
ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND HOUSING RESILIENCE

FITCHBURG, WISCONSIN



ELEVATE

WHAT IS EFFICIENCY NAVIGATOR?

The Efficiency Navigator helps small to medium-sized apartment housing become more efficient, affordable, and resilient while reducing operating costs for owners and energy cost burden for residents. The Efficiency Navigator addresses **housing resilience, equity, and climate change**.

The program is for renter-occupied buildings with rents affordable to residents at or below 80% Area Median Income. This housing stock is known as naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH).

In 2025, the Efficiency Navigator invested \$530,000 to improve 68 households in Fitchburg's Healthy Neighborhoods, reducing energy costs, lowering emissions, and preserving naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH). The program delivers measurable climate, equity, and housing stability outcomes.

SUPPORTING FITCHBURG

A goal of the 2019 Fitchburg Housing Plan outlines the priority to upgrade existing multi-family housing, while maintaining affordability, which is achieved by providing sustainable and energy efficient upgrades and reduce the overall cost of utilities for residents. In the city's Sustainability Plan, the goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 33.4% and reduce people living in energy poverty (by 50%).

Through energy efficiency upgrades the Efficiency Navigator reduces greenhouse gas emissions and improves the quality of existing multi-family homes. The program also serves as an important housing initiative that helps preserve naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) and lower energy costs for residents, reflecting Fitchburg's commitment to neighborhood stability and targeted investment in communities that benefit most.

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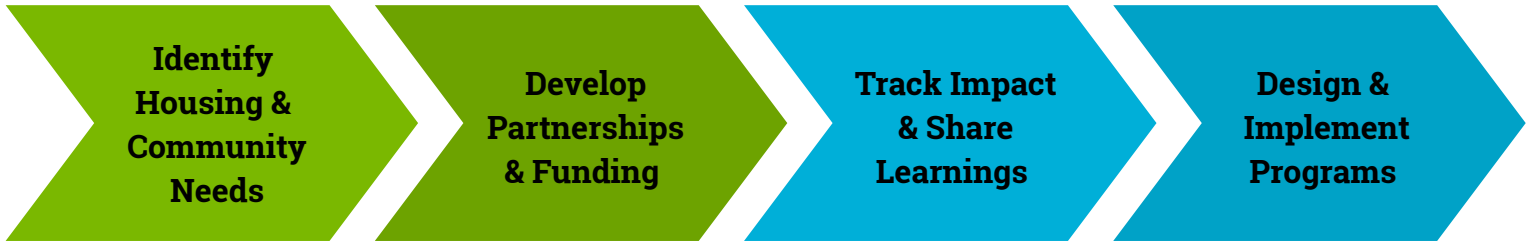
We just heard from one of our tenants that she's noticing her utility bills are \$10-20 less than at this same time last year.

– Fitchburg Property Owner

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THE PROCESS: FROM IDEA TO IMPACT



Applications Received in 2025

120
Units

15
Buildings

Fitchburg EN builds off the 2019 Fitchburg Housing Plan, focusing on the four Healthy Neighborhoods of Jamestown, Belmar, Southdale, and North Fish Hatchery Rd which are neighborhoods with higher unemployment and lower income rates. The program is funded by closure of TIF districts No. 4, 6, & 15. Our focus was on 12-units or less property size where residents paid utility. Joining Forces for Families is a community partner for the Fitchburg Efficiency Navigator.

The program coordinated outreach with the City of Fitchburg to mail program information to potential participants in the four Healthy Neighborhoods. We worked as a team to prioritize the applications from properties in order to best service the needs of the community. Then the program conducted energy assessments at each eligible building.

Collaboration with property owners who care deeply about their communities has been at the heart of the program. We start with a building efficiency assessment, then technical support to navigate obtaining quotes from contractors and incentives, timely implementation of the identified energy efficiency measures and health and safety opportunities, and tracking the impact.

The Efficiency Navigator is able to cover the cost of building upgrades, removing the financial barrier to action and making improvements possible at scale. Sustain Dane, in partnership with Elevate and Joining Forces for Families, completed this work with funding from the City of Fitchburg's Affordable Housing Fund.

