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CITY of BOSTON

SMALL BUILDING DECARBONIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Pathways to Equitable Net Zero

February 2026

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***Boston Small Building
Decarbonization Strategy
Executive Summary***

Pathways to Equitable Net Zero

February 2026

Prepared by:
CoEverything
Architecture Towards Neutral
New Frameworks
EP Interpretation and Translation



INTRODUCTION

Boston has committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. The real measure of progress will come not only from whether we meet those goals, but from the choices we make on the way there.

Small buildings sit at the center of this effort. Homes under 15 units and commercial spaces under 20,000 square feet make up nearly three-quarters of the city's building stock and account for about 30 percent of building emissions. Many of them are more than a hundred years old. They still run on fossil fuels, carry years of deferred maintenance, and are often held by owners navigating tight budgets and complicated property histories.

The work becomes most urgent in Environmental Justice neighborhoods. Residents here face higher energy bills, poorer indoor air quality, and the long shadow of disinvestment. These realities shape daily life, not abstract policy. At the same time, this is where the potential for change is greatest. When upgrades reach these homes, the benefits show up quickly: safer and healthier living spaces, lower monthly costs, and more stability for both renters and owners. Investment in these communities strengthens the whole city. It turns climate goals into something people can feel, and it moves Boston closer to a transition that is not only cleaner, but fairer.

Through the launch of Boston Energy Saver, the City is connecting residents to trusted help, establishing data-sharing across agencies, and building partnerships with community organizations and resources.

This isn't only a climate focused approach, but a chance to make Boston's homes healthier, and more affordable and its communities stronger. Boston is already demonstrating that building decarbonization can be collaborative, equitable, and rooted in the lived experience of its residents. These strategic recommendations for the City of Boston and its decarbonization partners include equitable approaches to retrofitting old building stock, aligning climate policy with housing justice, and fostering collaboration into every stage. The lessons learned here can guide cities everywhere to build a cleaner, more just future.

A VISION BUILT ON EQUITY

Boston's path to a zero-carbon future will be built on equity. In that future, climate action improves daily life. Homes are healthier and safer. Energy is affordable. Neighborhoods that have carried the highest energy burdens see the greatest gains.

We don't have to choose between equity and climate goals. Equity is the way we achieve these goals. Success means strengthening communities while cutting emissions. It means being clear and transparent about the work ahead, earning trust step by step, and showing that a decarbonized Boston can also be a fairer and more stable place to live.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was developed by Co-Everything, Architecture Towards Neutral, New Frameworks, EP Interpretation and Translation, with insights from the City of Boston and many community members and organizations. Over the 2025 study period, the team conducted a landscape and literature review developed to scope the challenges and opportunities involved in bringing energy reduction and electrification programs to Environmental Justice communities in Boston. Next, the team engaged with hundreds of community members in events across these communities, soliciting their input on identifying barriers and benefits to increasing access to these programs.

The following report summarizes this work and the recommended strategies the team has identified to address systemic barriers and improve Environmental Justice communities' quality of life while reducing their energy burden and greenhouse gas emissions. The City of Boston and the Boston Energy Saver team will consider these recommended strategies and evaluate which ones to implement as its programs and policies evolve. Some of the recommendations involve external initiatives that may be outside of the City's control or influence.



1.
LANDSCAPE &
BARRIERS
ANALYSIS

THE CHALLENGE

The approach presented here builds on extensive research and community engagement. That work identified barriers preventing participation in energy efficiency programs. It documented lived experiences of Boston residents navigating these systems.

SEVEN BARRIER CATEGORIES

Despite existing programs, interconnected barriers prevent full participation. For many residents, it's not one challenge but the accumulation of several that makes participation feel out of reach:



1. Structural and Technical Barriers: Physical conditions like knob-and-tube wiring, asbestos, or inadequate electrical panels must be fixed before energy upgrades can begin.



2. Financial Barriers: Up-front costs, gaps between free and full-cost programs, and limited access to credit leave many residents unable to proceed. The “split incentive” means renters who bear energy burdens lack decision-making power, and landlords who control building decisions see no financial benefit from energy reduction.



3. Procedural Barriers: Long wait times, inconsistent follow-through, and confusing eligibility requirements create frustration and dropout.



4. Informational Barriers: Confusion about overlapping City, state, and federal programs leaves residents unsure which apply to their situation or how to combine incentives.



5. Language and Cultural Barriers: Translation alone is not enough. Outreach must be culturally fluent and delivered through trusted community channels. Programs must be accessible from beginning to end for speakers of languages other than English.



6. Behavioral Barriers: Past experiences with unfulfilled promises and predatory schemes create skepticism. Tenants fear retaliation; landlords fear scrutiny. These concerns require transparent delivery and consistent follow-up to overcome.



7. Programmatic Gaps: Entire building types lack clear pathways, especially small multi-unit buildings and buildings with absentee landlords.



