

The city of the future requires living at higher densities, with sustainable use of materials and energy, as well as socially sustainable neighbourhoods designed for long-term habitation. Not merely temporary housing for first-time occupants, not only located at high-density urban nodes, and not designed for just one type of household. For this future-proof, diverse and equitable city, fair and complete homes are essential. In addition to providing a sense of comfort and security, a complete home offers space for interpretation and personal development, and supports long-term residence by occupants with varying living patterns and life stages. People do not always want - or are not always able - to move when their circumstances change. It is unreasonable to expect this of residents; it is wasteful and undermines local networks and community cohesion. The right to housing should therefore also mean the right to personal development and to long-term residence in one place. Every dwelling should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate change and enable long-term occupancy. This is not a luxury. Residents who are satisfied with their home and see a future there develop a more positive relationship with their neighbourhood and contribute to the social health of the city of which the dwelling is part.

The minimum requirements in the Bbl¹, the quantitative approach to calculating Gross Floor Area (GFA)³, or valuation through the WWS² say little about a dwelling's actual usability and future value. The smaller the dwelling, the more carefully this must be assessed. This document sets out design and evaluation criteria that can make the difference between a compact apartment regarded as a temporary solution and a fully fledged home with long-term prospects.

The criteria draw on a rich tradition of housing design and social housing, address omissions in the statutory framework, and are intended to support dialogue among planners, designers, developers, policymakers, assessors, and other quality stewards in residential development. The wording emphasises principles and allows room for different design solutions.

The ambition is to make 'comprehensive housing quality' - understood as the sum of functional and experiential quality - discussable and widely applicable as a rational assessment criterion, potentially in the form of a Housing Value Score. For each criterion, a full or half point can be awarded. Begin with Criterion 1, as this provides a strong foundation for addressing the subsequent criteria. Apply sound professional judgement where multiple options exist or where an equivalent alternative fulfils the intent of the criterion. Record the score and, where relevant, the motivation. The total score indicates the degree of completeness and flexibility of a housing type, its potential for long-term occupancy, and its contribution to an inclusive and equitable city.

1

The Buildings and Living Environment Decree (Bbl) defines, in absolute terms, the minimum standard for what may be rented or sold in the Netherlands as an independent dwelling. It primarily addresses the technical aspects of safety and comfort, regulations concerning spatial quality are deliberately kept minimal. The law is structured in such a way that the 'least good' dwelling within a block or neighborhood - in a category just above the smallest possible student unit - can still comply. The definition of 'habitable area' (verblijfsgebied) is crucial: it stipulates that one or more spaces must be present with sufficient width, height, daylight, sound insulation, heating and ventilation, allowing people to remain there for extended periods. Put bluntly: as long as there is one such habitable space of 11 m², at least 3 meters wide, with a kitchenette and sanitary facilities, connected by passages 0.85 meters wide, it qualifies as a dwelling. Any space wider than 1.8 meters and larger than 5 m² may then count as additional habitable area. The layout and the proportion of habitable area versus other spaces may be freely determined; actual functional usability is not addressed. The quantitative requirements provided are intended as a starting point - not as a goal or a promise of long-term residential satisfaction.

2

The Housing Valuation System (WWS), used to determine rental prices, also says little about spatial quality, usability or flexibility. It rewards the presence of floor area and number of rooms, the energy label and the value of the location.

A good housing design seeks, within the reserved footprint, a balance between movement and security, freedom and stability. The true functional quality of a dwelling cannot be derived from its official usable floor area and its real residential value is not the same as its market value.³ Therefore, use the criteria below for full-fledged dwellings during both design and assessment.

1. Everyday flexibility

To avoid dictating a fixed living pattern, the dwelling design allows alternative layouts and exchange of functions, even without major alterations.

Does the dwelling contain spatial reservations based on realistic functional zones and typical furniture, tailored to expected household sizes and target group diversity in the near future?⁴ Demonstrate the functional flexibility of each dwelling type by drawing at least three different usage patterns for households in different life phases.

score	0	1
note		

2. Facade

For freedom of layout and use, now and in the future, the dwelling has sufficient facade potential.

