

Executive Summary: Evanston Green Homes Pilot Program (2019–2026)

The Evanston Green Homes Pilot is a City-supported initiative designed to retrofit existing affordable housing with climate-resilient, energy-efficient, and healthy upgrades. By providing no-cost improvements to vulnerable residents, the program seeks to lower utility bills, address historic housing inequities, and advance the City's 2018 Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP) goals of carbon neutrality by 2050.

Program Strategy & Equity

Implemented by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) and Elevate Energy, the pilot utilized a “One-Stop Shop” model to streamline services for residents.

- **TARGETING:** Using a data-driven Vulnerability Score, the program focused on Census Tracts 8092 and 8102—areas with high concentrations of BIPOC residents, lower median incomes, and significant climate-related infrastructure risks.
- **FUNDING:** Initial support was provided via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), with additional funding from the Good Neighbor Fund (2024) specifically for electrification (heat pumps and induction stoves).
- **COMMUNITY-LED DESIGN:** The program was shaped by a Resident Advisory Group and five community focus groups, ensuring that implementation reflected the needs of renters, homeowners, and landlords regarding communication, equity, and project scope.

Operational Highlights

- **ELIGIBILITY:** Participants must reside in designated pilot areas and meet income thresholds at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI).
- **SAFEGUARDS:** To prevent "green gentrification," landlords receiving upgrades must sign affordability preservation agreements, capping rent increases for five years based on Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) limits.
- **PROCESS:** The program manages the full lifecycle of a project: application and eligibility verification, professional energy assessments, contractor bidding/hiring, construction oversight, and post-completion satisfaction evaluation.

Key Lessons & Future Recommendations

Based on program outcomes, the following actions are recommended to scale the pilot into a long-term city initiative:

- **REFINE AFFORDABILITY MECHANISMS:** Align entry and preservation criteria more closely (e.g., matching AMI requirements to bedroom counts) and record preservation agreements on property deeds to ensure legal enforceability.
- **STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS:** Formalize Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with utility providers and state agencies (like the Illinois Weatherization Assistance Program) to leverage external funding and streamline data sharing.
- **IMPROVE INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:** Align City Community Development and Sustainability departments to "braid" housing rehabilitation and energy retrofit funds, and establish consistent permit review criteria for enrolled properties.
- **EXPAND OUTREACH & CONTRACTOR DIVERSITY:** While the program received 30 qualified contractor bids, future iterations should break projects into trade-specific scopes to increase participation from local and MWBE-certified firms.
- **OPTIMIZE DOCUMENTATION:** To reduce the administrative burden on participants, transition to geographic-based eligibility assumptions where feasible and automate utility data collection.



The Evanston Green Homes Pilot successfully demonstrated that a human-centered, one-stop-shop approach effectively delivers critical home improvements to historically underserved communities. Participants reported high satisfaction, with 100% of survey respondents indicating they would recommend the program. Expanding the geographic scope to areas, combined with more robust interdepartmental and state-level partnerships, will be essential for the program's long-term sustainability and impact.