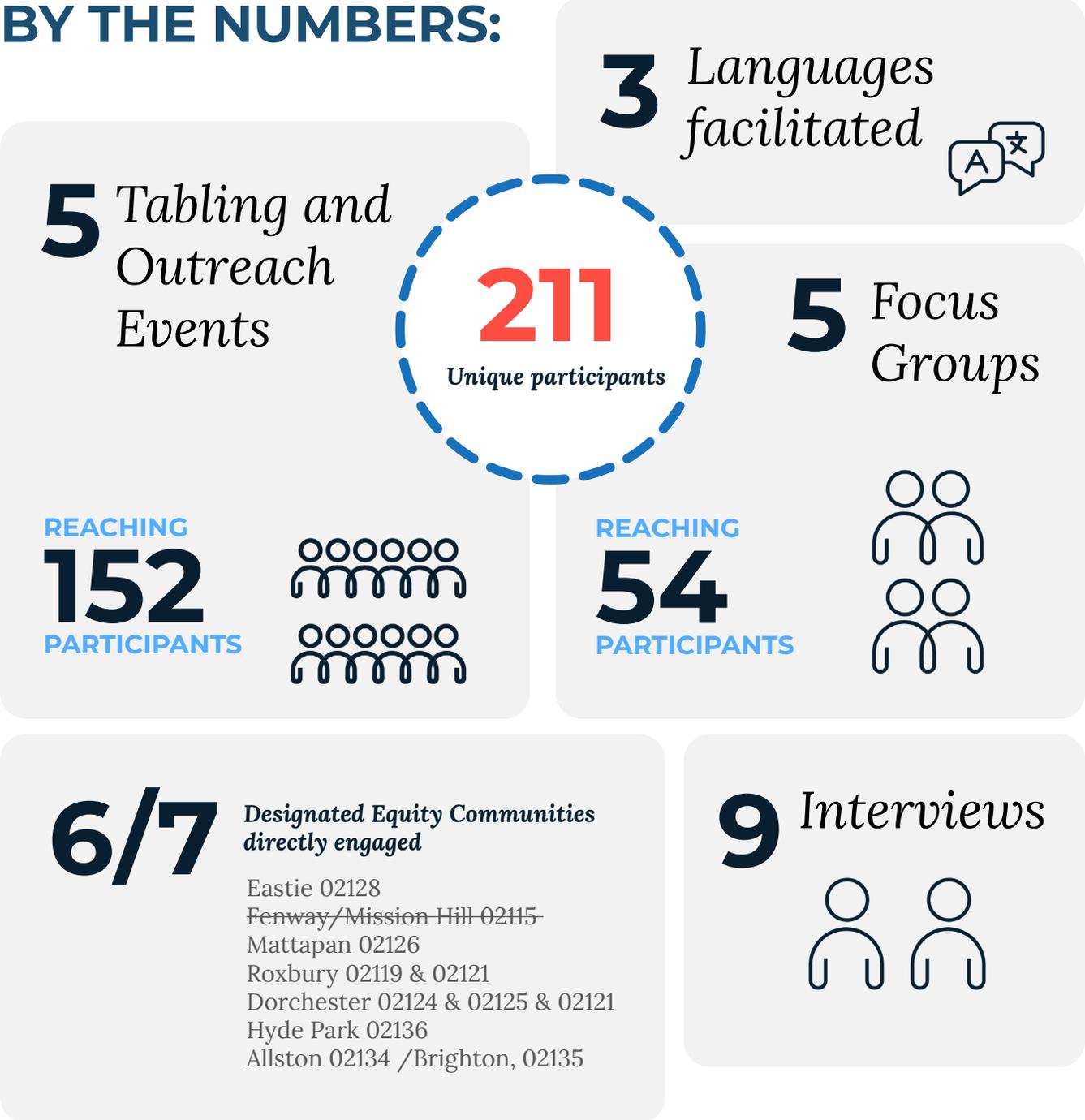
2. ENGAGEMENT REPORT



ENGAGEMENT

In order to understand how Boston residents experience existing energy efficiency and electrification programs, and why many eligible households do not complete them, we conducted a series of community engagement activities between June and September 2025. Through listening sessions, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews across six Environmental Justice neighborhoods, we gathered qualitative insights from renters, homeowners, and small landlords. This resident-informed data is essential because participation barriers are often rooted in lived experience. Trust, language access, power dynamics, and procedural complexity are factors that are not visible in program enrollment statistics alone. The findings from this engagement directly shaped the recommended strategies outlined in the Small Building Decarbonization Strategy.

BY THE NUMBERS:



WHAT COMMUNITIES TOLD US

Through focus groups, interviews, and listening sessions across six Environmental Justice neighborhoods, we heard from 211 participants. Consistent themes emerged:

The Engagement Cliff: Residents know about programs but few successfully enroll. The gap lies in the process itself.

Trust Through Results: Trust grows from demonstrated results, not outreach. Previous negative experiences have made many cautious.

Human Support Matters: Residents want one reliable person to guide them from inquiry to installation.

Power Imbalances for Renters: Many fear rent increases or eviction if they request improvements. Landlords lack incentives to invest.

Language Justice as Relationship: Communities want sustained engagement in their own languages through trusted community members.

Boston's challenge isn't about awareness or motivation, but instead, it's about trust, design, and accountability. Residents are ready to act, but systems must become simpler, more reliable, and visibly equitable.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Boston's strategy for decarbonizing small buildings centers climate justice by dismantling structural barriers and delivering improvements, including weatherization, electrification, and essential repairs, through initiatives that prioritize low-income residents and communities of color. The guiding principles are:

Justice and Equity: Prioritize Environmental Justice Communities. Direct resources first to neighborhoods facing decades of disinvestment.

Community-Led and Collaborative: Co-create programs with residents and community organizations.

Health, Housing, and Climate Together: Link energy upgrades with tenant protections, which should include rent stabilization, just-cause eviction protections, and right-to-remain clauses.