Ensure that the sum of open and closed facade elements, measured from inside, exceeds 45% of the usable floor area.⁵ If width is limited, compensate with facade plasticity.⁶

score	0	1
note		

3. Building structure

To accommodate unknown future uses - also at building level - the load-bearing structure is prepared for rearrangement of space and function.

Choose logical spans within which different combinations of living spaces fit. Provide openings in structural walls and service installations in advance where future connections are expected. Make built-in long-term flexibility visible through a housing passport.

score	0	1
note		

3
The commonly used Usable Floor Area (GO), calculated according to NEN 2580, totals the floor area of all spaces within the dwelling, without taking into account how the shape and layout affect the actual quality of use or habitation. It also includes all space occupied by non-load-bearing walls and by the equipment required to heat and ventilate the dwelling. The spatial footprint varies significantly depending on the technical systems chosen and has been increasing in recent years. A qualitative comparison between dwelling types based solely on GO therefore quickly produces a distorted picture. The largest part of the WOZ (property value) is determined by location.

4
Test the housing program using a hypothetical set of generic furniture together with the circulation space around it. The dimensions of these so-called 'usable zones' or 'gebruiksmatjes' are no longer regulated by the government. Various housing association briefs (Programmes of Requirements) provide a good starting point, but they differ slightly from one another. Use common sense and, for example, pages 48–50 of [De Woonstandaard](#) as a reference for basic functional mats: beds, kitchen units, tables and seating groups. Increase the reserved space according to the expected number and possible type of residents - for example, table size, clearance next to the bed, wardrobe lengths - in order to meet the criteria for a full-fledged dwelling. When projecting these mats, keep in mind that circulation routes are, in reality, more rounded and tend to overlap.

5
Consider all wall lengths that contain windows, or where windows could potentially be made, and multiply this by the ceiling height; use this area in the formula:
Facade area / Usable floor area × 100% > 45%

6
If the main form of the structural shell provides insufficient façade surface area, this can be compensated for in the façade design; consider angled façade sections, recessed loggias, corner windows, bay windows, etc., which effectively increase the façade surface without relocating the dwelling-separating walls.



Social rental housing with an open load-bearing structure
Architect: Liesbeth van der Pol, 1989
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

4. Wall surface area

Living unfolds along the walls; sufficient usable wall surface provides room for personalization and domesticity.

Check whether wall surface area exceeds 200% of usable floor area.⁷ Compose carefully with sufficiently long wall segments, preferably in L- or U-shapes, supplemented by corners or niches between strategically positioned openings.

score	0	½	1
note			

5. Circulation routes

The dwelling has logical circulation routes that make the full depth and width usable and perceptible. The position of doors and passages supports both functionality and scenographic quality.

Are different routes possible without disturbing usable floor and wall area? Draw imaginary day and night routines. Assess door swing directions for usability and spatial quality, in both open and closed positions. Guide movement through a clear hierarchy in doors, sightlines, and orientation toward daylight; use sliding doors and glass doors where the situation calls for it. Is the living room door easy for visitors to find?

score	0	½	1
note			

6. Hallway

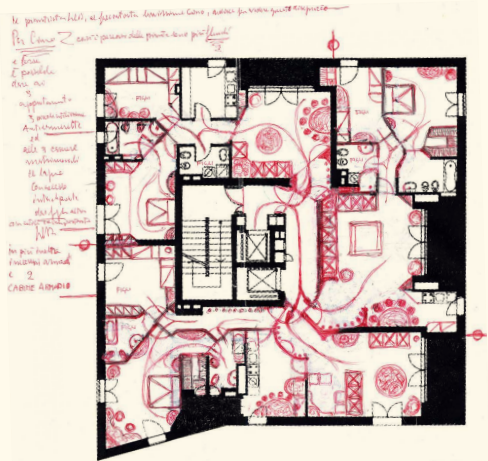
The node of circulation - hall or corridor - contributes to flexible use, offers room for reception, and can visually or functionally connect to living spaces.

