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Freeport's electrification rebate among coming boons for the eco-conscious

A home energy solutions workshop at the Freeport Community Center from 9 a.m. to noon on Feb. 25 will help educate residents about electrification rebate programs offered through the Town of Freeport, Efficiency Maine and the federal government.

Posted January 8, 2023 Updated January 8, 2023 **John Terhune**
Press Herald

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A \$40,000 rebate program passed by the Freeport Town Council Tuesday night could be the first of several boons in 2023 for residents looking to slash their heating bills and carbon footprints, according to the advocacy group behind the proposal.

The new "Electrify Everything" rebate program, which developer Freeport Climate Action Now modeled off of [similar offerings in towns like South Portland](#) and Auburn, will offer up to \$2,000 to qualifying Freeport households that purchase energy-efficient measures like heat pumps, insulation upgrades, energy assessments and more.

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"The climate is not one of several priorities; it's an existential priority," Councilor Ed Bradley said before voting to approve the program. "We need to do something as soon as we can."

Residents have already voiced agreement, Freeport CAN Secretary Bob Sullivan said. As the group developed its proposal over the last several months, about 700 people signed a petition supporting the project, which will be paid for with federal COVID relief funds.

"People didn't need to be sold," Sullivan said. "They stopped at our table and said, 'We're for it. Where do I sign?'"

Households making up to 90% of the area median income (\$70,380 for an individual or \$100,530 for a family of four) will be eligible for the program.

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The use of heat pumps has exploded in Maine as the technology has improved over the past decade, Andy Meyer, residential program manager at Efficiency Maine, told the Times Record in December. Switching to heat pumps can cut the amount of energy needed to warm a home by 50%, cutting heating bills in half and [eliminating thousands of pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each year](#).



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As of early December, Efficiency Maine's own heat pump rebate program was on track to help more than 20,000 Maine households pay for the technology in 2022, which Meyer called "the biggest revolution in heating since the invention of fire."

That popularity has lengthened installation wait times, which may prevent Freeport residents from enjoying the cost saving benefits of heat pumps this winter, said Freeport CAN Coordinator Kathleen Sullivan, who is married to Bob Sullivan. Rebates for insulation, air sealing and other weatherization efforts could have a more immediate impact for [those struggling to pay their heating bills](#).

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"Getting somebody to come do an audit takes a long time and to install the heat pumps takes a long time," she said. "But there are things you can do yourself without having to hire somebody."

Talks on DIY heating efficiency projects and home energy audits will be two of four featured panel discussions at an upcoming home energy solutions workshop at the Freeport Community Center on Feb. 25. The event, organized by FreeportCAN, Freeport Community Services and Balsam Realty, will also feature sessions on high tech efficiency upgrades and resources to help finance weatherization efforts.

More help could arrive from the federal government later this year. The High-Efficiency Electric Home Rebate Act, part of the Inflation Reduction Act President Joe Biden signed into law in August, will provide qualifying households with up to \$14,000 in rebates for qualifying electrification projects, including heat pump installations and weatherization.

With those larger rebates around the corner, Freeport CAN and members of the Town Council urge residents to consider waiting to pull the trigger on major purchases like heat pumps. But for those who can afford it, they say, there is value in racing to cut emissions.

"It's great that people can save money," Bob Sullivan said. "But look, we're trying to save the planet."

More information about Freeport's rebate program will be available on the town website once the registration process is finalized.

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