

Sustainable Middleborough Final EmPower Grant Project Report Weatherization Guide June 2024

This report is a final summary of the activities and outcomes associated with Sustainable Middleborough’s “Innovation and Capacity-Building Grant” from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (CEC) EmPower program. The \$16,280 grant, which covered the 26-month period from March 2022 through May 2024, supported the creation and distribution of a Middleborough Weatherization Guide. With the grant support, Sustainable Middleborough successfully developed resource materials (the “Guide”) and ongoing outreach to the community, establishing itself as a valuable resource for low-/moderate-income residents who want to increase the energy efficiency of their homes.

Overview of Project Accomplishments

Sustainable Middleborough’s goal for this EmPower Grant was to encourage whole-house weatherization and a transition to energy-saving home heating and cooling systems by providing outreach and easy-to-access guidance to Middleborough residents. Our focus is on the town’s environmental justice census block and low-/moderate-income (LMI) households throughout the town. As part of an "Insulate Middleborough" campaign, our organization developed accessible, targeted information on weatherization programs and incentives, including federal, state, and local rebates, tax credits, and financing options

Living in one of four towns in the state with a municipal utility that provides both gas and electricity, Middleborough residents do not qualify for widely advertised MassSave programs. Navigating the steps of whole-house weatherization is always a confusing multistep process, but it’s even more so in Middleborough, where residents struggle to understand which resources they have access to and which they do not.

We have promoted and disseminated our new Guide and coordinating print materials through our website, mailings to the community, workshops, and tabling at community events. Plus we have continued to successfully advocate for local energy policy changes that directly benefit our LMI residents by reduce their energy use and costs and to build the capacity of Sustainable Middleborough to impact on the community over the longer term.

Sustainable Middleborough’s activities fall into four main categories:

- (1) creation of the Weatherization Guide and print materials,
- (2) community outreach,
- (3) policy advocacy, and
- (4) organizational development.

Creation of the Middleborough Weatherization Guide

The primary goal of Sustainable Middleborough's EmPower grant was the development and distribution of a Middleborough Weatherization Guide. Originally conceived as a paper product, we soon realized that the Guide would be more functional and cost-effective as an online product on a new Sustainable Middleborough website: www.sustainablemiddleborough.org. Using simple language, short blocks of text, and a fun infographic design, the guide takes Middleborough residents step-by-step through topics such as: what is weatherization; reasons to weatherize; how much you can save; and how to get weatherization assistance, rebates, and other incentives and financing. The website also provides direct links to many local organizations with information and financial resources for weatherization projects. The website has had approximately 4,300 visits since it was created in September 2022.

Sustainable Middleborough has continued to develop new content for the website and print materials for in-person outreach. Some of those outreach materials include:

- An eye-catching trifold "Weatherize Now" brochure aimed at raising awareness of weatherization resources in Middleborough, encouraging energy audit sign-ups, and driving consumers toward the project website.
- An easy-to-use 2-page spreadsheet called "Energy Efficiency Incentives for Middleborough Households," which shows all federal, state, and local incentives and financing programs for every home energy-saving improvement residents might be considering. The guide brings together information on incentives from multiple sources, making it easy to see at a glance how rebates and tax credits can be combined to make energy upgrades affordable. This information has never before been available in one place and is the most useful resource we've produced. Previously residents had to visit multiple websites and make multiple calls. Residents at our tabling events have told us they felt stuck trying to understand various incentives and thanked us for doing this homework for them. This part of our guide has also been adapted by the local utility for its website and was featured in the local newspaper: <https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/sustainable-middleboro-provides-guide-energy-rebates/65255>.
- We have produced targeted handouts on: accessing the Massachusetts fuel assistance program, weatherization assistance, and home heating system repairs through the community action program serving Middleborough; the new 0% loan program established by the local utility; MassDevelopment's Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program, which finances energy improvements for multifamily and commercial projects; and testimonials about the benefits of energy improvements from local residents.

