish a 50-foot buffer from biological resources to protect habitats (Wildlife Pilot Study) and water access, and limit grading within that zone. Use wildlife-permeable fencing and avoid hazardous materials like spikes, glass, or razor wire. Design to minimize plant and animal habitat disruption (at-risk species can be found here), daylight buried streams, and maintain species connectivity across the site and adjacent parcels. Install outdoor lighting that is "dark sky" compliant, low-glare, and wildlife-sensitive such as amber LEDs (Wildlife Pilot Study).

II. Natural Spaces & Greenery

Incorporate setbacks to accommodate large-canopy street trees and native landscaping. In particular, native California oak species should be integrated into shade and biodiversity plans. Require tree wells (aiming for 8 ft), parkway plantings, and deep soil volumes for long-term health. Incentivize use of native, food-producing, or non-allergenic species (LA Urban Forestry Division). Preserve existing trees by designing driveways, sidewalks, or bulb-outs around their roots, and document preservation plans. When removal is unavoidable, replace with native trees of appropriate size in coordination with the Urban Forestry Division (Bureau of Engineering). Prioritize retaining trees during street or sidewalk widenings, and select species using tools like SelectTree. Plan for trees with the largest possible canopy, and incorporate parkways, medians, and setbacks as long-term green infrastructure (Wildlife Pilot Study). Ensure invasive species are removed, and conserve or restore native plant communities.

III. Soil & Vegetation

Use local, quality soils and compost. Limit grading and compaction to preserve existing soil structure. Eliminate the use of artificial turf and incentivize low-maintenance, climate-adaptive landscaping. Provide adequate soil depths and quality planting soils for healthy tree and shrub growth, leaving crowns open and free of brick circles, walls, or weed cloth (Wildlife Pilot Study). Enhance street landscaping with sidewalk plantings and irrigation systems, and design landscaping to reduce wildfire risk by managing fuels. Protect slopes over 60% by retaining native vegetation to prevent erosion, and preserve protected trees even in brush clearance areas. Submit landscaping plans to the local NC and coordinate long-term maintenance funding for median strips where applicable.

IV. Fire Resilience

When constructing in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, use Grade A covering materials for roofs, and also consider utilizing simple shapes in building design to limit ember catchment. Pursue design investments that limit air and ember infiltration within the building, such as baffled vents, screens, fire-resistant doors and windows, and gutter guards. Additionally, adding exterior walls (made of rammed earth, hempcrete, or similar material) to the perimeter of the building will increase fire resilience (LA County Recovers). There are more resources at ncsa.la/after_the_fires and ncsa.la/electrify_palisades.

Transportation

I. Active Transit

A. Walkability

Most of the following suggestions below are taken or adapted from the Citywide Design Guidelines. Design walkable environments with shade, furniture, safety lighting, minimized driveways, sidewalk amenities, and building articulation. Avoid blank walls and orient entrances toward streets. Define multi-zone sidewalks (e.g., amenity, pedestrian, frontage, and flex zones with adequate widths) (Complete Streets Design Guide). Ban new drive-throughs and require zero-lot-line buildings in urban cores to promote street activation. Sidewalk pedestrian pathways must be at least 5 feet wide on residential local streets and at least 7 feet on larger streets. Avoid reducing sidewalk widths or road widening, and use alleys for vehicle access instead of breaking up pedestrian space with driveways. Locate driveways and loading areas at least 100 feet from intersections. Encourage ground-floor active uses along parking structures and avoid parking lots fronting sidewalks, and consider installing drinking fountains and public restrooms (Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles).

1. Space & Shade

Maximize shaded and green public space via parklets, trees, overhangs, and building setbacks that support healthy walking environments. Require shade structures and pedestrian lighting in all commercial corridors (Architectural Digest). Incorporate shaded plazas, courtyards, terraces, and pocket parks into large buildings, and prioritize canopy trees with adequate tree wells for long-term growth. Use bulb-outs, permeable sidewalks, or meandering alignments to preserve existing mature trees, and replace any removed trees with native species of appropriate size (Urban Forestry Division). Extend overhead covers across driveways with integrated awnings, arcades, or canopies to shelter pedestrians from sun and rain. Add benches, lockers, and other sidewalk amenities to promote comfort and an active lifestyle.

2. Lighting

Provide pedestrian-scale, shielded, and dark-sky-compliant lighting for visibility and safety, especially near alleys and entrances. Use ornamental low-level lighting to highlight paths and entrances, and ensure all parking and pedestrian areas are illuminated (LAMC Section 93.0117). Install rear-building lighting to improve security for residents and neighbors. Lighting above 15 feet should not exceed 400 lumens, and

fixtures must be fully shielded to prevent glare (Los Angeles City Planning). Coordinate with the Bureau of Street Lighting to ensure design uniformity consistent with Great Streets guidelines, and avoid lighting types that are disruptive, such as mercury vapor, ultraviolet, or flashing lights (LA Bureau of Street Lighting).

B. Bikes

Provide bicycle storage for residents, employees, and visitors that is secure, covered, and located on the ground floor (LAMC Section 12.03) and use this guide to the LA Bicycle Parking Ordinance. Ensure workplace showers and lockers are available for employees (Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles). Designate a safe, well-lit area for bike and scooter parking near transit drop-off points.

C. Public Transportation

Support Citywide Housing Incentive Program (CHIP) projects, particularly those with high levels of affordability, typically seen as 40-60% of the total number of units (Los Angeles City Planning). Require a transportation demand management (TDM) plan for commercial developments, with monitored incentives for commuting by carpool, vanpool, bike, walking, or telecommuting (Los Angeles Department of Transportation). Plant a canopy tree at adjacent bus stops and provide comfortable seating. In large developments and high-density areas, incorporate designated stops for microtransit (e.g., DASH, Circuit). Reserve curb lanes for bus boarding, bike/scooter parking, or passenger pick-up/drop-off in consultation with LADOT (Los Angeles Department of Transportation). Locate microtransit, bike, and rideshare drop-offs in well-lit areas near security call buttons, avoiding building entrances. Provide TOD incentives, transit passes, and microtransit drop-off zones (City Clerk of Los Angeles).

