# Sustainable Middleborough
# EmPower Implementation Grant
# Semi-Annual Progress Report
# August 2026

The purpose of this report is to provide a progress report on Sustainable Middleborough's Massachusetts CEC EmPower Implementation Grant for the hiring of a half-time Weatherization Navigator and expansion of weatherization outreach efforts among low/moderate-income households in Middleborough. The report covers March 2026 through August 2026.

**Background/Context**

Sustainable Middleborough is a local nonprofit established in 2017 to promote a more sustainable environment by providing Middleborough residents with accessible, targeted information on weatherization programs, incentives, tax credits, and financing options, as part of a broader "Insulate Middleborough" campaign. The goal is to encourage whole-house weatherization and adoption of energy-saving home heating and cooling systems with a focus on families in Middleborough's Environmental Justice District as well as low/moderate-income families throughout the community. Under an earlier (2022) EmPower Capacity-Building Grant, Sustainable Middleborough created an online Weatherization Guide to support that effort and organized outreach efforts that included local advocacy, tabling at community events, and educational workshops. The current Empower Implementation Grant is designed to expand these efforts through the addition of a half-time Weatherization Navigator to provide one-on-one support for families navigating the weatherization/energy improvements process and the expansion of community outreach efforts.

**Overview of Project Accomplishments**

Sustainable Middleborough's efforts during the past six months have continued to focus on community outreach and education; direct weatherization assistance; and policy advocacy. These activities have included our annual Cooler Middleborough Fair; ongoing tabling; direct outreach initiatives aimed at landlords and tenants; and planning and recruitment for a second window insert initiative through the local food pantry and Council on Aging. Policy advocacy included exploration of expanded support for rooftop solar, involvement in community debates over several new development proposals; and participation in a multi-community proposal for the New England Heat Pump Accelerator initiative; as well as continued advocacy for expanded rebate programs with our municipally owned utility. These efforts are summarized below.

*Outreach and Education*

Sustainable Middleborough's outreach and education activities have included our 4th annual Cooler Middleborough Fair; ongoing tabling and presentations at local events; individual advising; and distribution of new landlord and tenant guides.

- **Cooler Middleborough Fair.** One of the major activities for Sustainable Middleborough during this period was the 4th annual Cooler Middleborough Fair on March 21, 2026, at the Middleborough High School. As in previous years, the Fair was a partnership between Sustainable Middleborough, the Middleborough Public Schools, and the New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance. It was designed to introduce Middleborough families to sustainable practices, ranging from home energy conservation to protection of coastal wildlife, while providing a free, fun, and educational event for the whole community. More than 25 exhibitors participated in this year's Fair, including insulation, solar, and heat pump contractors; our local utility; Energy New England, which administers energy assessments, rebates, and electric vehicle promotion for residents (no one here is eligible for MassSave); conservation organizations; local scout and church youth groups; and elementary, middle and high school students displaying science projects related to energy use. Sustainable Middleborough worked closely on two youth projects that were displayed: (1) we continue to partner with Manufacturing students who make the wooden frames for our window insert project; and (2) our Weatherization Navigator offered a series of morning workshops to a Girl Scout troop working on energy badges. In addition to the return of a life-size inflatable whale that fairgoers can walk inside, this year Bridgewater State University's geography department brought a 20-foot inflatable globe; and attendees were greeted by a video message from Bill McKibben recorded specifically for Sustainable Middleborough. Fair exhibitors again offered numerous games and crafts for families, and Sustainable Middleborough added a successful "Bug Hole" game about pollinators and habitat, plus a scavenger hunt this year, requiring families to talk to and get stamps from exhibitors, with homemade goodies as prizes. We also developed and demonstrated a solar tool, to help homeowners understand their solar-power potential. More than 250 residents attended the 3-hour fair. As one of the larger public events in town, the Fair continues to serve as a signature event for Sustainable Middleborough, providing a fun, educational, safe indoor place where adults and young people can learn about energy efficiency and the environment.