Avoid narrow or long dark corridors, for example by widening them locally or introducing multiple halls within the dwelling.⁸ Consider the hall as a small square; aim for a clear form in the composition, a certain elegance, and a strong sense of orientation. Is there space in the area behind the front door to greet visitors and sufficient wall space for coats, shoes and a few small items? If no enclosed hall is provided, is there a spatial reservation to realise it in the future?⁹

score	0	½	1
note			

7
The wall surface area is the sum of all interior wall surfaces visible to residents, calculated on the basis of a wall height of 2.6m, excluding all doors and openings, and including both transparent and opaque facade surfaces, without yet deducting reductions caused by door swing directions, etc. Add up the wall surfaces and apply the formula:
Wall surface area / Usable floor area × 100% > 200%

A wall segment at least 0.8m wide and free from circulation routes may be considered usable. The usable wall surface area is what remains after deducting shorter wall segments, technical installations, bathroom space, kitchen units, glazed surfaces, and circulation routes. Doors positioned perpendicular to a wall at less than 30cm distance render that wall unusable on both sides over a length of 1m'. A dwelling has sufficient usable wall surface area when the total of all remaining wall segments amounts to 61m' for one resident, and 3 additional 1m' for each extra resident.



Notes by architect Luigi Caccia Dominioni on plans of a social housing tower by colleague architect Cino Zucchi, 2002

8
Expectations regarding the presence and position of the hall within the dwelling are strongly culturally determined. Conversations with urban residents show that the majority do not favor a (compact) apartment without a hall at the entrance, however small or impractical it may be. This is mainly because of its role as a buffer zone between private and public space and as protection against drafts. Good alternatives can be devised for the first function; the second can be resolved technically. For inspiration, look beyond national borders. For example, the principle commonly used in Belgium of a more public "day hall" at the entrance and a separate "night hall" near the private rooms, or the Swiss tradition of widened, often trapezoidal halls that are in (semi-)open connection with the living spaces.

9
The minimum dimensions required for accessibility — 1350 × 1800mm or 1500 × 1500mm behind the front door — provide sufficient width for these functions, provided that there is enough usable wall length (a solid door to a technical room or utility meter cupboard does not count). In exceptional cases, for example if the wheelchair turning circle is accommodated elsewhere, a hall with a width of 1200mm may suffice.

7. Compartmentalisation

To support functional flexibility and spatial quality, the floor plan maintains a balance between compartmentalisation, neutrality and openness.

Is there room for creativity and self-direction by future residents? Leave one or several ‘rooms’ undefined,¹⁰ ensure lasting freedom of choice between connection and separation. A subtle suggestion of a room, a half-open room, sliding partitions and en-suite doors enrich the range of uses and spatial layering. Alternatively, divide the living space into as many equivalent and interchangeable rooms as possible.

score	0	½	1
note			

8. Living space

The living space is pleasant and practical, and suitable for a wide range of activities, both individual and collective.

Can sitting, dining, gathering, making music, playing and studying each find a fixed or improvised place? Choose a favorable width-to-depth ratio¹¹ within which functional zones can be exchanged. The base area¹² is sufficient for one person; add at least 2m² for each additional expected resident. Take into account receiving guests. Is there space for a dinner with at least as many guests as there are residents?

score	0	½	1
note			

9. Kitchen

When integrating living, dining and kitchen zones, clear zoning and a certain degree of separation of the cooking area make the dwelling inclusive and usable for the most diverse group of users.

Is it possible to prepare food in a zone that can be visually or physically separated from sanitary facilities, sleeping areas and the seating area? At the same time, while working in the kitchen, is it possible to supervise at least the dining area and maintain a view toward daylight?

score	0		1
note			



Rental dwelling with a freely interpretable half-open room
Architect: Common Practice, 2022
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

¹⁰ Full compartmentalization quickly leads to a sense of confinement. Once built, walls are not easily altered. A half-open space, separated only visually, can lead a double life – functioning both as a distinct area and as an extension of the everyday living space.

¹¹ Do not fixate on a rectangle with a minimum width. A living space may include narrowings and widenings, as long as the different functional zones remain usable and accessible.

¹² The Bbl prescribes 18 m² for combined functions of sitting, dining, cooking and sleeping. Use this as a starting point for one person, but add a separate bedroom to it.