We have distributed approximately 1,000 copies of each of the handouts through Sustainable Middleborough's community outreach events. Electronic copies of the handouts are in the zip file with this report.

Community Outreach

With the creation of the Weatherization Guide and website, Sustainable Middleborough began ongoing community outreach efforts through an annual Cooler Middleborough Fair, workshop

presentations, tabling at community events, and mailings to the Middleborough Center environmental-justice block and adjacent low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

- The largest of Sustainable Middleborough’s outreach efforts have been two “Cooler Middleborough Fairs,” annual community-wide events in partnership with the Middleborough Public Schools and local nonprofit organizations. The two Fairs took place in April 2023 and April 2024. Funded in part through grants from Cooler Communities/the Harold Grinspoon Foundation and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Fairs showcased student energy-efficiency projects, along with energy-saving exhibits by the local utility, Energy New England, and commercial vendors of insulation, heat pumps, heat pump hot water heaters, and solar installations. Extensively marketed on social media and through the local newspaper, the Fair raised awareness of energy-saving opportunities and provided one stop for Middleborough residents to sign up for home energy assessments and estimates and learn about weatherization, heat pumps, solar, and electric vehicles. Approximately 250 people attended in 2023 and approximately 120 in 2024. In addition to the energy-related exhibits, both Fairs included exhibits from the New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance (NECWA), which provided activities for children on biodiversity, and from local family-oriented social service agencies. The goal of the Fairs has been to provide a mix of energy-related information and fun environment-related family activities to educate and engage local residents. Sustainable Middleborough and the school district expect to continue organizing the Fair as an annual event. Here are some of our press clippings:

<https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/cooler-middleboro-fair-promises-cool-experience-all/69162>

<https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/one-cool-event-middleboro-fair-promotes-energy-efficiency-and-more/63460>

<https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/one-cool-event-cooler-middleboro-showcase-energy-environment/62798>

- Sustainable Middleborough also organized its own workshop events at the Middleborough Public Library and other venues:
 - An Insulate Middleborough launch event focused on whole-house weatherization, incentive programs, and the Inflation Reduction Act (October 2022) by Loie Hayes of Green Energy Consumers Alliance and our state Senator Marc Pacheco:
<https://vod.mccam02346.com/CablecastPublicSite/show/7551?channel=1>
 - A workshop on residential solar by our partner EnergySage and one of our members, Dan Hotchkiss, who presented his own cost-benefit analysis of rooftop solar with low municipal-utility electricity rates (October 2024):
<https://vod.mccam02346.com/CablecastPublicSite/show/8330?channel=1>.
 - We have also made multiple presentations to local and statewide civic organization on the Insulate Middleborough campaign, including the local Rotary Club, town Democratic Committee, and as an invited speaker at Mass Climate Action Network’s

statewide Muni Summit on Equitable Energy Efficiency and Electrification in MLPs in December 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujuyJPKHmjg&t=2718s>

- Sustainable Middleborough also regularly hosts an outreach table at events organized by our community partners. Our volunteers distribute informational materials and talk with residents about energy improvements and incentives. Volunteers also provide coloring books and seed-planting activities for children as a way of attracting and engaging whole families. Events have included:
 - A concert and family activity organized by the Middleborough Public Library on the Town Hall lawn (7/11/23);
 - A day-long Harvest Festival organized by the Soule Homestead Education Center (9/9/23), a local agricultural and environmental education nonprofit;
 - A half-day family Fall Festival organized by the Middleborough YMCA (10/9/23);
 - A half-day “Crantoberfest” community fair organized by the Town of Middleborough Tourism Committee (10/14/23);
 - An evening “Family Strong” parent night event at Middleborough High School (10/18/2023), in collaboration with Middleboro Matters (a local substance abuse prevention coalition);
 - A three-hour outreach event at the Middleborough Council on Aging (11/2/23);
 - A community Christmas Fair at Town Hall (3/2/23);
 - A town-wide heat pump forum organized by the local utility to introduce heat pumps and related energy-saving technology to area HVAC contractors and consumers (3/16/24);
 - The town’s Herring Run Festival (4/13-14/24), a two-day community-wide fair attended by an estimated 5,000 area residents; and
 - Sheep Day (5/18/24), a day-long agricultural fair organized by the Soule Homestead Education Center.