- **Tabling and Presentations**. Sustainable Middleborough also continued its ongoing outreach at more than a dozen local events (an average of 2 per month) between March and August. This included tabling at the annual Herring Run Festival, Pridefest, and Soule Homestead's annual Sheep Day event, as well as monthly tabling at the St. Vincent De Paul food pantry, local school and library events, and a presentation at Oak Point, a large over-55 community in Middleborough. Through these events, Sustainable Middleborough had direct conversations with approximately 800 residents, providing information on energy-saving strategies and local incentives and answering questions about opportunities to make homes more energy efficient. All of our tabling events and presentations were in collaboration with our community partners (see the full list of local events in the "Results" section).

- **Landlord and Tenant Guides**. In order to better serve renters in our community, Sustainable Middleborough created and distributed materials for both landlords and tenants, inspired by models developed by our EmPower cohort member Cape Ann Climate Coalition. The first piece was a 20-page landlord guide on the benefits of weatherization; do-it-yourself and low-cost steps that landlords could take to make their buildings more energy efficient; financing and rebate options available to landlords in our community; and links to additional resources. The Landlord Guide was distributed directly to approximately 85 owners of multi-

family housing in Middleborough's Environmental Justice District, with additional copies sent to realtors and other housing groups in town. Since then, we continue to distribute the guide through our regular tabling events.

In early 2026, we developed a 24-page tenant guide on ways that tenants can save on heating. The guide includes information on getting a free energy assessment; do-it-yourself air sealing and insulation projects; strategies for reducing energy use in the home; as well as information on tenants' rights; how to talk with your landlord about energy improvements; and resources for paying for energy improvements, such as the federally funded Weatherization Assistance Program. Sustainable Middleborough also developed a one-page weatherization handout for tenants. Both are being distributed at regular tabling events, at the local food pantry, and through displays at local shops and laundromats. Copies of the Guides are available at: https://sustainablemiddleborough.org/landlord-resources/ and https://sustainablemiddleborough.org/tenant-resources/.

- **One-on-One Advising**. Between March and the end of August, the Weatherization Navigator met with 18 families to provide individual, one-on-one advising. Many of these conversations were generated by our Navigator's regular food pantry visits, as well as Sustainable Middleborough's tabling events. In most cases, the consultations were focused on strategies for weatherization, how to install air-sealing materials, and signing up for the fall window insert program.

- **Outreach through Local Media.** Sustainable Middleborough also worked with local media to promote its community outreach efforts. Recent articles in the local newspaper covered the Cooler Middleborough Fair and our fall projects, such as the window inserts initiative and an October workshop on preparing for extreme weather:

  https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/middleboro-about-get-cooler-return-annual-environment-and-clean-energy-fair/156195 (Cooler Middleborough Fair)

  https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/upcoming-cooler-middleboro-fair-return-new-addition-year/156527 (Cooler Middleborough Fair)

  https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/cooler-mb/156609 (Cooler Middleborough Fair)

  https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/students-put-their-energies-helping-families-free-insulation/159262 (window inserts)

  https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/program-set-preparing-extreme-weather/159512 (preparing for extreme weather)

  Other articles reported on Sustainable Middleborough's involvement in local energy-related and sustainability issues: https://nemasket.theweektoday.com/article/energy-storage-facility-plan-raises-concerns/158725

https://www.facebook.com/MiddleboroughNews/posts/pfbid02Y4xRxctqwh1zzs8owdkddfwcZ9KAtuD1LevCiBZkPP2v9xreDziFjXZS5yggVxSZl

https://www.facebook.com/MiddleboroughNews/posts/pfbid0bNQKV7qvokk7zgsAQCJVoocgaawPbtkbNxbuGxB12YyF44FvmZgkr9DPAjodfgpGl

Sustainable Middleborough also maintained a regular social media presence and created new website content, promoting local events, raising awareness of peak energy days, and offering weekly summer cooling tips. From March to August, Sustainable Middleborough issued 77 posts (an average of over 10 a month), resulting in over 15,000 views and 2,000 "engagements" (clicks, shares, etc.). (See posts at https://www.facebook.com/SustainableMiddleborough.)

