

## 2021 Public Comments from the City of Newburyport, MA for the EEAC Meeting March 24, 2021

Newburyport's public comments below reference two items we have provided as samples in support this feedback. One is a 7-page PowerPoint that demonstrates a March 2021 attempt to electrify the heat in an old home that typifies the challenges affecting a significant portion of homes in Newburyport. The second is a PDF that demonstrates the type of material that, if distributed to homeowners during the home energy assessment (HEA), would better support our efforts.

### Support for a sustained multi-year effort

- Newburyport, like many communities, has net zero emissions goals
- The proper metric for our community is to measure our emissions reductions trajectory over the next 5-10 years
- With a 1-year Community Initiative we ramp up community awareness, education, and participation, but it dies out before we participate again
- This seems like a lost opportunity in the face of longer term goals
- There are only so many chances to capture the end-of-life replacements and get an electric and/or solar product installed.
- This is supposed to be the decade of action

### Insufficient Start-up Funds

- Building awareness takes time. A big push coming out of the gate makes a difference.
- Marketing needs to transition from awareness to focus on harder to reach HVAC/hot water upgrade goals that require a long lead time and need more guidance due to the deficiency of guidance in the HEA

### Better Support for Newburyport's Unique Building and Demographic Composition

- The most heavily populated area of Newburyport has 2,200 contributing homes to the National Register of Historic Places. Out of 8,844 buildings in all of Newburyport, 4,605 are considered historic (75 or greater years old).
- That means about 52% of our buildings have unique retrofit barriers related to wiring, ducting, and building configuration. This preponderance of complicated, expensive upgrades is not considered in
  - The development of the goals that National Grid sets for Newburyport
  - Mass Save incentives and marketing information (low applicability)
  - Observations and guidance to the homeowner during the HEA.
- Homeowners of older homes represent the majority of people who say they were disappointed by their energy consultant.

- HEA marketing mischaracterizes the opportunities and EE savings potential for older homes and, largely through omission, the HEA mischaracterizes the financial and time investment for EE upgrades for older homes
- See our example of the challenge of electrifying an existing gas-fired heating system in a typical older home. PowerPoint attached.
- Another problem is that the Heat Loan does not cover restoring historic windows, whose old growth wood will last another 100 years if restored properly.
- Many historic homes are occupied by seniors. Given the significant barriers and low applicability of incentives, they do not consider the time, effort, expense, or savings of upgrades worth doing before they die and/or sell the house. We hear this a lot.
- Demographically, Newburyport's population is old. MVPC projections show our population continuing to age for about a decade before beginning a slow reversal.

### [More Support for Local HVAC/Hot Water Upgrades During the HEA](#)

- Of critical importance is capturing end of life replacement upgrades in the next 10 years if we are to meet our goals
- A unique obstacle in Newburyport is the number of HVAC and plumbing technicians from New Hampshire and Maine that service our border town. This supply chain is unaware of Newburyport and Massachusetts energy goals and Mass Save incentives.
- During the HEA, Newburyport homeowners should get a list of Mass Save-affiliated technicians and plumbers within a 50-mile radius and a list of current incentives, before the homeowner starts looking into an upgrade, as well as a list of electrification options, like the sample attached, so they will know what to ask about. Solar should be identified as another option on the pathway and resources provided. The communities can provide you with this information.
- Support for outreach to our local technicians and plumbers is sorely needed. It's not enough to leave it to residents to know what to ask for when an upgrade is recommended. Some technicians are from out of state. Some local technicians are not Mass Save trained. Plumbers are a particular challenge because they seem not to be incentivized by money.
- Looping in all of our local technicians would be an opportunity for long term community partnerships to help our outreach these next years to capture those end-of-life replacements.

