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SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: Green Home Tours to showcase energy efficient technologies

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Concerns over our changing climate and rising energy bills have Marblehead residents considering changes to how they heat and power their homes. As a coastal community, many of us are worried about climate change and how that could impact us and our children. We want to do our part to fight against the potentially devastating effects that rising global temperatures might bring.

To help Marbleheaders learn about home energy efficiency, Sustainable Marblehead is organizing a Green Homes Tour on April 8 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., featuring 11 houses.

During the tour, Marblehead residents will have the opportunity to visit with other homeowners who have installed heat pumps, solar, insulation and other energy-efficiency technologies such as induction stoves and tankless hot water heaters. For more information, go to sustainablemarblehead.org.

At the 2018 Town Meeting, a warrant article was approved to set a goal of using 100% carbon-free energy in Marblehead. Later, our Select Board voted unanimously to approve the townwide goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. Clearly, Marbleheaders have a desire to reduce our greenhouse-gas emissions.

Homes and buildings contribute more than a third of the carbon output from Marblehead. Fortunately, there are programs, financial incentives and improving technologies that will help us slash our emissions and reach our goal.

The best way to start is by getting an energy audit through your utility. All Marblehead residents, including renters, can schedule an energy audit through Marblehead Light's partner at NextZero. Their audit will show residents how they can reduce their energy consumption and save money on their energy bills.

Natural-gas customers of National Grid are eligible for a similar service from the Mass Save program.

An energy audit will start by assessing your home's insulation capabilities. Areas that are insufficiently insulated will be noted along with possible solutions that will result in a more comfortable house that consumes less energy. Both the NextZero and Mass Save programs provide rebates that will reduce the cost of improving your insulation.



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Homes that are being heated by burning oil, propane or natural gas are candidates for upgrades to heat pumps. Heat pumps are highly efficient because they don't create heat; they simply extract it from the atmosphere. Homeowners who convert from oil to heat pumps typically save 30% to 40% on their energy bills. In addition, heat pumps can provide air conditioning in the summer months.

Today's heat pumps are available in designs that work well in cold weather and are able to operate at full capacity even when temperatures drop to as cold as 20-below. They come in a variety of options. Heat pumps can be connected to indoor mini splits that are wall-mounted or on the floor. There are even options to install them flush in the ceiling if you have an unfinished attic. They can be used with a home's existing ductwork and registers for forced-air systems. An air-to-water heat pump can be used with existing baseboards or radiator heaters.

While heat pumps cost more to install than a furnace or boiler, they cost much less to run. There are a number of incentives that will bring the price down. Mass Save offers rebates up to \$10,000 for new heat pumps, and NextZero offers up to \$500. The federal government offers a \$2,000 tax credit and will be rolling out a program later this year that will give another \$8,000 discount off the invoice. Mass Save has a zero-interest loan program for financing the remaining amount, and most heat pump manufacturers have low- or zero-percent loan programs as well.

Adding rooftop solar to power your electrified heating system will further reduce your carbon output, lower your electric bill and avoid future price spikes. New technologies are increasing the electrical output of solar panels. There is even the option to install panels that look like regular roofing tiles.

Here too, incentives are available to reduce the cost. The federal government provides a tax credit equal to 30% of the cost to install solar. This, along with the ability to sell the excess capacity that's generated during the day, results in a payback period that's typically six to eight years for a new solar system.

We hope you will join us for the Green Homes Tour on April 8. It will give you the opportunity to see energy efficient technologies in action and talk to homeowners to learn from their experiences. You can sign up for the tour on the homepage of Sustainable Marblehead's website at sustainablemarblehead.org.

Mark Adams is a Marblehead resident and chairs the Sustainable Marblehead Green Homes and Buildings Group.



Mark Adams

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