Through the tabling outreach, Sustainable Middleborough volunteers have talked one-on-one with an estimated 1,000 community members. We have found this outreach particularly effective in going deeper with residents’ individual questions and issues around weatherization, driving online traffic to our website and Weatherization Guide, and learning what residents need and what obstacles they encounter as we adapt our campaigns and strategies.

- Sustainable Middleborough designed and distributed postcard mailings in February 2023 and May 2024 to approximately 3,200 households in Middleborough’s environmental-justice census block and surrounding neighborhoods. Copies of both postcards are included with this report.
 - The first postcard in February 2023 provided easy-to-understand information on weatherization (“5 Steps to Save on Your Energy Bill”), including instructions on

checking your income for WAP eligibility and signing up for a home energy audit. The postcard was designed to raise awareness of weatherization opportunities, encourage audit signups, and point resident toward Sustainable Middleborough's website (www.SustainableMiddleborough.org) for more information.

- The second postcard in May 2024 highlighted a new 0%/low-interest loan program established by the local utility and a local credit union for weatherization and heat pump projects. Households below the statewide median income can get a 0% loan over 7 years, and all other households can get 3 points off the standard interest rate. This new program, which Sustainable Middleborough had strongly advocated for over many months, has received little other promotion. The postcards provided links to sign up on the local utility website and to Sustainable Middleborough's website.

Policy Advocacy

Throughout the grant period, Sustainable Middleborough has advocated for more effective energy-related policies with the local utility and with state agencies and legislators. Overall, those advocacy efforts have been remarkably successful:

- In one of its initial (pre-grant) advocacy efforts, Sustainable Middleborough successfully advocated for the adoption of zero carbon emission goals by the local utility and more accurate carbon reporting. In 2018-19 the utility was telling its customers their electricity came from 70% "clean energy" but reporting 27% carbon-free electricity sources to the state Department of Public Utilities. In April 2020 the utility adopted and published a carbon accounting model that is in line with the state and gives an update at each monthly commission meeting. The utility has also expanded its carbon-free portfolio of energy sources from 27% in 2018 to 63% in 2023 and has acknowledged Sustainable Middleborough's influence on its policies:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah0A9RAXC0Q&t=7s>
- During the grant period Sustainable Middleborough has advocated with the local utility to strengthen its energy-saving rebate programs, especially for low-/moderate-income households. We attend every monthly utility commission meeting, often speak during a Public Comment period (which became a regular agenda item after we started asking to speak), periodically ask for in-person meetings with the Energy Services staff, as well as regular communication by email and phone calls. Those efforts have led to increases in the Residential Conservation Services budget each year.

In July 2022 we met with staff and outlined these priorities:

- (1) a discounted rate for low-income households,
- (2) higher rebates for low-/moderate-income households,
- (3) a 0% loan program, and
- (4) a public input process, including keeping our organization in conversations about policy changes.

As of March 2024 all have been achieved.

