

## **HOW TO MAKE HOME ENERGY RETROFITS GO VIRAL**

### **Community Ideas from Green Neighbours 21 Meeting on Nov-23-2016**

On Wednesday November 23, 2016 a group of about 35 community members packed the room at the Green Neighbours 21<sup>1</sup> meeting held from 7:00-9:00 PM at St. Matthew's United Church (729 St. Clair W in Toronto). The meeting was held to address the question:

### **Home Energy Retrofits – can we make them go viral?**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The dramatic cuts in carbon emissions that Toronto needs in coming decades will require a massive upgrade in the energy efficiency of the leaky, poorly insulated older homes where so many of us live. How can we make this process easy, reliable and affordable for everyone? Toronto's innovative Home Energy Loan Program (HELP) has been recognized internationally for its work in that direction, but can we make it even better? The program will soon be up for renewal, so this is the perfect moment for a close look at how it worked and to imagine its future.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

##### **Part A. How to make home energy retrofits go viral?**

###### **1. Create a one-stop service:**

- provide free access to a trustworthy knowledgeable impartial advisor to help homeowners understand their consumption and the products or technology that can reduce their costs.
- combine an expert assessment of each home with a full retrofit plan linked to a team of certified contractors who would complete the work according to specifications, provide a guarantee that benefits will be realized, and easy one-application access to all incentive programs.

###### **1. Recruit existing fossil fuel companies** to rebrand as 'heating' companies

- generate utility-driven initiatives that homeowners can opt out of, but default is energy efficiency upgrades with street-level engagement
- encourage companies to develop innovative heating alternatives to suit local energy opportunities
- incentivize reductions in fossil fuel delivery and reward growth in alternative energy delivery

###### **2. Promote advantages to the occupants** rather than 'the greater good' (i.e. fighting climate change), advantages of home energy retrofits include:

- lower energy, waste and water bills

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<sup>1</sup> Green Neighbours 21 is a grass-roots, action-oriented group of people who live in Toronto in Ward 21 (and beyond) who've been working together on solutions to climate change and other environmental problems since 2007. [www.gn21.ca](http://www.gn21.ca)

- living environment is quieter, cleaner, less drafty, more comfortable, healthier
  - home is more resilient, less vulnerable to extreme weather & power disruptions
3. Use social means to promote uptake:
- local **demonstration homes** or other buildings (e.g. one in each Ward) for tours, practical experience and advice, if they see it they are more likely to want it, make home energy upgrades a status symbol
  - **peer pressure** – show how a person’s home compares to similar homes of neighbours and to similar but energy efficient homes after upgrades (i.e. use social benchmarking)
  - **make retrofits visible at sale** - require energy efficiency of new or existing homes be disclosed when listed for sale so upgrades add value to home sale prices

### **Part B. How to make the ‘home energy loan program’ (HELP) more effective**

1. Use existing HELP projects to **create an online ‘shopping’ site**, e.g. click on upgrade to find out typical cost (or range of costs?) and payback period, a click prompts a pop-up chat box to appear that engages the user and offers personalized advice
2. **Add “full service” and “self service” options** with no loan requirement, and retain the current HELP option as a middle level. The two new levels would be for people who don’t want loans. Income from a new “full service option” would be used to subsidize workshops/training creating a new free “self-service” DIY option.