



**NYSERDA**

# A Buyer's Guide to Energy- Efficient Homes



# Buying

WITH EFFICIENCY IN MIND



NYSERDA

For most New Yorkers, energy costs make up a substantial portion of monthly household expenses. When shopping for a new home, it's important to learn about the home's energy performance to avoid unexpected costs after moving in and ensure you are investing in a comfortable space for your family.

## Keeping efficiency in mind when looking for a home offers many benefits:

- **Save money** on future energy bills and maintenance costs
- **Avoid hidden costs** from high energy use
- **Enjoy year-round comfort** with consistent temperatures and better air quality
- **Make an informed offer** with a full understanding of total homeownership costs

# Homebuyer's Guide

## WITH EFFICIENCY IN MIND

When shopping for and viewing a home, check for signs of the home's energy performance.

□ **Ask for typical monthly energy costs.**

Ask the current homeowners or real estate agent what their monthly or annual energy bill payments are (electricity, gas, oil, propane). This will give you a sense of the energy performance of the home and what the total cost of ownership would be. Remember that energy use is related to lifestyle and behaviors—if the current homeowners have a different family size or habits than your own, they may have different energy use.

□ **Examine appliances and lighting.**

Look for [ENERGY STAR® certified](#) appliances in the home—these will be the most efficient. You can also ask for the age, make, and model of all major appliances and research their performance using an [appliance energy calculator](#). Check for energy-efficient lighting as well, such as LEDs, timers, motion sensors, and smart switches. Energy-efficient light bulbs use up to 90 percent less energy, cost less to operate, and can last up to 25 years longer than conventional lighting options. They are also available in a wide array of design options.

□ **Look for smart thermostats.**

Almost half of the monthly energy costs in a home are controlled by a thermostat. See if the home has any smart thermostats, such as Wi-Fi and learning thermostats. These thermostats allow you to regulate the temperature of a home no matter where you are. Ask the current homeowners if the thermostats will be included with the home or if they are planning on taking them.

□ **Check the water fixtures.**

Look for WaterSense labeled products, such as low-flow faucets and showerheads in the kitchens and bathrooms. These products can dramatically reduce the amount of water used in a home.

□ **Consider home size carefully.**

Larger homes with more square footage require more energy to heat and cool. Carefully consider the energy costs of homes with large spaces, extra bedrooms and bathrooms, and finished basements or attics.

□ **Check the fireplace.**

If the fireplace is fully functioning, have it inspected to make sure it also has a working damper, and consider adding an efficient insert or stove if one is not already installed. If the fireplace isn't functioning, ask the homeowners or real estate agent if all the openings are properly sealed. Unused fireplaces, especially in older homes, can be a common source of air leaks and heat loss.

□ **Examine the heating, cooling, and hot water systems.**

Ask the homeowner or real estate agent how old the systems are and how often they are serviced. Systems that receive annual maintenance can last up to 20 years old. If the system is 15–20 years old, and it hasn't been serviced regularly, it may need to be replaced. To determine whether the systems are energy efficient, look for the ENERGY STAR certification or high-performing systems like heat pumps and on-demand water heaters. You can also ask or check what the energy rating of the system is. Learn more about how to determine whether a system is energy efficient on NYSERDA's [heating and cooling page](#).

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When shopping for and viewing a home, check for signs of the home's energy performance.

☐ **Check for signs of rust and leaks.**

Turn a faucet on and check to see whether the water is clear. If the water has a reddish tint or if you notice water puddling around the water heater, these are signs that the water heater system may need to be replaced.

☐ **Look at the windows.**

Ask your home inspector how efficient the windows may be. Heat gain and loss through windows can be responsible for 25–30 percent of residential heating and cooling energy use. Windows can have single, double, or even triple panes of glass. Each pane offers an insulating air layer between the home and the outdoors. In addition, windows with Low-E coatings help provide better comfort and protect indoor furnishings from UV exposure. Look for windows that are ENERGY STAR certified—these can reduce energy bills by 10 percent or more in New York.

☐ **Check for air leaks.**

See if the home feels drafty—are there any noticeable air leaks and drafts around baseboards, electrical outlets, doors, or windows? Do you see any dark streaks on carpets around the edges of rooms or dust collecting around interior door frames? These are all potential signs that the home has air leaks and may need air sealing and insulation upgrades. A home inspector or home energy auditor can help identify the source of air leaks and recommend any upgrades that may be needed.

☐ **See if a home goes the extra mile.**

Beyond the basics, ask if the home is high performing. An energy-efficient home may be ENERGY STAR certified or have a home energy rating. Newer homes that meet ENERGY STAR standards may have a label on the circuit breaker box. High-performing homes may also use renewable energy systems, such as solar panels and heat pumps.

**Learn more about**  
[home buying with energy efficiency in mind.](#)