- In June 2023 Middleborough Gas and Electric adopted a 5% discount off the standard residential electric and gas rates for income-qualified households. The new policy also gave those households 30 days to receive an additional prompt payment discount of 15% on electric and 10% on gas. We worked closely with MGED Commissioner Larissa Hallgren on this change.
- In fall 2023 the utility began offering 100% rebates on energy-saving improvements for low-income households, rather than its standard 50% rebates, though still with caps. For example, low-income households can get rebates for 100% of the cost of heat pump mini splits with a \$3,000 cap, compared with 50% with a \$2,500 cap for other households; and 100% of the cost of weatherization and air sealing up to a combined \$2,250 cap, compared with 50% and a \$1,500 cap. Similarly, rebates were doubled for heat pump hot water heaters and appliances.
- In March 2024 Middleborough Gas and Electric partnered with the Taunton Federal Credit Union to offer a 0%/low-interest loan program for weatherization, heat pumps, and heat pump water heaters. Households at or below the state median income can qualify for 0% loans; higher-earning households can get loan interest discounted by 3 percentage points. MLP customers are not eligible for 0% HEAT loans, and few municipal utilities have such programs. Sustainable Middleborough was a major advocate for this program, arguing that the utility's rebates are simply too low to incentivize energy retrofits for low-/moderate-income households. Those households cannot make up the difference between, say, a \$1,500 cap on insulation and air sealing rebates and the cost of a whole-house insulation job. LMI households assume, correctly, that rebates are only for wealthier people. We argued that using the utility's energy efficiency budget for affordable loans would be a more effective way to incentivize and serve low-/moderate-income households.
- Sustainable Middleborough successfully advocated for Middleborough to become an early adopter of the Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program of MassDevelopment in 2022. PACE allows commercial and multifamily building owners to finance major energy retrofits through a betterment program, without showing debt on their books. This program has tremendous potential to bring resources to town to improve un-/under-insulated multifamily housing.
- By continuing to observe commission meetings, Sustainable Middleborough this year has been on hand to ask for a more open and representative hiring process for the utility general manager and to object when a consultant recommended raising residential rates and lowering commercial rates. Both advocacy efforts resulted in positive changes.
- Lastly, Sustainable Middleborough continues its advocacy and education efforts regarding state energy policies. In March 2024 we participated in the state DOER's public meetings on the use of federal Inflation Reduction Act funds for energy efficiency rebates. Sustainable Middleborough became a leader statewide in educating municipal utility town advocates about inequities in the state's proposed implementation of the rebates, which are funded by federal tax dollars, and the state plan's impact on low-/moderate-income households in our towns—a complicated issue to understand, to say the least. Our members drafted a sign-on comment letter, signed by 140 elected

representatives and advocates in municipal utility towns and submitted to DOER. We continue to reach out to our state and federal legislators and media about this equity issue.

Organizational Development

Finally, Sustainable Middleborough's "Capacity-Building" grant enabled Sustainable Middleborough to do just that: to strengthen its identity, form a network of local partnerships, and establish itself as an active, influential nonprofit organization in the community.

- The creation of the Weatherization Guide and the Sustainable Middleborough website met its goal of providing essential information to Middleborough families. It also helped create an identity for Sustainable Middleborough as a presence in the community and gave us a capacity to communicate that we did not have as an unfunded operation.
- One of our first actions under the EmPower grant was to reach out to local social-service and community organizations to establish an advisory group. Sustainable Middleborough then worked with that group to define the weatherization information needs of low-/moderate-income households, communication strategies, and vision for the Weatherization Guide. We have continued to work with those partners to distribute information to their constituents and to collaborate on outreach, enabling us to expand our capacity to reach key audiences. Advisory group members include representatives from the Middleborough Council on Aging, the local food bank, YMCA, School Resource Office, WIC Program, Soule Homestead Education Center, Middleborough Housing Authority, and the Middleborough Area Assistance Coalition.
- Sustainable Middleborough formed a partnership with EnergySage to provide easy access and free interpretation of residential solar installation estimates. Both of our organizations have created pages on our websites for the Middleborough program. EnergySage will gather quotes from prescreened solar installers, organize them in a consistent format, and advise residents on which if any are a good match. Residents can remain anonymous until they're ready to talk to an installer, avoiding high-pressure sales tactics. In October 2023 Sustainable Middleborough and EnergySage conducted a solar workshop at the public library, which included information on how solar works, its costs, and financial incentives. The workshop included presentations by EnergySage and one of our local members sharing his cost-benefit analysis of his solar installation in a municipal utility territory with low electric rates. Video of the workshop was posted by the local community access cable provider:
<https://vod.mccam02346.com/CablecastPublicSite/show/8330?channel=1>.
- One of the most significant accomplishments for Sustainable Middleborough was the successful application for a three-year Implementation EmPower Grant through the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. The new grant provides funding for a half-time Weatherization Navigator to expand Sustainable Middleborough's outreach efforts and to provide more one-on-one guidance to low-/moderate-income residents on weatherization and transition from fossil fuels. The new grant will allow Sustainable Middleborough to further increase its visibility in the community, make its outreach efforts more consistent and impactful, and provide targeted support to residents,