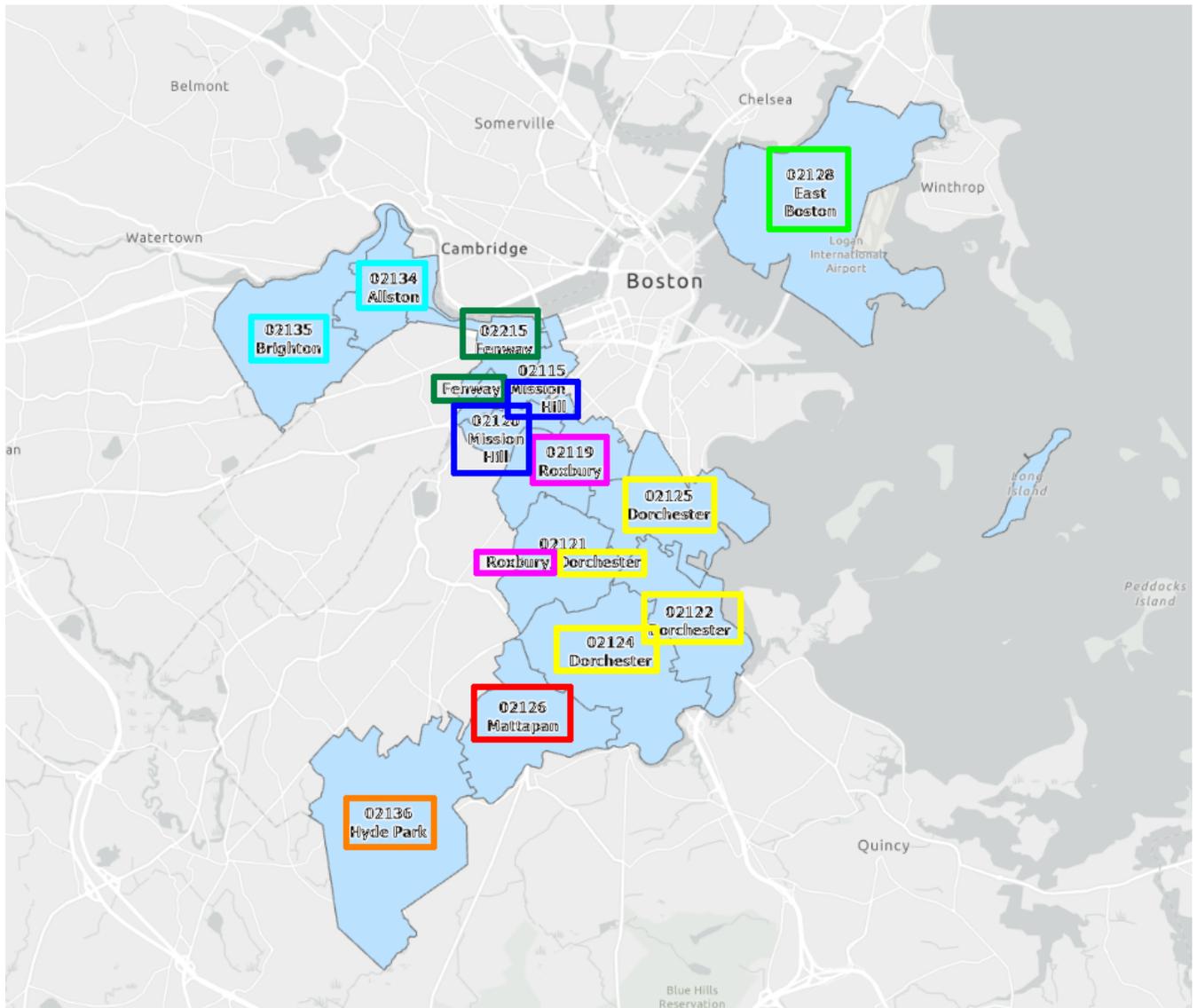
Affordability: Energy upgrades must reduce utility bills, not increase housing costs.

Accountability and Transparency: Track success not just by case volume, but by issues solved and communities served.

WHO WE ENGAGED

Designated Equity Communities (DECs) are neighborhoods across Massachusetts with a high percentage of customers, particularly renters and landlords, whom the Mass Save programs have not previously reached. These communities are identified to receive prioritized support, including streamlined access to energy-saving services and upgrades. Under the Massachusetts 2025-2027 Energy Efficiency and Decarbonization Plan, these communities receive prioritized support, including streamlined access to energy-saving services and upgrades.

The communities identified on the map below are those eligible within City of Boston limits. These zip codes were the focus of the team's outreach.