*Direct Weatherization Assistance/Window Inserts*

Current incentive programs provide almost no energy-efficiency incentives for tenants. In order to better serve these and other low/moderate-income residents, Sustainable Middleborough has focused on two relatively low-cost and low-tech "passive building mitigation" strategies as an effective use of our funds and volunteer power. Both efforts provide direct assistance to low-income families while raising awareness of the benefits of air sealing.

- **Window Inserts**. In late 2025 and early 2026, Sustainable Middleborough piloted the production of window inserts for 10 families recruited through the food pantry and Council on Aging. That effort built on a model developed by Window Dressers, a Maine nonprofit, and was conducted in partnership with Middleborough High School Innovation Lab students, Middleborough's St. Vincent de Paul food pantry, and the Council on Aging. The inserts are designed as removeable interior storm windows that can be used over multiple winters. (A brief description of the inserts can be found here: https://windowdressers.org/insulating-inserts/.) Sustainable Middleborough volunteers visited each household that applied for inserts to measure their windows. Students in the high school Innovation Lab then constructed the wood frames for the inserts, and about 15 Sustainable Middleborough volunteers assembled the inserts with shrink film, foam, and tape, and heat guns or hair dryers. Each family received 3 inserts in the initial pilot at no cost, which we were able to provide through fundraising. We raised additional funds so that we could provide even more inserts for 4 of the families.

  In March 2026, we hosted a focus group with our board, leadership team, and volunteers to guide our priorities in the year ahead. The overwhelming first choice was to expand the window inserts effort. This year we are offering up to 5 inserts each for 30 families (150 window inserts total). As part of our planning, Sustainable Middleborough met with Windows Dressers representatives to consider joining their program. Our commitment to provide inserts free to low-income families (Window Dressers charges most families for their inserts) and our partnership with the high school Innovation Lab ultimately led us to decide to continue our program independently.

  In June, Sustainable Middleborough began its outreach at the Food Pantry and through the

Meals on Wheels and fuel assistance intake programs that are located at the Council on Aging. Our Weatherization Navigator began monthly tabling at the Food Pantry to coach clients on energy-efficiency strategies and to recruit window insert participants. Flyers were also distributed at the COA and included in the Meals on Wheels packages for approximately 180 senior residents. Articles in the local newspaper have also raised awareness of the project. To date, 17 families have signed up for the project, high school students have begun constructing the insert frames, and recruitment is continuing.

- **Window-Sealing Kits**. Sustainable Middleborough is also continuing to distribute air sealing kits, primarily through the food pantry. As a result of our advocacy with our local utility to provide better incentives for tenants, Middleborough Gas and Electric has added rebates for air sealing kits and weatherstripping to its program, two rebates that do not require an energy assessment.

**Policy Advocacy**

Sustainable Middleborough has continued its advocacy and education efforts regarding state and local energy policies.

- At the state level, Sustainable Middleborough members continue to meet regularly with the state representatives and state senator for Middleborough and their staffs to update them on our activities and to discuss proposed energy and environment-related legislation. Legislation discussed included measures related to gas pipeline expansion, indoor and outdoor air quality, use of ratepayer funds for lobbying by public utilities, creation of a climate change Superfund, and legislation aimed at limiting PFAS products in the state. Our goal was to gain an understanding of our state legislators' perspectives, to educate them on bills they were unfamiliar with, and to encourage co-sponsorship and support. We anticipate continuing these meetings throughout the year.

- At the local level, Sustainable Middleborough has continued to meet with Middleborough Gas and Electric staff to coordinate outreach, encourage expansion of MGED's rebate programs, especially to low-income residents and renters, and to monitor the utility's involvement in new regional energy projects. As a result of our advocacy, MGED has increased the rebate amounts available to low-income families for weatherization and heat pumps, and has added new rebates for weather stripping and window-sealing kits. Sustainable Middleborough volunteers continue to attend monthly Commission meetings to monitor and provide public comments on local policy decisions.