especially low-/moderate-income households.

<https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/weatherization-navigator-help-residents-save-energy-and-money/68083>

- Finally, Sustainable Middleborough Inc. incorporated as a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation and received tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service in August 2023. As a nonprofit, Sustainable Middleborough can now receive and manage its own grant funds and engage in independent fundraising efforts. More important, the nonprofit status further establishes Sustainable Middleborough as a permanent, visible resource in the community.

Measurable Results

As a result of its EmPower grant, Sustainable Middleborough has been able to provide information on weatherization and other energy-saving improvements to a substantial number of households in Middleborough. The extent of these efforts, carried out by a relatively small cadre of community volunteers, is reflected in measures of the distribution of informational materials, community mailings, website traffic, and face-to-face interactions with local residents.

The outcome measures presented below differ to a degree from those in the original EmPower grant. The original metrics were based on a proposal to create a single printed Weatherization Guide document to be distributed online and through Sustainable Middleborough-sponsored workshops. As described in our January 2023 progress report, once the project began, our advisory committee told us that information should be in short, easily accessed pieces, and that most users were unlikely to pick up a document that was more than a page. Those conversations led us to refocus our strategy on creating briefer, single- or double-sided handouts (such as the “Weatherize Now!” Brochure, our incentive spreadsheet, the new loan program handout, postcards, etc.) and then to provide more in-depth information through the website. The handouts/postcards raise awareness of energy-saving opportunities, and the website is a resource that allows users to find and focus on the information they need. We discovered that we could reach more community members by tabling at existing community events than we could by organizing our own workshops. As a result, we have revised metrics such as the number of Guides printed and distributed, number of downloads of the Guide, workshop presentations, etc. Instead, we are reporting what we believe to be outcomes that are functionally equivalent and better reflect the effectiveness of the work made possible by the grant.

Distribution of Informational Materials/Handouts: Guides printed and distributed, outreach tools for partners

Through the Cooler Communities Fairs, tabling events, and workshops, Sustainable Middleborough distributed approximately 4,500 copies of our energy-related handouts. These included:

- 1,100 copies of the “Weatherize Now!” brochure
- 950 copies of the 2-page “Energy Efficiency Incentives for Middleborough Households” spreadsheet

- 600 copies of handouts on accessing the fuel assistance, WAP, and HeartWAP programs for low-income households
- 600 copies of a handout with testimonials from local residents on their weatherization experiences and results
- 450 handouts on a new 0%/low-interest loan program
- 350 handouts on the PACE program for commercial building retrofits

The “Weatherize Now!” brochures were also placed in visible locations at our partner organizations in addition to our outreach events.

Mailings: Guides printed and distributed

Sustainable Middleborough conducted two large-scale postcard mailings (February 2023 and May 2024). Each mailing distributed postcards to approximately 3,200 households in Middleborough’s environmental justice block and surrounding neighborhoods through the Postal Service Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service. Through those mailings, Sustainable Middleborough reached approximately one-third of Middleborough’s 9,727 households.