How the Process Works

Assessment

We offer building assessments to identify energy, health & safety, and solar opportunities

Scope of Work

We provide step-by-step technical support to navigate contractor engagement and incentive programs

Implement Measures

We help owners navigate implementation of the identified energy efficiency measures and health and safety opportunities

CASE STUDIES



Location: **Jamestown
Fitchburg, Wisconsin**
4 buildings & 16 units
Residents: **24 (5 children)**



Estimated 10-year cost savings:
\$39,640.00



Estimated 10-year avoided
CO₂ emissions: **189,130 kg**



Average energy savings
per year: **28%**



Completed Improvements:

- Air sealing
- Attic & rim joint insulation
- Windows
- Dual fuel air source heat pump
- Refrigerators
- Ventilation



Location: **Southdale
Fitchburg, Wisconsin**
4 buildings & 40 units
Residents: **68 residents
(7 children & 13 seniors)**



Estimated 10-year cost savings:
\$31,840



Estimated 10-year avoided
CO₂ emissions: **166,830 kg**



Average energy savings
per year: **14%**



Completed Improvements:

- Air sealing
- Attic and rim joint insulation
- Wall insulation
- Refrigerators
- Ventilation
- Window installation

IMPACTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2025

102

Residents

29

Children & Seniors

40,434 kg

Annual CO₂ Emissions Savings

41

Energy Efficiency Measures

9

Health & Safety Measures

99,410

Vehicle Miles Traveled Avoided Annually

ALL MEASURES INCLUDE:

- Air Sealing
- Attic Insulation
- Dual Fuel Air Source Heat Pump
- Wall & Rim Joint Insulation
- ENERGY STAR Refrigerators
- Window Replacement
- Mold Remediation and Testing
- Ventilation
- Chimney Liner
- Gas Leak Repair



Equivalent of driving around the Earth **FOUR** times!

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

\$530,000

City Investment

\$7,800

Average Investment Per Household

\$15,539

Leveraged Incentives

\$65,020

Estimated 10-Year Resident Savings

LOOKING FORWARD

- **Program interest** – With assistance from the City of Fitchburg, the program sent targeted mailers out to property owners in Fitchburg's four healthy neighborhoods. This process was successful in identifying buildings that were a good fit for the program. We recommend using this same process for outreach to a new group of buildings for 2026.
- **Communication with residents** – Joining Forces for Families provided helpful reviews and suggestions on improving communications with residents. This included adding two emails to the process that shared information about the proposed improvements/construction process ahead of implementation and then a summary email at the conclusion of the work. Residents are provided with a survey to share feedback as well.
- **Approval process** – Fitchburg's requirement that individual invoices be approved by elected officials led to the Efficiency Navigator coming in front of committees & council multiple times in the year. Invoices arrive at different times from different contractors, so multiple approval packets were needed. Also, the windows work was requested by staff as a separately, additionally funded project that required separate approvals. Streamlining the approvals could be helpful.
- **Federal rebates** – The opportunity is now available to pursue Federal IRA rebates (HOMES or HEAR) in 2026, with the participation of residents and property owners for income verification. We recommend that participants complete the necessary application process to determine rebate program eligibility if their assessment report identifies rebate eligible measure. Buildings with successful rebate applications could be prioritized for implementation. It is also important to note that we piloted this in 2025 and the approval process from Focus on Energy was over three months long. We may need to reconsider the approach if application approvals have delays that prevents work from being able to occur.



FUNDING

The program is funded by the City of Fitchburg's Affordable Housing Fund in the amount of \$570,000, which comes from the closure of TIF districts No. 4, 6, & 15. Contractors leveraged Focus on Energy rebates in the amount of \$15,539.



CONCLUSION

Over the past four years the Efficiency Navigator has made a positive impact on over 100 residents and 68 households, including 16 seniors and 13 children in Fitchburg.

The Efficiency Navigator can continue to move forward with important energy efficiency and health and safety improvements in a new cohort of buildings for 2026.

The Efficiency Navigator serves as Fitchburg's primary preservation strategy for small-scale naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH), ensuring existing housing stock remains safe, efficient, and affordable without displacement. We invite city leaders, community organizations, and residents to stay engaged, to share their lived experiences, support local initiatives, and champion efforts that ensure every household will live in an comfortable, efficient, safe and resilient home.

