



SUBJECT: Better Homes Burlington pilot program update
TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.
FROM: Environment and Energy

Report Number: EICS-10-24

Wards Affected: All

Date to Committee: May 13, 2024

Date to Council: May 21, 2024

Recommendation:

Approve an extension of the Better Homes Burlington pilot program to provide a maximum of six zero-interest loans of up to \$10,000 each in 2024, to Burlington residents who meet program eligibility criteria; and

Consider an investment in the amount of \$50,000 during the Mayor’s 2025 budget process to make the Better Homes Burlington pilot an ongoing program and increase the number of annual zero-interest loans, with consideration to additional future funding top-ups to grow a revolving fund to support Better Homes Burlington.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
- Providing the best services and experiences

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Better Homes Burlington Energy Retrofit Pilot Program – referred throughout as the “Better Homes Burlington pilot program” – including the results and lessons learned of the pilot program and recommended next steps for continuing the program.

Executive Summary:

Pilot Program Results

Staff launched the Better Homes Burlington concierge service in July 2023, and received applications for the zero-interest loan between September 2023 and February 2024. The concierge service was accessed by 142 Burlington residents who sought guidance on their home energy retrofit project, and the Better Homes Burlington zero-interest loan received 56 applications from residents across all six wards in Burlington. Of these 56 applications, 16 residents received the zero-interest loan. The loan recipients provided very positive reviews of the Better Homes Burlington pilot program, emphasizing the loan's role in their decision to switch to an air-source heat pump. The Better Homes Burlington pilot program participants are expected to reduce their home energy consumption by an average of 40% from switching to an air-source heat pump.

Lessons Learned

1. Increase Application Window

The pilot program received several applications from residents who expressed that while they were very interested in participating, they would not be able to complete the work in the pilot timeframe. To remove this barrier to participation, the application window should be increased from four-and-a-half months as in the pilot program, to a minimum of six months.

2. Maintain Flexibility With Other Incentive Programs

86% of applicants who received the Better Homes Burlington loan also applied to an additional financial incentive program. The Better Homes Burlington pilot program took a flexible approach to coordinating with other incentive programs, which was praised by the participants for its agility, and should be built into a future iteration of the program.

3. Benefits of the Concierge Service

Many residents who accessed the concierge service expressed relief and gratitude to have a representative of the City be able to personally address and respond to their questions. The concierge service removes barriers for residents to implement heat pumps by helping them navigate the complex home energy retrofit environment.

4. Support for Heat Pumps is Still Needed

Although knowledge about heat pumps is growing, staff still see the need to continue working with external organizations to raise awareness of the benefits of heat pumps and the different types of technologies that are available.

Next Steps

The Better Homes Burlington pilot program has been enthusiastically embraced by residents who are eager to see the program continue beyond the pilot stage.

1. Continue the Concierge Service

The concierge service continues to be accessed by residents seeking assistance navigating the home energy retrofit environment. Continuing this service supports the City's commitments to take action on climate change and to offer excellent customer service to Burlington residents.

2. Extend Heat Pump Loan Program

Using \$200,000 of funding as approved in [EICS-04-23](#), the Better Homes Burlington program could support up to six additional loans in 2024. In addition, an annual funding contribution could be considered through the Mayor's 2025 budget to increase the number of zero-interest loans to provide to Burlington homeowners in future years.

3. Pursue Collaboration with Housing Connections Centre

One of the seven initiatives outlined in the City's HAF Action Plan is to build community and partner capacity by creating a Housing Connections Centre. The Better Homes Burlington program is well positioned to provide a framework for the Housing Connections Centre and provide information to residents on climate resiliency and energy efficiency of accessory residential units.

Financial Matters

An extension of the Better Homes Burlington program coordinator position for an additional year was approved by the city's Strategy and Risk team using funding from the Housing Accelerator Fund.

An option for further consideration is to create a self-sustaining fund for the Better Homes Burlington program. The financial impact would depend on the number of additional annual loans to be issued. For example, 10 loans would require an additional \$100,000, 15 loans would require an additional \$250,000, and 20 loans would require an additional \$400,000. Additional investment in the fund could be spread over subsequent budgets (ie. \$50,000/year). Proposed supplementary funding to the Better Homes Burlington program could be considered through the Mayor's budget process.

Background and Discussion:

On June 1, 2023, Council received report [EICS-04-23](#), Better Homes Burlington Pilot Program. Committee approved the following motions:

Approve the establishment of the Better Homes Burlington Energy Retrofit Pilot Program to provide a maximum of twenty loans to Burlington homeowners who meet program eligibility criteria to support the implementation of air source heat pumps.

Approve By-law No. 40-2023, being the Better Homes Burlington Energy Retrofit By-law, substantially in the form attached as Appendix A to report EICS-04-23, in the form satisfactory to the Executive Director of Legal Services and Corporation Council, or designate.

Authorize and direct the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services, or designate, to execute necessary agreement with each homeowner participating in the Better Homes Burlington Energy Retrofit Program, and any extension thereto, with content satisfactory to the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, or designate, and form satisfactory to the Executive Director of Legal Services and Corporation Council or designate.

That the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services monitor and access the results of the Better Homes Burlington pilot program and report back to council in one year with recommended next steps.

Staff launched the Better Homes Burlington concierge service in July 2023, and received applications for the zero-interest loan between September 2023 and February 2024. The Better Homes Burlington pilot program supported residential decarbonization by:

- Providing a concierge service for homeowners with guidance on options to complete a home energy efficiency retrofit;
- Offering loans to homeowners to accelerate the adoption of air source heat pumps;
- Engaging and educating homeowners and contractors to promote/deliver home energy efficiency retrofits; and,
- Developing and publishing the [Burlington.ca/BetterHomes](https://www.burlington.ca/BetterHomes) website to provide information on home energy retrofits and incentive programs, including the City's zero-interest loan.