- We have also used our voice to advocate for other clean-energy and environmental issues in our town. In August our Select Board approved a PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) for a grid-scale storage battery in town. Initially there was vocal opposition to the battery, including from the board, and much misinformation. Our advocates spoke at meetings and provided a 5-page memo with documentation to the board, explaining the benefits to our utility, town, and ratepayers, and providing up-to-date data and context on safety risks. Two

of the board members cited our memo as influencing their yes votes. We also met with the developers of a proposed surf park and have provided a presence at local Select Board, Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, and Historical Commission meetings when that and other projects are on their agendas.

**Measurable Results**

The table below summarizes the Project Metrics for March through August 2026.

| Performance Metric | March – August 2026 | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| Number of inquiries into Weatherization Navigator position | Not relevant (position was filled Spring 2024) | |
| Number of outreach events (tabling, etc.) with partner organizations | 11 events, 786 direct contacts with residents (see listing below) | Town of Middleborough, Middleborough Public Schools, Middleborough Public Library, Middleborough Tourism Committee, Soule Homestead Education Center, Middleborough Council on Aging, St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, Oak Point Senior Community; Middleborough Pridefest, New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance. |
| Number of workshops/presentations hosted (and partner organizations involved) | 4 workshops, 114 participants | SVDP Food Pantry, Oak Point Senior Community, Middleborough Public Library |
| Number of households receiving one-on-one advising | 18 | |
| Number of Middleborough energy assessments conducted through MGED and SSCAC | 136 | Based on January-June 2026 data from MGED. Full-year projection is 272 assessments. |
| Number and dollar value of weatherization or heating/cooling upgrades implemented by Middleborough families through MGED and SSCAC | 26 weatherization projects (MGED and SSCAC combined), 24 heat pump installations (MGED). Total value: $102,728. | Based on 6-month data (January-June 2026) from MGED. Total value: $102,728. Full-year results project to 52 weatherization and 48 heat pump projects. Estimated value: $205,456. |

The specific tabling and workshop events (and estimated direct contacts at each) are as follows:

| Event | Date | Contacts |
|---|---|---|
| Cooler Middleborough Fair 4 | 3/20/2026 | 250 |
| Herring Run Festival | 4/11/2026 | 230 |
| Soule Homestead Sheep Day | 5/16/2026 | 84 |
| Oak Point Dems Presentation | 5/20/2026 | 35 |
| Burkland Parent Night | 6/10/2026 | 24 |
| PrideFest | 6/14/2026 | 54 |
| Food Pantry Weatherization Event | 6/20/2026 | 32 |
| Library Plant a Seed Event | 6/30/2026 | 8 |
| Food Pantry Weatherization Event | 7/18/2026 | 27 |
| Children's Library Seed Event | 8/4/2026 | 12 |
| Food Pantry Window Inserts | 8/9/2026 | 30 |
| Total Contacts | | 786 |

The table below presents a more detailed summary of annual energy assessment and home-energy improvement activities through Middleborough Gas and Electric and South Shore Community Action Council from 2022 through June 2026. When 2026 figures are projected out to a full year, they suggest substantial growth in the number and value of home energy assessments and insulation projects; heat pump installations and low-interest loans appear to be similar to 2025. Residential solar is down slightly, possibly reflecting the end of federal tax credits. However, those numbers may also reflect the season, with fewer installations in the winter months. Total spending on rebates and incentives, projected out for a full 12 months, would total $357,360, a 4% increase over 2025. Given the disappearance of federal tax incentives for residential improvements, we are quite pleased that the overall number of families making investments continues to rise.

Lastly, Sustainable Middleborough's website traffic increased substantially during the most recent 6 months. Between March and August 2026, www.sustainablemiddleborough.org was viewed 1,695 times by 1,158 visitors, or an average of 283 views and 190 visitors per month. This is a substantial increase over the previous 6-month period, which had 824 views by 446 visitors.