WHO WE ENGAGED

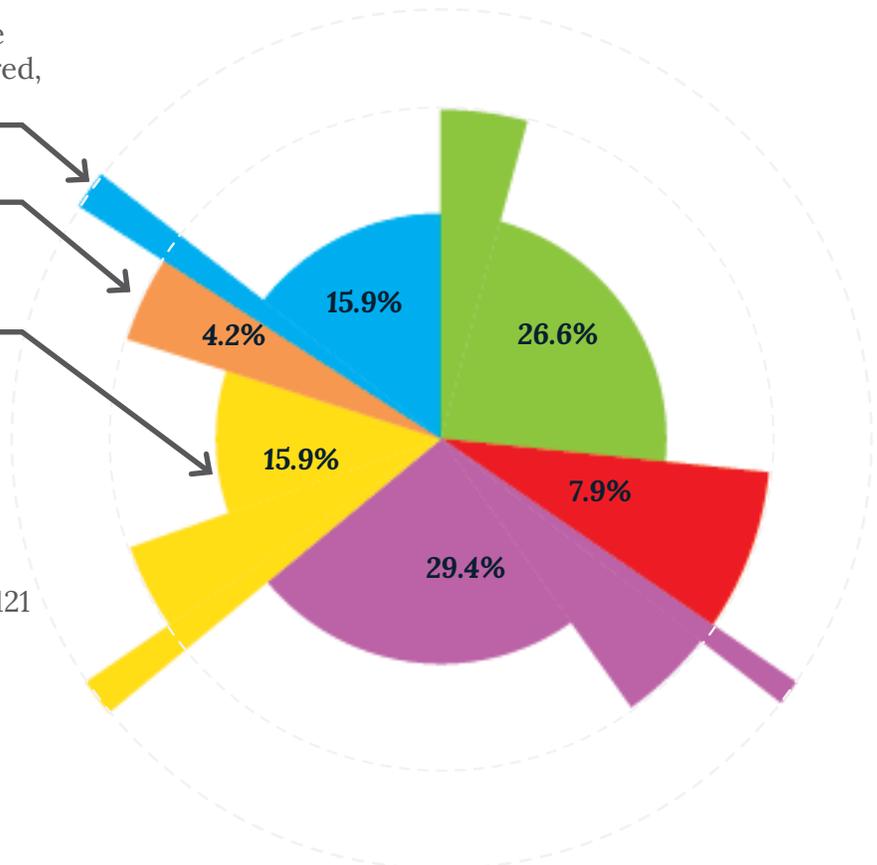
BY GEOGRAPHY AND TYPE

1:1 interviews were considered the most in-depth information gathered, represented by the widest radius.

Focus groups are in the middle

Listening sessions as the most superficial engagement type are represented at the inner radius

- Eastie 02128
- Fenway/Mission Hill 02115
- Mattapan 02126
- Roxbury 02119 & 02121
- Dorchester 02124 & 02125 & 02121
- Hyde Park 02136
- Allston 02134 /Brighton, 02135

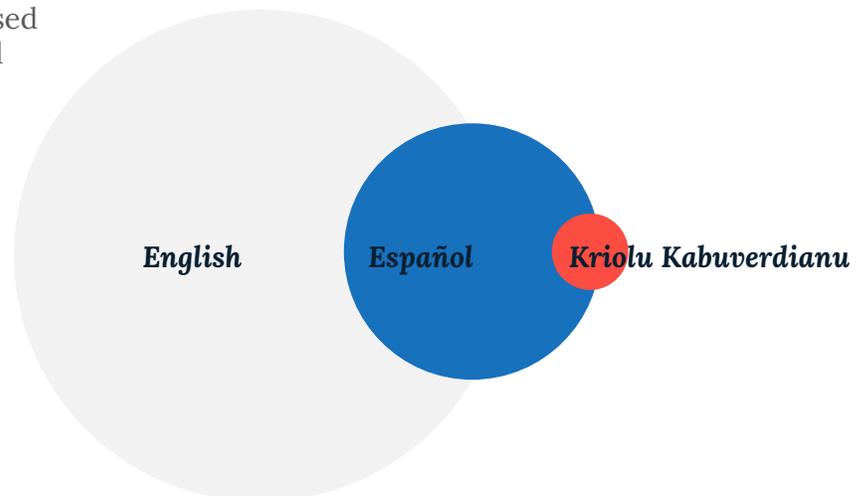


LANGUAGE EQUITY

Translation services were advertised for Spanish, Cape Vere Creole and Haitian Creole.

19 unique event/ interactions

- **6 Multilingual events**
- **2 Monolingual in LOTE***
- **11 monolingual in English**



*Languages other than English



LISTENING SESSION EVENTS



152 participants

5 sessions

- 22 ppl Four Corners Day - Dorchester 02121
- 51 ppl Roxbury CC MAHA Fair - Roxbury 02119
- 20 ppl Eastie Farms Garden Party - 02128
- 31 ppl Brighton Farmers Market - 02135
- 28 ppl UCB Network Night - East Boston 02128

Listening session events used a playful format called **Energy Bingo**. We set up at three locations with 63 total participants playing a bingo-style game where they marked energy actions they already do. Other events featured walk-by “mark-up” boards at farmers markets, and individual cards in a structured setting. The game let us measure the gap between everyday efficiency behaviors and actual program enrollment without making anyone feel tested.



FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOPS



54 participants

5 sessions

- 9 ppl Dorchester Food Co-op - 02121
- 10 ppl Madison Park Dev. Corp. - Roxbury 02119
- 9 ppl Mutual Aid Eastie - 02128
- 9 ppl South West Boston CDC - Hyde Park 02136
- 17 ppl Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition - Mattapan 02126

Focus group workshops used a different approach. We ran an IDEO storyboard exercise where participants mapped a fictional resident’s journey through Boston Energy Saver. Five sessions hosted by trusted community organizations generated 54 documented contributions. People drew on post-it notes, sketched scenarios, and discussed what would happen at each stage. The fictional framing sometimes made it easier to talk about fears and barriers honestly. To enhance participation, participants received food, child care (when needed), gift card compensation, and information about resources like Mass Save and energy assistance programs.

