

Gorham Area Neighborhoods Energy Project

Background Information and FAQ

Summary

The Gorham Area Neighborhoods Energy Project is a locally-designed and driven effort that emerged from the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative. We are working with Efficiency Vermont, Green Mountain Power, Vermont Gas and others to offer unique opportunities for energy savings to all residents in the neighborhood. Aggressive goals for raising awareness, participation and undertaking major measures have been established to guide and motivate a team of neighborhood volunteers that will initiate this process with their neighbors.

Origin

The Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative (GMCEI) is part of the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Climate Economy Model Communities Program. A team of Middlebury residents with support of the Select Board applied to participate in the program and Middlebury was one of two communities selected to begin in 2017. In September, October, and November in a series of meetings the community gathered to decide on priorities for the initiative. The GMCEI currently has four task forces (Energy, Transportation, Agriculture, and Organizational Capacity) and has adopted the following vision statement:

Working together to achieve economic, environmental, and social health and resilience, our region will achieve deep carbon reduction while also supporting a thriving and inclusive community of individuals, businesses and institutions. As a result, this will be a place that attracts youth, retains families, and is a supportive place to grow old.

More information is available at www.middclimateeconomy.org

Background of Energy Task Force and Neighborhood Energy Project

One of the four task forces is focused on energy efficiency and renewables. Local architect Chris Huston chairs the group of nearly 40 members. From November onward, the subcommittee of the task force has been working with partners Efficiency Vermont, Vermont Gas Systems, Neighborworks of Western Vermont and Green Mountain Power to develop a new approach to facilitate greater residential fossil fuel emission reductions. The neighborhood demonstration project emerged from this exploration. The program is designed to be flexible with many different offerings and simple so as not to overwhelm possible participants. It is also designed to coordinate the different offerings of the various utilities that serve Middlebury. In February the task force solicited interest from Middlebury neighborhoods interested in participating and the Gorham area neighborhoods were selected to second to pilot the program (after South St., which happened in the spring and summer of 2018). The hope is that this model will be successful and expanded to other neighborhoods in the future.

Simple Process Overview

1. The first contact will be with a neighborhood volunteer who will introduce the program and sign residents up for a visit from a home energy advisor.
2. Efficiency Vermont, Vermont Gas Systems, and Green Mountain Power will be providing the home visits. They will reach out to interested residents to schedule the visits.

3. Free home visits will last up to 90 minutes and will result in a 1 – 2 page “report” that outlines some opportunities for energy savings and some measure of the resident’s interest in moving forward with the opportunities.
4. Depending on the type of actions that a resident wants to pursue, the home energy advisor or another partner will provide referrals to contractors to perform a deeper assessment and provide a cost estimate.
5. When needed, neighborhood volunteers may reach out again to help persuade residents to move forward with potential actions.

Possible Questions

What happens at the visit with a home energy advisor?

Professional staff from either Efficiency Vermont, Vermont Gas Systems, or Green Mountain Power will conduct a free home energy visit of your home to identify energy saving opportunities and connect you with resources to help you move forward. Each home energy visit takes approximately 60 minutes – and could result in you significantly reducing your energy bills.

What is new and unique about this program?

Never before has there been a locally developed effort that includes many potential offerings with neighbors taking the lead on outreach. There also are some incentives that are only available through this program. Finally, all three utilities serving Middlebury are at the table and coordinating their work to help achieve unity and simplicity.

What are some of the unique incentives available through this program?

- Smart thermostats will be provided for free to program participants
- Residents will have the opportunity to have a free home visit from an energy expert
- Efficiency Vermont has increased their maximum incentive for home weatherization projects from \$2,000 to \$3,000
- For other offerings, additional incentives may be possible depending on levels of neighborhood participation

What is a “Smart Thermostat?”

A smart thermostat enables a resident to control their heating or cooling system from an internet-connected device. The thermostat also “learns” from the preferences of the resident and then adjusts the heating and cooling system to reduce costs and energy use without sacrificing comfort.

Aren’t all of these offerings actually going to cost me money?

Some of the offerings included in this project will save money from day one, and others will save money over a longer period. One should also take into consideration the health and comfort related benefits of many of these actions, as well as the community and environmental benefits.

Why is Vermont Gas participating?

In 2016 Vermont Gas joined Efficiency Vermont and Burlington Electric Department as one of Vermont’s 3 energy efficiency utilities serving Vermonters. This means that Vermont Gas now has a regulatory requirement to help their customers save energy. Because energy efficiency is a key priority of this program, along with achieving simplicity by bringing together all utility partners, the local task force has decided it is important to have Vermont Gas as part of this program and to include their energy efficiency and renewable natural gas offerings.

Goals for the Program

The Energy Task Force of the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative, in coordination with utility partners, has developed a pilot program to encourage substantial residential participation in a menu of offerings that will reduce fossil fuel emissions and increase the health, comfort, and affordability of participating homes. The Task Force has established three tiers of participation with goals for each.

Level 1 – Information Sharing - 100% of households in the Gorham Area Neighborhoods will participate in an opportunity to learn about strategies to save money and reduce fossil fuel emissions.

Level 2 – Actions - 90% of residents will take at least one action to reduce fossil fuel use.

Level 3 – Major Actions - 50% of households will undertake at least one significant measure to reduce fossil fuel emissions.

Ways for residents to participate

This is for background information – do not feel like you need an understanding of all of these offerings

Level 1 – Information sharing opportunities include:

- A visit with a neighbor sharing information about energy improvement opportunities
- A home visit through Efficiency Vermont's Home Energy Advisor program
- A home visit through Vermont Gas Systems' Efficiency Snapshot program
- A home visit through Green Mountain Power for evaluation of potential electrification measures (e.g., heat pumps, electric vehicles, battery storage)
- A full energy audit (for qualified Vermont Gas Systems customers)
- Attendance at an educational workshop (provided by Efficiency Vermont or another partner)
- Attendance at a neighborhood house party

Level 2 - Actions include:

- Installing a smart thermostat (free to any participant willing to have a home energy advisor visit, Efficiency Snapshot visit or energy audit as part of Level 1)
- Air sealing activities
- Installing at least 5 LED light bulbs
- Transitioning to a vehicle with improved gas mileage
- Committing to regularly replacing a car trip with carpooling, the use of public transit, or biking and walking (via a signed pledge)
- Installing a modern wood heating device to displace fossil fuel use that could provide up to 75% of a home's thermal load
- Installing a heat pump hot water heater
- Installing a cold climate heat pump that displaces up to 75% of a residence's heating load
- Installing a residential energy storage device
- Participation in the Vermont Gas Systems Renewable Natural Gas offering
- Joining a pre-buy group for fuel oil that delivers a B-20 mix (20% biofuel) to reduce fossil fuel use

- Installing a grid connection device on any electric resistive water heaters so they are available to participate in peak demand events

Level 3 – Major Actions include:

- A major home retrofit for thermal efficiency, achieving a minimum of 10% reduction in fuel use
- Replacing a gasoline powered vehicle with a plug-in electric vehicle.
- Replacing a home heating fuel source to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Fuel switching options include:
 - Installing cold climate heat pumps intended to heat at least 75% of a residence
 - Replacing or displacing an oil furnace with modern biomass heating intended to heat at least 75% of a residence
- Utilizing the net metering program to supply household electricity.
 - Residential solar participation
 - Community solar participation