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Police Report Opinion Program provides free energy use fix-ups

By Rebeca Oliveira October 22, 2010

All renters, home-owners encouraged to apply

Mayor Thomas Menino has implemented the Renew Boston initiative to provide Boston residents with free energy efficiency improvements such as air sealing and insulation upgrades to their homes. This is the first such partnership between city government and utility companies, Joseph Walsh, manager of the Renew Boston initiative, said at the Sept. 28 meeting of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council. The City is trying to get as many homes as possible upgraded before winter, Walsh added.

"It's an instant rebate. There is no cost to the resident," Walsh said.

Renters and owners are encouraged to apply for the program, Walsh said. Qualification for improvements is based on the income of the residents, defined as falling between 60 and 120 percent of state median income. Exact figures are based on the number of occupants per household and are available on the Renew Boston web site. A three-person household would qualify with an income between \$49,675 and \$99,350, for example.

Because of Renew Boston's guidelines, even mixed-ownership buildings should not have a hard time qualifying. If a majority of occupants in a building with up to four apartments qualify, the whole building is eligible, Walsh said. "A triple decker with two owners and one renter, with a variety of incomes, could qualify just as easily as a single-family home."

Because Renew Boston is a government initiative, Walsh said, it has access to all government agencies, which makes it much easier to expedite the process, compared to private initiatives. "We're bringing several tools to the table," Walsh added.

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Every home is entitled to a free energy audit every 12 months, which would pin-point problem areas that the program would then remedy, Walsh said. Lyndsay Schandel, from Next Step Living, the company hired by the City to perform the assessments and implement the improvements, added that a home energy assessment only needs a 10-degree difference between the inside and outside of the house to be effective.

Renew Boston has enlisted 13 community-based organizations to market and distribute these services, Walsh said.

Residents who fall below the Renew Boston Residential program guidelines should contact Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) to learn more about no-cost efficiency upgrades. Bostonians who fall above the program income guidelines may still be eligible for MassSAVE, a utility-sponsored efficiency program that advises residents on ways to reduce their energy bills and provides up to 75% of the costs of many home energy improvements. Other programs are available for larger and commercial buildings.

“Either way it’s still a really great program,” Schandel said.

The Renew Boston network coordinates utilities with for-profit and non-profit partners and is funded with \$1.8 million from an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant and through existing energy efficiency programs administered by NSTAR and National Grid. The project is expected to save Boston residents \$3.4 million per year in energy costs, and is expected to create 58 local jobs, according to a press release.

“Renew Boston is a unique public-private partnership that will have a transformative effect on the lives of neighborhood residents, while significantly advancing our climate action agenda,” Menino said in the press release. “This latest effort encourages energy efficiency across all neighborhoods and will save residents money on energy bills, dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and put local people to work in good paying green jobs.”

According to the City of Boston web site, Renew Boston is a major component of the City’s push for reducing Boston’s greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020 and by 80 percent by 2050. Through the program, Menino hopes to reduce the City’s demand for electricity by 200 megawatts by 2017, have 25 megawatts of solar power installations by 2015, along with projected lower greenhouse gas emissions, according to the City’s web site.

Resources

[Renew Boston](#): 635-7283

[Action for Boston Community Development](#): 357-6012

[MassSAVE](#)

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