More depth of information



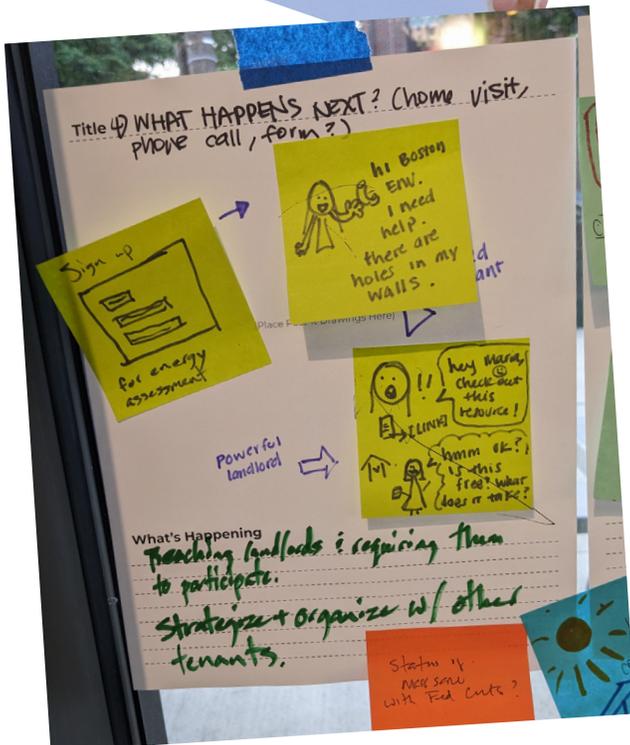
INTERVIEWS



9 participants

- INT 01 - Alston 02134
- INT 02 - Dorchester 02125 - Renter
- INT 03 - Dorchester 02121 - Owner Occ Landlord
- INT 04 - Brighton 02135 - Owner, Condo
- INT 05 - JP - Renter + Industry Partner
- INT 06 - Roxbury 02121 - Owner Occ Landlord
- INT 07 - Brighton 02135 - Renter
- INT 08 - Roxbury - Renter
- INT 09 - Dorchester 02124 - Landlord

One-on-one interviews formed the core of the individual story collection. We conducted 9 interviews of about 60 minutes each, using semi-structured guides that adapted based on whether someone was a renter, homeowner, or small landlord. These happened remotely with real-time typed notes, and participants received \$40 digital gift cards as compensation. The conversational format let us probe specific experiences: what happened when you tried to get Mass Save? What stopped you? Who would you trust to help?



An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in New England, showing a dense residential area with various styles of houses and multi-story buildings. In the background, there is a large body of water, possibly a bay or harbor, with a small island or peninsula visible. The sky is clear and blue. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the text.

3. SMALL BUILDING DECARBONIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

TEN RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

These ten strategies outline how Boston can move from fragmented efforts to an integrated, citywide system. They respond to what residents, implementers, and City staff said most clearly: **the process must be easier, fairer, and built around real human experience.** The City of Boston and the Boston Energy Saver team will consider these recommended strategies and evaluate which ones to implement as its programs and policies evolve. Some of the recommendations involve external initiatives that may be outside of the City’s control or influence.

The strategies are listed in order of priority, but none stand alone. Together, they form the scaffolding for a just transition.

IMPLEMENTATION AT A GLANCE

Implementation follows a phased approach. Near-term strategies establish trust infrastructure and community partnerships during the three-year pilot period. This timeline should function as a living document, subject to refinement based on performance monitoring.

NEAR-TERM (YEARS 0-2)

Focus: Build trust infrastructure, operational systems, and community partnerships



- Strategy A: Make enrollment effortless
- Strategy B: Reach renters by tackling split incentives
- Strategy C: Grow trust through community-based organizations and Peer Ambassadors
- Strategy D: Coordinate for accountability
- Strategy G: Lead with what residents care about

MEDIUM-TERM (YEARS 3-5)

Focus: Expand to complex building types, negotiate systemic changes, initiate policy development



- Strategy E: Advocate for improved Mass Save program design
- Strategy F: Ensure contractor quality and capacity
- Strategy H: Reduce permitting friction through Inspectional Services Department partnership
- Strategy I: Expand access for all residents
- Strategy J: Create policy requirements (development phase)

LONG-TERM (YEARS 5-10)

Focus: Implement regulatory requirements, scale proven approaches, achieve measurable impact



- Strategy J: Create policy requirements (implementation phase)
- Scale successful models citywide based on pilot outcomes
- Demonstrate significant greenhouse gas reductions from small buildings in Environmental Justice Communities

GLOSSARY OF PARTICIPANTS

The strategies that follow implicate participants in the implementation of the work. Lead and supporting roles are noted where applicable. Some roles are proposed new positions and are defined below. You can find participants highlighted in a gray band below the introduction to each strategy.

