

Ten Community Fossil-Free Demonstration Project Comments

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I volunteer for the Town of Arlington as one of Electrify Arlington's four trained Heat Pump Volunteer Coaches. I am also the point person who handles the day-to-day logistics for this program, including communicating with Arlington residents. I therefore spend many hours a week helping Arlington residents who are interested in installing heat pumps and other aspects of building electrification because they want to reduce their carbon emissions and/or increase the comfort of their homes, but they don't want to spend more than they can afford.

Retrofitting homes, I know from these experiences, has both financial and non-financial costs. The financial costs are obvious. Equally important, I have come to believe, are the generally invisible costs in people's time and attention.

Every home is different, so every home requires its own evaluation and its own plan. Each homeowner or landlord needs to learn enough to make good decisions for their own particular building. They know that mistakes can be expensive, so they often feel significant anxiety during this process. Homeowners do not always receive good advice from contractors, and some homeowners end up with systems that are overly expensive and/or inadequate for heating their homes. The learning curve, uncertainty, and fear are all significant impediments.

Constructing a new all-electric home, in contrast, is a known and relatively easy process. Many people have done it, both for single-family houses and for larger residential buildings. Any builder or architect can learn how to build all-electric homes and then apply their knowledge to multiple buildings.

It is much simpler, easier, and more reliable to build a new all-electric home now than to build a home with fossil fuels now and retrofit it in 15-20 years. Each new building with fossil fuels imposes a burden on its future owners – not in the far future, but in the near future.

If legislators and regulators are concerned about the costs of requiring new construction to be all-electric, I hope they will also consider the costs of *not* requiring new construction to be all-electric. As someone working on the ground to help residents retrofit their homes, these costs – both financial and otherwise – are glaring to me. Making property-ownership unnecessarily difficult is not fair to homeowners and landlords in our Commonwealth.

The Ten Community Fossil-Free Demonstration Project is a step in the right direction, and I hope DOER will implement this project with the speed and urgency that it deserves.

Several people who offered verbal testimony on February 8, 2023, made important suggestions for reducing delays and making this project more helpful to more people. I support all of them, and especially:

1. Evaluate each community's plans promptly after they are filed, rather than insisting on a sequence of approval within the ten priority communities.
2. Allow a replacement community to start the process as soon as one of the ten priority communities withdraws or it becomes clear that one of the ten priority communities will not qualify.
3. When considering replacement communities, give preference to communities with high population densities and environmental justice communities – both for fairness, and so that policy-makers can learn how a fossil-fuel-free requirement works in diverse types of communities.
4. As soon as possible, make it possible for additional communities to opt into a fossil fuel free code. **Remember: Every home built with fossil fuels now is a problem for a future homeowner or landlord.**