**Middleborough Gas and Electric Department Energy Programs, 2022-June 2026**

| Activity | 2022 | | 2023 | | 2024 | | 2025 | | 2026 (Jan-June) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | $ | N | $ | N | $ | N | $ | N | $ |
| Home Energy Assessments* | 180 | $55,800 | 255 | $81,600 | 204 | $67,320 | 236 | $85,904 | 136 | $36,426 |
| Insulation & Weatherization Rebates | 31 | $22,444 | 22 | $17,876 | 23 | $20,657 | 25 | $32,984 | 22 | $32,216 |
| Low-Income Weatherization | 22 | $47,600 | 29 | $62,052 | 25 | $88,786 | 17 | $66,736 | 4 | $27,288 |
| Air Source Heat Pump | 50 | $60,121 | 61 | $70,396 | 51 | $72,353 | 58 | $88,279 | 24 | $43,224 |
| MLP Residential Solar | 5 | $29,340 | 9 | $70,026 | 9 | $50,316 | 6 | $20,368 | 2 | $12,192 |
| Low- to No-Interest Loans | | | | | 10 | $40,128 | 8 | $33,526 | 4 | $18,231 |
| Total Home Energy Related Expenditures | | $215,305.00 | | $301,950.00 | | $339,560.00 | | $327,797.00 | | $169,577.00 |
| EV Charger grants | 2 | $600 | 13 | $3,900 | 14 | $4,200 | 14 | 4,200 | 14 | $4,200 |
| Home Appliance Rebates – Energy Star (Humidifier, Air Conditioner, Thermostat) | 44 | $5,419 | 53 | $5,693 | 72 | $6,666 | 67 | $5,559 | 13 | $2,568 |
| Electric Lawn Equipment | 87 | $5016 | 89 | $4757 | 78 | $4322 | 100 | $5,948 | 42 | $2,335 |
| Total Charger, Appliance, Equipment Expenditures | | $11,035 | | $14,350 | | $15,188 | | $15,707 | | $9,103 |
| Total Expenditures on Rebates/Loans | | $215,905.00 | | $305,850.00 | | $343,760.00 | | $343,504 | | $178,680 |

*HEA costs include HEA kit costs.

**Lessons Learned and Next Steps**

Sustainable Middleborough's work on the Empower Grant continues as planned. The addition of the Weatherization Navigator has increased our capacity to develop new materials, expand our outreach efforts, and strengthen our relationships with community partners. In the past six months, we have continued our regular tabling activities while adding substantial new projects aimed at increasing outreach to landlords and tenants and providing direct assistance through our window inserts initiative.

Overall, we continue to believe that our mix of outreach strategies – tabling, workshops, our fair, policy advocacy, and direct support for renters – will help us reach a variety of populations within the community and build an identity as a trusted, credible resource. We are now regularly recognized by residents who have seen us or spoken to us at multiple events and are, as a result, more interested in engaging in focused conversations.

A continuing challenge facing our weatherization/energy-efficiency efforts this year is the elimination of the federal tax credits for weatherization, heat pumps, and solar installations. Our local utility is continuing to provide rebates for energy improvements, and our data suggests that families are continuing to invest in those improvements. We believe the sharp rise in the cost of home heating oil has also prompted more local residents to consider increasing the insulation in their houses and installing heat pump systems. Approximately 40% of Middleborough single-family homes are heated with oil or propane (compared with a statewide average of 27%). In neighboring Lakeville, which we also serve, 75% of the homes are heated by oil or propane. Clearly there is room to shift residents to new technologies.

**Summary**

In sum, the Empower Grant continues to enable Sustainable Middleborough to carry out an important mission – serving as a critical resource for Middleborough residents. We continue to stand as the only organization of this type serving our community. We are committed to expanding and refining outreach efforts with a particular focus on finding effective ways to support renters and other low-income households in the community while promoting energy-saving efforts among the broader population.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Submitted by:
Kimberly French, President, Sustainable Middleborough
Alan Melchior, Treasurer, Sustainable Middleborough