| | |
|--|---|
| <u>All strategy participants</u> | Referring to all parties involved in this report, the MOU |
| <u>BCAN</u> | Boston Climate Action Network |
| <u>BES</u> | Boston Energy Saver |
| <u>BES navigators</u> | Boston Energy Saver navigators: new role : Hire navigators from communities served (language/cultural match), train in program mechanics, assign by geography (specific to individual EJC), empower to solve problems without escalation |
| <u>BES vendors</u> | Boston Energy Saver vendors hired by City of Boston |
| <u>BHA</u> | Boston Housing Authority |
| <u>Boston Home Center</u> | A city program helping Boston residents buy, improve, and keep their homes. |
| <u>CBO's</u> | Community-Based Organizations |
| <u>Contractors</u> | Referring to licensed general contractors |
| <u>DER</u> | Department of Energy Resources |
| <u>Embedded Eversource staff</u> | Full-time employee within Boston Energy Saver, new role |
| <u>EJC</u> | Environmental Justice Communities |
| <u>Environment Dept</u> | Boston Environment Department |
| <u>ISD</u> | Inspectional Services Department |
| <u>Legal clinics</u> | Advice from community legal support, new role/ program |
| <u>Mass Save administrators</u> | Existing personnel operating Mass Save programs |
| <u>Marketing/ Coms Lead</u> | Dedicated marketing and communications lead, new role |
| <u>MOIA</u> | Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement |
| <u>MOU</u> | Memorandum of Understanding, specifically Boston Building Decarbonization Collaboration MOU, see appendix |
| <u>MWBE</u> | Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise |
| <u>OEOI</u> | Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion |
| <u>Peer ambassadors</u> | Recruit, train, and compensate residents who've completed retrofits to become paid peer ambassadors, new role |
| <u>SDO</u> | Supplier Diversity Office |
| <u>Tenant advocates</u> | Recruit, train, and compensate renters to take action on collective tenant rights to reduce individual risk, new role |
| <u>Trade associations</u> | Existing city organizations to partner with for new program development |
| <u>Utilities</u> | Boston utilities are Eversource, National Grid |
| <u>Workforce development</u> | Programs to pre-qualify contractors, new role/ program |

A.

MAKE ENROLLMENT EFFORTLESS

Leverage the new Boston Energy Saver program to create a dedicated navigator pathway where knowledgeable staff guides residents from initial contact through project completion. This eliminates procedural barriers while building trust.

Environment Dept, BES vendors, Utilities, CBO's

KEY POINTS

Invest in Navigator Capacity: Staff for both responsive work (returning calls, processing applications) and proactive outreach (community events, hands-on support)

Prioritize Cultural and Linguistic Competence: Hire staff matched to the communities they serve, with deep understanding of local needs and multilingual capabilities

Make First Contact Fast and Easy: Ensure first interactions take under ten minutes through phone, text, online, drop-in, or in-person pathways

Automate Enrollment Triggers: Implement real-time enrollment at events, pre-filled applications, and automatic scheduling using opt-out models

Empower Navigators as Problem-Solvers: Give navigators knowledge and capacity to follow through on commitments and maintain sustained presence

Create Second-Chance Pathways: Develop specialized roles to re-engage residents who dropped out after negative experiences



B.

REACH RENTERS BY TACKLING SPLIT INCENTIVES

Renters represent about sixty-five percent of Boston's residents, yet most retrofit programs were designed for owners. Address the documented gap in renter participation by combining landlord incentives with tenant protections.

Environment Dept, BES navigators, Utilities, Legal clinics, Tenant advocates

KEY POINTS

Target 5-14 Unit Properties: Provide enhanced incentive packages including higher rebates, expedited permitting, free technical assistance, and dedicated navigators

Study Rent Stabilization Requirements: Explore conditioning subsidies on tenant protections including rent caps and just-cause eviction protections

Reach Absentee Landlords: Use municipal bill inserts, inspection touchpoints, and property tax communications to reach disengaged property owners

Enable Tenant-Initiated Engagement: Implement threshold-based landlord contact where the City mediates when multiple tenants request services

Provide Portable Efficiency Measures: Offer measures tenants can install independently and take when they move. The Boston Housing Authority is piloting window-mount heat pumps at Hassan Apartments, following successful models in New York City.

Support Condo Owners and Associations: Extend dedicated navigator support to help navigate complex governance structures



C.

GROW TRUST THROUGH CBO'S AND PEER AMBASSADORS

Fund community-based organizations as co-designers and co-deliverers of Boston Energy Saver. These organizations are trusted community partners who need defined referral pathways and reliable communication channels with City staff—not outreach vendors.

Environment Dept, BCAN, CBO's, Peer ambassadors, Utilities

KEY POINTS

Fund Community-Based Organizations as True Partners: Provide multi-year funding, program design authority, and formal integration. Resources that directly benefit constituents also strengthen the organizations themselves.

Deploy Paid Peer Ambassadors: Recruit residents who completed retrofits, trained and compensated to speak authentically about their experience

Build Capacity for Scale: Support distributed investments with real-time enrollment infrastructure at community events

Embed Multilingual Navigators: Place permanent multilingual navigators alongside community organizations for relationship-based communication

Invest Early to Build Trust: Build familiarity in years one and two to demonstrate the model works by year three, creating evidence to secure ongoing funding



D.

COORDINATE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Establish the backend systems and coordination structures that enable all other strategies. Create a unified front door where one intake determines eligibility across all programs. Show up in communities with infrastructure to avoid trust-eroding delays.

Environment Dept (chair), Utilities, BHA, Boston Home Center, BCAN, ISD, Embedded Eversource staff

KEY POINTS

Build Unified Data Infrastructure: Track referrals from first contact through post-installation. Document reasons for stoppages with weekly dashboards and quarterly equity analysis.

Create an Advisory Council: Include Inspectional Services Department, Eversource, National Grid, a City Councilor from a Designated Equity Community, community-based partners, and appointed residents. Require 14-day remedial plans when partners miss targets.