Website Traffic

Website traffic has grown steadily since www.sustainablemiddleborough.org was created. During 2022, the first few months of website operation, the website had 771 views and 188 visitors. In 2023, the first full year of operation, that number increased to 2,363 views and over 600 visitors. The figures for the first five months of 2024 are 1,195 views and 540 visitors, which project to more than 2,800 views and nearly 1,300 visitors for a full year of operation. In total, between September 2022 and the end of May 2024, the website was visited 4,329 times by approximately 1,300 visitors.

The most common page viewed during that period was the home page (1,895 visits), which provided news and updates as well as access to other website postings. Other frequently visited pages include the “About Us” page (220 visits) and the “Careers” page (203 visits), which included the posting for the part-time Weatherization Navigator position.

Pages representing key elements of the Weatherization Guide were visited regularly over the roughly 2-year period that the website has been in operation, with a total of nearly 1,000 page views, as follows:

Pages	Visits
Weatherization 101	139
5 Steps to Save	132
Local Utility Rebates	120
Where to Get and Energy Audit	93
Federal Tax Credits and Rebates	85
Free Help to Get Started	84
Why Invest in Insulation	78
How to Find a Contractor	72
Other Financing Options	65
What about Solar	62
Free Income-Qualified Weatherization	60

The most common links from www.sustainablemiddleborough.org to external sites were to Energy New England (ENE.org), where users could sign up for free energy audits, and MGED.com, the local utility website providing information on rebates and other incentives.

Overall, website traffic averaged 206 visits by 63 visitors per month during the grant period.

Workshops and Presentations

The section on community outreach above details the various workshops and tabling events conducted by Sustainable Middleborough during the grant period. These included the two Cooler Middleborough Fairs, two library workshops, and 10 tabling events, plus additional presentations at groups such as the local Rotary Club. As noted above, we estimate that we had one-on-one conversations with approximately 1,000 area residents through those in-person outreach activities.

Usage of Weatherization Rebates and Incentives

The data from the local utility suggests that Sustainable Middleborough's outreach efforts, among others, have raised awareness of energy-saving opportunities and fostered an ongoing demand for energy audits and rebates for energy-efficiency improvements.

The data for 2022 and 2023, for example, show substantial increases in the demand for home energy assessments (from 180 to 255); low-income weatherization assistance (from 22 projects to 29); air source heat pump installations (from 50 to 61); residential solar projects (from 5 to 9) and installation of EV chargers (from 2 to 13). The only category to show a decline from 2022 to 2023 was rebates for insulation and weatherization rebates (from 31 to 22 projects).

Data from the first four months of 2024 presents a more mixed picture. When the 2024 data is translated into annualized estimates, they show an estimated 210 audit requests (more than 2022, less than 2023); 18 low-income weatherization project (below 2022-23); 45 air source heat pump installations (below 2022-23), and 9 residential solar projects (up from 2022, comparable to 2023). There are an estimated 30 insulation and weatherization projects (similar to 2022, higher than 2023) and a continued increase in rebates for EV chargers (an estimated 15, up from 13 in 2023 and 2 in 2022). While the early figures for 2024 seem low, it seems likely that we will see more of an increase as the year goes on. Two of the town's major energy-related events (a large heat pump forum sponsored by the utility and our Cooler Middleborough Fair) just took place in March and April, and it takes some time for homeowners to initiate projects and apply for rebates. Similarly, the local utility's loan program just went into effect this spring, and it takes time for those projects to be funded and completed. We have also spoken to some residents who have completed their audits, estimates, and required Abode consultations and are now waiting for the state to implement the federal Inflation Reduction Act rebates this fall—a program we have been heavily promoting.

While the data for 2024 is mixed, we believe that Sustainable Middleborough has been effective in both raising public awareness and encouraging more aggressive support for energy-savings from the local utility. We will continue to track the data and use it to adjust our strategies if needed moving forward.