Half-open kitchen as an extension of the living room
Architect: Common Practice, 2022
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

10. Personal development

The dwelling provides space for personal development and unforeseen change. It is possible to accommodate a new activity or to house one additional person temporarily.

Is there room to create space for working from home, a hobby, a young child, or a guest? In addition to at least one closable bedroom, the dwelling therefore includes a freely interpretable zone that can be (temporarily) visually or physically separated. Think of a niche, alcove, bay window, an oversized hall, or an en-suite room.

score	0	½	1
note			

11. Bedroom

The bedroom is a place to be alone – or alone as a couple – to recover mentally and physically, sometimes also during the day. Children and young people should have sufficient space in their bedrooms for homework, play and hobbies.

Always provide at least one closable bedroom with space for a double bed. The possibility of placing a double bed in other bedrooms and/or creating equally sized, interchangeable bedrooms increases usability and flexibility for diverse households.¹³ In a friends apartment or other form of collective housing, apply higher spatial and acoustic standards to the sleeping areas.

score	0	½	1
note			

12. Physical inclusivity

The dwelling is physically inclusive and takes into account people with (temporarily) reduced mobility, bedridden residents and elderly occupants.

Ensure that the dwelling can be lived in independently with a walker and can be visited with a stroller or a compact wheelchair. Position a separate toilet so that it can easily be combined with the bathroom in the future. Is it possible to create a visual connection between the largest bedroom and another daytime living space, preferably the main living room? For each development area, determine the percentage of new dwellings that are fully accessible or suitable for care.¹⁴

score	0	½	1
note			



WDwelling with space for personal development
Architect: Liesbeth van der Pol, 1989
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

¹³ In practice, growing children sometimes occupy the larger bedroom. In a closable bedroom in which a rectangle of 2.8 × 2.8 meters fits (not overlapping with the door swing), a double bed 1.6 meters wide can be accommodated with circulation space along both long sides. In a bedroom where a rectangle of 2.2 × 2.8 meters fits, the same bed can be placed with circulation space along one long side. The required wardrobe length falls outside this spatial reservation and can, if necessary, be accommodated elsewhere in the dwelling.

¹⁴ See the various requirements and considerations in NEN 9120:2025, the WoonKeur Handbook (2015) and the Handbook for Accessibility (2009). In theory, a fully accessible and lifetime-adaptable dwelling is the most complete form of housing. In practice, however, this is a difficult starting point, particularly in relatively compact apartments, where it often leads to spatial and financial dilemmas. The additional space required and the associated costs can only be justified if the primary target group already consists of people with physical, visual, or auditory impairments, or seniors in need of care. This often results in complexes that are monofunctional and have an institutional character. The specific layouts and material expressions are not appreciated by most other urban residents. Younger people with disabilities, as well as younger seniors, may experience them as stigmatizing. In this way, it also becomes an urban design dilemma: a high degree of physical inclusivity can make the relationship between resident, building and neighborhood less inclusive.

13. Storage space

Sufficient and efficient storage options throughout the dwelling provide a functional and calm backdrop for more dynamic living activities.

There is a basic need to store objects used daily as well as occasionally. Reserve space for (built-in) wardrobes, display cabinets, shelving units and storage racks, allowing for 6m¹ for one person, and add 2m¹ for each additional resident.¹⁵

score	0	½	1
note			

14. View

Carefully considered visual relationships between inside and outside make the qualities of the world beyond perceptible, visually enlarge the dwelling from within and enhance the experience of living there, while maintaining an appropriate level of privacy, comfort and climatic quality.

Ensure that the dwelling has two or more different views. At least one view should directly overlook a high-quality space (e.g. a green courtyard, a body of water, a tree-lined street, park or green square). Provide a well-composed framing, taking into account the facade as experienced from the inside. At least one room should offer an additional perspective - diagonally, sideways, upward or downward - for a person standing 2 meters from the facade. At least 50% of all windows should not be north-facing.¹⁶

score	0	½	1
note			

15. Outdoor space

The dwelling includes outdoor space(s) suitable for various activities such as dining, resting, playing or working, in the form of private outdoor space, optionally supplemented by collective variants.