Establish a Unified Front Door: Position Boston Energy Saver where one intake determines eligibility across Mass Save, City, and federal programs

Empower Community Steering Groups: Include groups with decision-making authority (not merely advisory), compensated participation, and access to summary data

Leverage Low-Cost Infrastructure: Use this funding window to build systems that continue providing value long after the three-year MOU period



E.

ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVED MASS SAVE PROGRAM DESIGN

Leverage Boston’s partnership with utilities to advocate for program design changes that enable more participation and savings. While Mass Save program designs are statewide, Boston can position itself as a testing ground for innovations that address documented gaps.

Environment Dept, DER, Mass Save administrators, Contractors, BCAN, CBOs

KEY POINTS

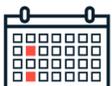
Advocate for Closing Programmatic Gaps: Recommend coverage for 80 percent-efficient equipment, insulating brick facades and standalone air sealing; support envelope-first incentives

Propose Removing Barriers: Address rules that force residents to continue using barely-functional systems because they don’t meet program thresholds

Recommend Specialized Building Pathways: Propose pathways for 5-14 unit buildings and condos with complex governance, which under-utilize current programs

Propose Simplified Enrollment: Suggest enrollment triggers at utility account changes, opt-out models, and on-bill financing with renter protections

Recommend Cooling Season Outreach: Support including air conditioning replacement as a tracked pathway, responding to what residents value most



F.

ENSURE CONTRACTOR QUALITY AND CAPACITY

Build quality assurance systems and workforce capacity so Boston has enough qualified installers to deliver projects well. Poor installation experiences quickly erode the trust that community-based organizations work hard to build.

Environmental Dept, Utilities, MWBE, Input from: OEI, SDO MOIA, Workforce development & trade associations

KEY POINTS

Establish a Vetted Contractor Roster: Include pre-qualification standards, ongoing monitoring through satisfaction surveys, third-party audits, and published scorecards

Invest in Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Capacity Building: Expand the local installer base with workforce development, creating pathways for community members to access good jobs

Guarantee Pipeline Access: Provide minority and women-owned firms with guaranteed lead allocations to ensure newly trained contractors have steady work

Align Capacity with Demand Growth: Ensure contractor capacity grows alongside increased participation from historically underserved communities



G.

LEAD WITH WHAT RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT

Provide communication guidance centering engagement on what residents value most—saving money and improving comfort—rather than leading with climate framing that can feel distant from daily life.

All strategy participants, dedicated marketing and communications lead

KEY POINTS

Lead with Savings and Comfort: Use concrete dollar amounts and neighbor testimonials; position clean energy as a co-benefit

Prioritize Cooling for Vulnerable Groups: Time outreach around cooling season; connect upgrades to health protection from heat stress

Ensure Language Justice: Create materials in primary languages with culturally appropriate context—not merely translated

Avoid Jargon: Use practical terms like “safer, healthier, cheaper heating” instead of “weatherization” or “decarbonization”

Apply Consistent Messaging: Ensure residents never have to translate environmental framing into personal benefit across all touchpoint



H.

REDUCE PERMITTING FRICTION THROUGH ISD PARTNERSHIP

Expand Collaboration with the Inspectional Services Department

ISD, Environment Department, Contractors, Mass Save administrators

KEY POINTS

Seat Inspectional Services Department on the Advisory Council: Create institutional transparency through public data sharing

Automate Cross-Referrals: Enable Mass Save assessment scheduling with permits, and trigger outreach within 30 days of property transfers

Recognize Low-Cost, High-Impact Potential: Minimal budget beyond staff time; removes systemic barriers without large ongoing expenditures



I.

EXPAND ACCESS FOR ALL RESIDENTS

Ensure every Boston resident can participate by removing barriers related to immigration status, credit history, or documentation requirements. This ensures trust-building investments convert to completed projects rather than frustration.

Environment Dept, Utilities, CBO's, Legal clinics

KEY POINTS

Create Bridge Grants with Alternative

Verification: Eliminate requirements for Social Security numbers, tax returns, or credit checks using community vouching or utility bill history

Use Residency-Based Verification: Include non-account-holders and multiple families living in a single unit

Bundle Repairs with Retrofits: Combine funding for necessary repairs with energy improvements in a single application

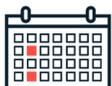
Embed Privacy and Immigration Protections:

Communicate explicit commitments prominently in outreach

Harmonize Eligibility Across Programs: Accept categorical eligibility so proof of participation in one income-qualified program counts automatically

Deliver Large Equity Benefits at Modest Cost:

Requires only modest budget for City bridge grants but ensures Boston's transition includes everyone



J.

CREATE POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Establish demand drivers and compliance requirements that will eventually make building decarbonization universal. While Boston Energy Saver focuses on voluntary programs, long-term climate commitments will require regulatory backstops.

Environment Dept (advocacy lead), Legal department, City Council, ISD (enforcement)

KEY POINTS

Implement Point-of-Sale Requirements:

Mandate Mass Save audits before property sale and energy performance disclosure during transactions

Establish Efficiency Standards: Establish minimum efficiency standards for rental properties

Include Anti-Displacement Safeguards: Ensure every regulation includes rent-stabilization agreements, hardship assistance, and support for low-income homeowners. Align policies with Boston's Anti-Displacement Action Plan

Begin Policy Development Now: Allocate staff capacity during the pilot to test frameworks and build consensus before full implementation

Acknowledge Political Realities: Position regulatory approaches as complements to voluntary programs for properties that remain inaccessible despite generous incentives



MEASURING SUCCESS

Effective performance monitoring must track not just how many projects are completed, **but who benefits**. We need to know which building types are reached, where projects occur, and what barriers cause dropout.