Activity	2022 (12 months)		2023 (12 months)		January-April 2024 (4 months)	
	N	\$	N	\$	N	\$
Home Energy Audits	180	\$55,800	255	\$81,600	70	\$23,100
Insulation & Weatherization Rebates	31	\$22,444	22	\$17,876	10	\$9,442
Low-Income Weatherization	22	\$47,600	29	\$62,052	6	\$15,823
Air Source Heat Pump	50	\$60,121	61	\$70,396	15	\$22,358
MLP Residential Solar	5	\$29,340	9	\$70,026	3	\$20,232
EV Charger Grants	2	\$600	13	\$3,900	5	\$1,200

Budget/Finances

With the final postcard mailing and payment to our fiscal sponsor (First Unitarian Universalist Society of Middleborough), our \$16,020 grant has been fully expended. Our major expenditures have been for the Consultant to develop the draft Guide; website and materials design (brochure, postcard, handouts); printing costs for the various materials/handouts used in outreach, and printing and mailing costs for the two rounds of EDDM postcards. The table below shows our initial budget (revised in January 2023) and final expenditures.

Budget and Final Expenditures

Proposed Activity	Budget	Final Expenditures
Consultant to develop Guide and website content	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Website design and hosting	\$2,400.00	\$2,471.38
Printing and Postage (Guide, mailings to EJ community)	\$6,500.00	\$5,639.77
Materials and Supplies	\$900.00	\$1,466.82
Legal Fees/Incorporation	\$0.00	\$222.03
Fiscal Sponsorship/Admin (10% of direct costs)	\$1,480.00	\$1,480.00*
Totals Expenditures to Date		
Total	\$16,280.00	

* Payment of the final \$1,000 in fiscal sponsorship costs will be made when the final \$1,000 payment for the Empower Grant is received.

Summary and Lessons Learned

In sum, the EmPower Grant has enabled us to create a critical resource for Middleborough residents and to begin the outreach needed to engage Middleborough residents in weatherization improvements that will have an impact on their financial health and our climate. With the support of the grant, we have been able to create a web-based Weatherization Guide and related materials; undertake a variety of in-person and mail community outreach efforts; continue to influence local and state energy policies; and establish Sustainable Middleborough as a recognized organization within the community.

The past two years have been an ongoing learning process. Foremost, we have learned that building energy awareness and improvements in a community is a slow, incremental process that requires persistence and determination. We are lucky that we have a core group of dedicated volunteers willing to undertake the necessary tasks and are looking forward to expanding our capacity with a half-time Weatherization Navigator under our new EmPower Implementation Grant.

We continue to learn and try new ways of reaching the low-/moderate-income residents in our community. We learned early on that we needed to keep materials brief and eye-catching, and that materials plus a conversation was a more effective strategy than materials alone. Hence, the increased focus on tabling as a means of meeting people where they were, instead of asking them to come to us. We plan to continue to develop workshops on weatherization topics, but with a greater emphasis on hands-on, how-to advice while using continued tabling for outreach.

We are continuing to look at ways of making our website more dynamic and engaging, in part by adding more practical, applied information. As one example, we are looking at ways of constructing on-line calculators that will let users see how the various rebate programs and tax credits apply to specific projects they have in mind and how those incentives can be combined to lower the costs of improvements.

We are exploring new ways of expanding our capacity, including recruitment of high school and college interns and volunteers. We have already partnered with the high school's environmental club, which helped organize the Cooler Community Fairs, and spoken to the intern coordinator there. Given that experience, we are looking and new ways of engaging youth and believe that these younger volunteers can help us reach additional young adults and families in the community.

Looking back, we believe that we have accomplished a tremendous amount with limited resources. We are looking forward to extending and expanding our impact with our Weatherization Navigator under our new EmPower Implementation Grant.

Please let us know if you have any questions. We look forward to conducting a telephone debrief with you at your convenience.

Submitted by:

Kimberly French, Project Manager, Sustainable Middleborough

Alan Melchior, Co-Manager, Sustainable Middleborough