II. Cars

A. Parking

Design convertible parking, shared structures, minimal surface lots, and car share programs (Los Angeles Department of Transportation). Place parking to the rear or underground. Construct parking so it can be converted to other uses (commercial, retail, storage) as demand decreases. Share parking facilities between buildings to reduce total spaces needed, taking advantage of different peak use times (City Clerk of Los Angeles). Provide dedicated space for car sharing in large housing developments. Use alleys or side streets for vehicle access instead of interrupting sidewalks with driveways. Include parkways where feasible, coordinating with LADOT, LADWP, and UFD for tree well sizing and canopy.

B. Electric Vehicles

Meet City EV requirements by installing 10–30% EV chargers or raceways in parking, with flexibility for future expansion. Create public-private partnerships for neighborhood charging hubs. Install EV charging stations per Ordinance No. 186485: 10% of parking spaces in all new multifamily, hotel, motel, and nonresidential buildings must have chargers (LADBS). Install EV raceways (channels for electrical cables) for at least 30% of spaces in multifamily and hotel/motel parking, rounded up, to support future EV infrastructure (Energy Codes). Ensure all charging spaces are easily accessible and ADA-compliant.

Livability

I. Air Quality

Design buildings near highways with MERV-13 filtration, sound walls, tree buffers, and low-VOC materials (adapted from Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles) to combat high levels of noise and air pollution. Avoid gas stoves and use air filtration to reduce indoor pollutants. Incorporate vegetation buffers and natural ventilation. Avoid placing windows near pollutant sources and regularly maintain air filters. Certify filtration systems annually and provide maintenance instructions to occupants. Prohibit gas-powered leaf blowers on-site (LAMC Section 112.04 C). Place living and sleeping areas as far as possible from freeways and busy roads.

II. Community Health

Designate health-promoting features in design guidelines—e.g., visual access to greenery, outdoor fitness areas, sound buffering elements, and thermal comfort via shading. Include gardens, food-growing areas, and step-back massing next to residences (City Clerk of Los Angeles). Avoid heat islands and ensure sufficient daylight and views (UCLA). Implement terraced step-backs and sloped roofs when adjacent to R-1 parcels to minimize encroachment (Citywide Design Guidelines). Provide canopy trees, perimeter trees, and shaded gathering areas on south- and west-facing facades. Create planting beds in setbacks, yards, and parkways for resident food production. Place windows, balconies, and courtyards to overlook sidewalks and shared spaces while avoiding intrusion into private gardens. Use articulation, massing breaks, and sightlines to avoid boxy styles that block sunlight (Citywide Design Guidelines). Enclose podium parking with active uses or landscaping. Screen rooftop utilities, trash, and equipment to minimize noise, odor, and visual impacts.

III. Affordable Housing

Include small and lower-cost units, preserve existing affordable housing, and collaborate with community land trusts. Apply affordability covenants that last in perpetuity where possible (Los Angeles Housing Department). Explore coliving formats in appropriate locations. Leverage state and federal funding for permanent supportive housing. Track and share neighborhood low-income housing data to inform residents of displacement impacts. Reduce parking where viable transit alternatives exist. Pursue single-staircase developments if the Los Angeles building code is updated in 2025 to encourage multifamily housing suitable for families.

Construction

Air Quality

Active construction sites must implement best available control measures to minimize fugitive dust (e.g. watering, coverings, sweeping) and prevent visible dust beyond the property line (SCAQMD 403). Unpaved demolition and construction areas should be wetted at least twice daily to reduce dust by up to 50% through water spraying and dust covers (Los Angeles City Clerk). Reduce emissions from vehicles and dust with dust control plans and restricted usage of high-emission equipment. Prohibit idling over 5 minutes and avoid placing materials under trees. Ask for a construction air quality compliance checklist for large developments.

Waste

Aim for zero-waste construction. Mixed construction & demolition waste generated within the city must be taken to approved facilities for recycling or reuse (LA Sanitation). LA policy mandates at least 65% of construction & demolition waste must be diverted from landfills (Waste Resources). Use local materials and protect existing trees and runoff systems. Define haul routes and manage staging.

Accessibility

Maintain sidewalk access during construction, support pedestrian safety, and minimize street disruption (Los Angeles City Clerk). Amenity zones must maintain at least 24 inches of clearance from the curb and avoid obstructing visibility at intersections (Bureau of Engineering).

Operations & Maintenance

Energy

Maintain energy systems, including solar panels and heat pumps, and certify performance. Annual certification or performance reporting as well as periodic energy audits should be conducted to ensure continued efficiency.

Water

Promote resident education, maintain stormwater features like bioswales and provide resident education on water-saving practices.

Waste

All multi-family and commercial properties must have on-site composting, recycling, and drop-off systems for hard-to-recycle items (Zero Waste LA County). Use secure trash containers and clear signage to reduce contamination and wildlife attraction.

Nature

Maintain green roofs and walls. Implement integrated pest management, minimize fertilizers, and continue wildfire risk mitigation through landscape maintenance.

Transportation

Provide car share, transit resources, ride-sharing infrastructure, and maps. Promote TOC incentives like transit passes and reduced parking.

Livability

Maintain pedestrian safety (lighting, cameras, security call buttons) and encourage stair use with signage. Track affordable housing compliance and engage with the community via art, events, and public spaces.