The documented gap in renter participation between owner-occupied and rental building participation shows that volume alone isn't success. Real success means unlocking access for renters, occupants of multi-family buildings, and Environmental Justice Community residents who have historically been underserved.

The City aims to work with utility partners, community-based organizations, and the Advisory Council to develop a comprehensive metrics framework. This includes regular data collection, quarterly equity analysis that triggers action when gaps emerge, and community steering group review.

RESOURCE PLANNING

The project team provided additional recommendations regarding budget, staffing, and infrastructure to support these ten strategies. The central argument is this: **equity-focused investments are essential infrastructure for emissions reductions**.

Incentive programs alone are unlikely to reach Environmental Justice populations due to structural barriers including complexity, mistrust, split incentives, and documentation requirements. Success requires dedicated investment in delivery infrastructure—navigators, community-based organizations, proactive engagement, and alternative verification pathways.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Boston's small-building decarbonization challenge isn't just about awareness or motivation, because we heard that residents are ready to act. The challenge is about trust, design, and accountability. These ten strategies provide a roadmap for systems that are simpler, more reliable, and visibly equitable.

Through Boston Energy Saver and deep partnerships with community organizations, Boston is demonstrating that building decarbonization can be collaborative, equitable, and rooted in lived experience. The lessons learned here are clear: equitable approaches to retrofitting old building stock, aligning climate policy with housing justice, and fostering collaboration at every stage. These lessons can guide cities everywhere toward a cleaner, more just future.

For the complete strategy report including detailed implementation steps, performance metrics, resource planning, and supporting research, see the full Decarbonization Strategy Report.



4. APPENDIX

South Bay
Resident
Permit
Parking
8am to 6pm
Mon-Fri

Street
Cleaning
8AM - 12PM

LANDSCAPE & BARRIERS ANALYSIS

METHODOLOGY: DATA SOURCES

This literature review draws from a curated set of core and supplementary documents that collectively inform the landscape of small building decarbonization in Boston. These sources include technical studies, program evaluations, City planning materials, and equity-focused analyses:

Core Sources Reviewed:

[Boston Building Decarbonization Collaboration MOU \(MOU\)](#)

- Defines the framework for collaboration between the City, utilities, and housing partners around retrofit strategy, funding, and delivery priorities.

[Boston Energy Saver Summary Presentation \(BES Summary\)](#)

- An internal City concept and communications tool for guiding residents through decarbonization pathways; actively soliciting feedback.

[2020 Residential Nonparticipant Market and Barriers Study \(Nonparticipant Market Barriers Study\)](#)

- Explores behavioral, cultural, and structural reasons Mass Save eligible residents opt out of participation. Emphasizes region- and demographic-specific responses.

[MA Energy Efficiency Advisory Council 2013–2022 Residential Nonparticipant Study \(MA-EEAC Non\)](#)

- Quantitative analysis of Mass Save program participation trends across MA. Highlights gaps in service to renters, moderate-income households, and linguistically isolated populations.

[Barriers to Mass Save in Boston's EJ Communities \(BCAN Report\)](#)

- Community-grounded report offering qualitative data and focus group findings from Environmental Justice communities across Boston.

[Home Modernization Navigator Program \(MassCEC\)](#)

- A pilot concierge model offering personalized, multilingual building retrofit support with incentive stacking and planning.

[BEI Boston Residential Decarbonization Funding Gap Analysis \(BEI Gap Analysis\)](#)

- Cost modeling and funding availability projections, especially for low- and moderate-income households. Offers insights into program feasibility and unmet needs.

*Additional sources are cited as applicable within this document

ENGAGEMENT REPORT

METHODS

1. *Listening session events*

- Used a playful format called Energy Bingo. We set up at three locations with 63 total participants playing a bingo-style game where they marked energy actions they already do. Two events used walk-by boards at farmers markets, where people marked as they passed. One event used individual cards in a structured setting. The game let us measure the gap between everyday efficiency behaviors and actual program enrollment without making anyone feel tested.

2. *Focus group workshops*

- Used a different approach. Rather than asking people to describe their own experiences directly, we ran an IDEO storyboard exercise where participants mapped a fictional resident's journey through Boston Energy Saver. Five sessions hosted by trusted community organizations generated 54 documented contributions. People drew on post-it notes, sketched scenarios, and discussed what would happen at each stage. The fictional framing sometimes made it easier to talk about fears and barriers honestly.
- Participants were compensated with gift cards from local businesses and a farmers market.

3. *One-on-one interviews*

- Formed the core of the individual story collection. We conducted 9 interviews of about 60 minutes each, using semi-structured guides that adapted based on whether someone was a renter, homeowner, or small landlord. These happened remotely with real-time typed notes, and participants received \$40 digital gift cards as compensation. The conversational format let us probe specific experiences: what happened when you tried to get Mass Save? What stopped you? Who would you trust to help?

BOSTON SMALL BUILDING DECARBONIZATION STRATEGY REPORT

FULL DOCUMENTATION LOCATION

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iaKDpbilzc3et6-Bw0Kyb9GfUjfX2ZDyOQva0NYRsuI/edit?usp=sharing>



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New Frameworks

Pathways to Equitable Net Zero

February 2026