Ensure that the dwelling has at least one (semi-)private outdoor space, directly accessible from the dwelling.¹⁷ Provide protection from overlooking and weather conditions, for example through canopies, loggias or facade articulation. The base area¹⁸ is sufficient for one person; add 1m² for each additional expected resident. Are the proportions such that people can sit together at a table outdoors?

score	0	1
note		

15
Fieldwork shows that although the type of belongings and the creativity in storage solutions vary greatly from one resident to another, a comparable quantity of both durable and softer items still needs to be accommodated. Provide space for 2m¹ for clothing (wardrobes and coat storage, 0.6m deep), 2m¹ for items in view such as books, music, and collections (cabinets 0.25–0.45m deep) and 2m¹ of storage space for items out of sight such as a vacuum cleaner, ironing board, suitcase, camping gear or party supplies (shelving 0.45m deep). Of the last category, 1m¹ may also be accommodated in an external storage unit. For each additional (long-term) resident, add 1m¹ to the first category, 0.5m¹ to the second and 0.5m¹ to the third category. Is there additional ceiling height, a staircase, or a window with a high sill that allows for the easy creation of storage space? Calculate this proportionally.



Dwelling with a wide view of a tree-lined street
Architect: Liesbeth van der Pol, 1989
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

16
Two sided orientation of the dwelling, with daytime functions on both a busy and a quiet side, is preferable but not a requirement. A form of corner orientation can also be experienced as full-fledged.

17
For dwellings smaller than 50m² of usable floor area (GO), the Bbl prescribes only (1m²) of collective outdoor space, located somewhere on or around the building. In practice, this is experienced as inadequate. Ensure that even the smallest dwellings have outdoor space directly connected to the unit, either private or shared with a small number of neighbors.

18
For dwellings larger than 50m² of usable floor area (GO), the Bbl prescribes 4m² of outdoor space with a minimum depth of 1.5 meters.



Social rental dwelling with outdoor space along the gallery
Architect: Rem Koolhaas, 1988
Illustration in inhabited state: Common Practice, 2025

Embedding.

The experience of arriving home and leaving is an essential factor in the relationship between dwelling and resident. The entrance area of the dwelling itself, the route to the dwelling through collective spaces and the connection between the building and the city are all part of this choreography. Does this route support a sense of dignity, safety and inclusivity? Are entrances easy to find? Are individual dwellings grouped into recognizable (sub-)domains? Are the common spaces clear and legible, provided with daylight, and do they offer, at certain points, enough width for an informal conversation? How many neighbors do you encounter along the way - calculated from the number of residents, rather than the number of dwellings?

Depending on the chosen building type and the nature of the urban context, there are major differences in factors - such as the proportions of corridors or galleries - that contribute to a pleasant and full-fledged living environment. These are not included in the above criteria, precisely in order to consider the dwelling independently of the chosen access system, stacking height and similar aspects. What happens outside the dwelling should not be used to compensate for or conceal shortcomings within it. Quality criteria at the building and block level are often part of urban planning frameworks within which the dwelling is realized, and there are ample other sources that address the relevant considerations and qualities.¹⁹

Communication

The serially produced dwelling, designed for an unknown and constantly changing occupant, entails a specific responsibility in both its design and its communication. Simplification and labeling are necessary to maintain clarity, but do not misuse abstract key figures to obscure reality. Communicate honestly about the dwelling throughout all phases; be precise and name the details.

The urban dwelling is always just one among many and will always be under pressure, both spatially and financially. Full-fledged quality represents what one may reasonably expect from a dwelling, regardless of how it is financed and whether it is owned or rented. It is not an absolute minimum requirement, but a composition of what matters for the long term. If a dwelling type cannot address all aspects, reasoned deviations are possible, provided they remain aligned with the essence. Use the criteria to make choices with long-term value in mind, for both resident and city.

Colophon

The Criteria for the Fair Floor Plan were compiled by Common Practice on the basis of design research,²⁰ fieldwork and expert interviews conducted within the framework of the Space for Justice program of the Creative Industries Fund NL, with the cooperation of TU Delft, Stichting !WOON, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, the Municipality of Amsterdam, and various urban residents.

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