### [The HEA Should Provide Some Sense of the Electrification and Renewable Pathways Available](#)

- Upgrades are a long process, with many options to evaluate. The consumer needs to learn the GHG reductions, financial costs, and savings/payback, and then choose a path, choose equipment, and finding the right supplier/supply chain.
- Some sense of the pathway with guidance on optional next steps is needed, particularly as it relates to HVAC/Hot water upgrades. It should include info similar to what's encompassed in this HGTV webpage (and others like it): <https://www.hgtv.com/remodel/mechanical-systems/is-it-time-to-upgrade-your-hvac>
- A pathways document would include resource links to qualified local technicians and plumbers (this is an equity issue). If they want to be listed, they'll get the training. Local knowledge can create this list.

### Future Adults are an Untapped Market

- School-aged children influence their parents. All school aged children will become adults in the next 20 years. Homeowners of school-aged children are a hard to access demographic.
- National Grid has some great videos produced for kids that could be shown year after year in our classrooms, auditoriums, Youth Center Programs, Girl and Boy Scout Club meetings, with sponsorship by the school's Environmental Club and Green Teams.
- Otherwise, we don't meet the criteria for using our school's listserv because the community initiative does not lend itself to that target audience. This eliminates a key local promotional network that reaches through social media.

### Success is Dependent on Cultural Context and Social Meaning

- The National Grid Community Initiative presents as a corporate program to the community, and sending corporate material through a community network doesn't really work well
- If marketing material was less glossy and corporate looking, and more community-driven, it would come across better as a community initiative and residents would be more responsive
- Residents don't take much National Grid material from the table. What they take are our manually prepared materials: lists of current incentives from everywhere (e.g., MassCEC incentives), the list of Mass Save trained technicians within 50 miles we want them to research, a listing of step-wise optional pathways that includes renewable retrofits and helps with the question of what to prioritize next if they've done 4 out of 10 things, lists of solar incentives and programs, and information about upcoming events for the initiative.
- All communities would benefit if National Grid & Mass Save enlisted the collaboration of a national non-profit partner such as Mother's Out Front who would add a small army of people to any community's effort, along with more awareness through their organization's grass-roots, community based media machine.

- A solar partner that offers options for both community and rooftop solar would boost education, awareness, and actions too. Solar programs are a lot of work, so it's better to run them during the community initiative while we have volunteers on hand and an established media presence.
- Any partnerships that adds manpower to our efforts (which is what Newburyport lacks) is a strong need.
- The partnership needs to be a non-profit, because when a business partner itself has goals, that sometimes leads to unsavory business-to-customer tactics akin to selling life insurance, making the affiliation unbecoming for a municipality
- It's very hard for a community to incorporate any kind of partnerships that adds manpower into the National Grid marketing material. That seems like an unnecessary obstacle. Either give us better control of marketing material for the sponsorships that add manpower or get the needed partnerships for us. We are looking for non-profit partnerships that add manpower to our outreach efforts.

### [The HEA Should Do More](#)

- There are only so many opportunities to change the replacement purchase plans for end-of-life equipment. The HEA needs to educate homeowners more robustly during the home visit.
- The HEA should provide a homeowners with a more comprehensive assessment to include:
  - a. Heating/cooling insulation deficiencies – walls, windows, basements, roofing
  - b. Air leaks – including chimney drafts/dampers, with a blower door test
  - c. Window assessment – including wood window restoration options
  - d. Air exchanges in the building or other air quality evaluation
  - e. Humidity control and migration
  - f. HVAC – age, efficiency, renewable retrofit and heat pump viability assessment and options with appropriate resources in supporting material as suggested
  - g. Building CO2 emissions – total and kWh/ft2, with reference numbers
  - h. Recommendations to maximize CO2 reduction/\$ invested (building owner \$ - rebate/incentive \$)
  - i. Leave the homeowner with a multi-year roadmap for upgrades with clear guidance, e.g., in 5 years this house will need a new hot water system, here is information on the types of products that should be considered, and here is a list of local suppliers who know how to install and help you get rebates on these products.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts.

City Of Newburyport

