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Button Up Northampton 2.0 Initiative Takes Aim at Energy Waste

Button Up Northampton 2.0 (BUN 2.0), a collaborative effort among three nonprofit groups endorsed by the city of Northampton, is announcing a house-to-house canvassing drive to spur home energy efficiency and the adoption of electric air source heat pumps. Each would lead to decreased energy bills and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

The campaign was initiated in early May. Volunteers are visiting neighborhoods in Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 where large numbers of homes have been identified that could benefit from weatherization. “Buttoning up” those homes would lower home heating bills and decrease the demand for fossil fuel and new gas pipelines, thus lowering the City’s contribution to climate change.

Last winter, ener-G-save, sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation, used infrared imaging technology to educate Pioneer Valley homeowners about energy leaks in their homes. The findings prompted over 500 people to request a free home energy audit and to follow up with generously subsidized weatherization improvements that cut energy use and heating bills.

The ener-G-save work paralleled the City’s successful HeatSmart program wherein residents were given access to reduced-cost, subsidized high-efficiency electric air source heat pumps. Local environmental organizations Climate Action NOW and Mothers Out Front were partners in HeatSmart which resulted in more than sixty homeowners converting all or part of their homes to this high efficiency heating technology.

These three groups have now joined forces, with the City’s backing, to survey residents’ interest in energy conservation and efficiency, decrease the use of fossil fuels for home heating thereby reducing energy bills for Northampton families and cutting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing air pollution.

BUN 2.0 will focus on single family homes as well as 2-4 family occupancy buildings. Generous current utility incentives can cover between 75% and 100% of improvement costs depending on income. A new pilot program run by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (Home Value Performance Program or Home MVP) is also available and subsidizes more energy saving measures than the utilities’ programs. Ener-G-save will provide customer service and liaison between customers and vetted contractors.

“Most people do not realize that they pay into a fund for energy efficiency every month through their electricity bill only to lose out on their share of this fund. The utilities have attractive incentives right now. We want to make it as easy as possible to navigate that system. Throughout our first year we have worked with over 500 customers and it’s been very gratifying to see more and more homeowners stop wasting precious resources and saving money at the same time,” stated Uli Nagel, Program Director of ener-G-save.

Data gathered in the surveys will allow BUN 2.0 to help households pursue their desired energy saving goals and help Northampton fulfill its recent Resolution to rely on 100% renewables for its energy needs. “Reducing energy use remains the least expensive and most easily accessible path to fulfill this Resolution,” stated Mayor David J. Narkewicz, who supported the Resolution passed unanimously by the City Council on February 1, 2018. “Our city is dedicated to combating climate change *and* reducing our residents’ heating costs and the Button Up Northampton 2.0 program provides a means to accomplish both.”

Mothers Out Front and Climate Action Now are particularly interested in the project as a means of reducing gas use to eliminate the need for additional gas pipelines in the area. “Decreasing gas demand is a much more economical and sustainable way to deal with limited gas pipeline capacity,” said Marty Nathan of Climate Action NOW. “The less gas we use in home heating, the more is available on the coldest days when demand is at its highest. And with at least a 75% rebate on insulation improvements for everyone, we can provide added value to Northampton homes and cut heating bills and carbon footprints at an affordable cost.”

The goal of BUN 2.0 is to have a minimum of 100 homes complete energy assessments and/or make recommended improvements before the next winter season causes poorly insulated homes to once again shed large amounts of heat.

An online survey is available that will trigger support for a free Mass Save energy audit and energy efficiency home improvements, click [here](#). BUN 2.0 welcomes volunteer support. If you are interested in joining canvassing for energy efficiency, please volunteer [here](#).

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