On March 19, 2023, Council received report [EICS-03-24](#), Better Homes Burlington Pilot Program Special Charge. Committee approved the following motion:

Approve By-Law No. 21-2024, being a By-law to Authorize the Imposition of a Special Charge under the Better Homes Burlington Program, substantially in the form attached as Appendix A to report EICS-03-24, in the form satisfactory of the Executive Director of Legal Services and Corporation Council, or designate;

The Better Homes Burlington pilot program was officially concluded with the approval of by-law 21-2024. The following sections of this report provide an overview of the results of the Better Homes Burlington pilot program.

Results - Concierge Service

The concierge service was accessed by 142 Burlington residents who sought guidance on their home energy efficiency retrofit project. 79 (56%) residents utilized the concierge phone line, and 63 (44%) the general information email. Common inquiries included:

- Energy Audits – guidance on the benefits of and how to arrange an EnerGuide Home Evaluation.
- Better Homes Burlington loan – guidance on the eligibility criteria, application process, and program structure to ascertain if the Better Homes Burlington loan fits the retrofit project they are looking to complete.
- Other Financing and Incentive Programs – guidance on the difference, eligibility criteria and application process between the various programs including the [Home Efficiency Rebate Plus \(HER+\) Program](#), and [Canada Greener Homes Loan](#).
- Air Source Heat Pumps – guidance on the various makes, models and sizes of heat pump, and how to find and retain contractor services.

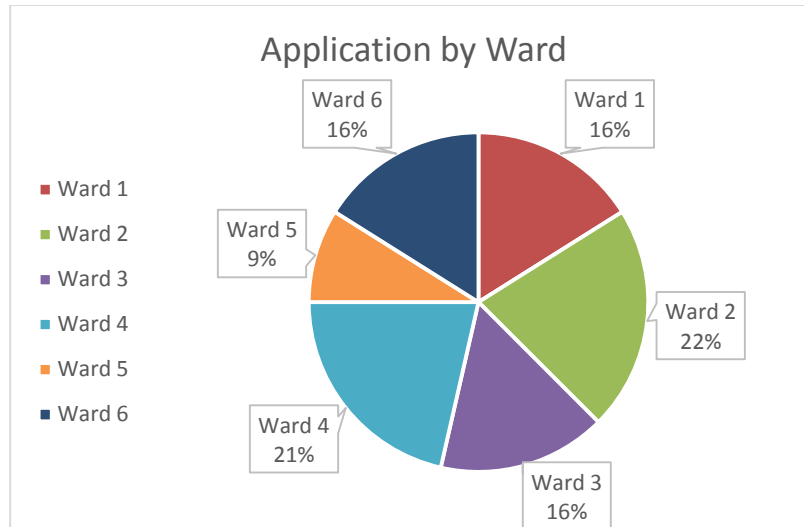
Additional inquiries included:

- Other Home Energy Efficiency Retrofits – including insulation, weather proofing, and upgrading space and water heating equipment.
- Building Permits – guidance on which renovations and retrofits require building permits.
- Additional Residential Units (ARU) and Accessory Building – guidance on application process for ARUs and how to make the new unit energy efficient.

Results - Zero-Interest Loan

The Better Homes Burlington zero-interest loan received 56 applications from residents across Burlington.

- 82% of applications were for detached homes, 7% for semi-detached, and 11% for townhomes;
- 92% of applications were for homes currently heated by natural gas, 4% for oil, and 4% for electricity;
- 22% of applications were for homes in Ward 2, 21% for Ward 4, 16% for Ward 1, 16% for Ward 3, 16% for Ward 6, and 9% for Ward 5.



Of these 56 applications, 19 residents submitted the Funding Request Form. The most reported reasons why a resident did not proceed with the Funding Request Form included:

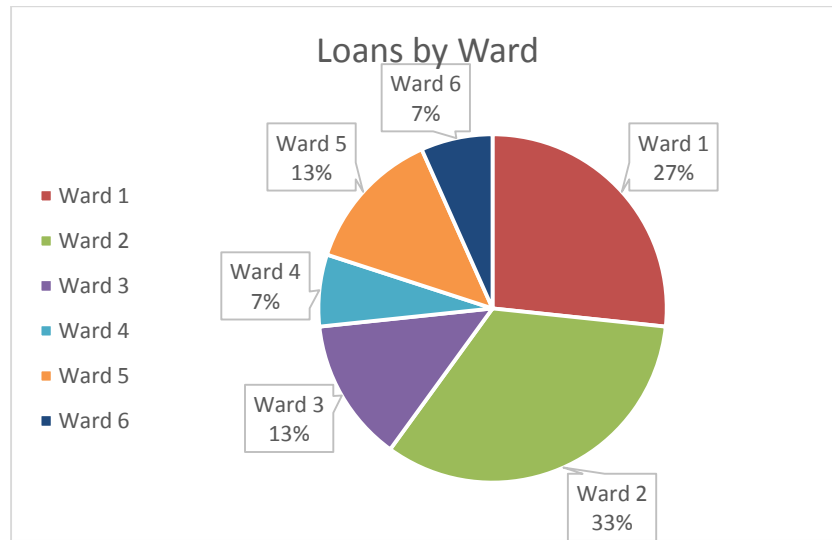
- Unable to complete the work within the constrained timeline of the pilot (4.5 months)
- Program ineligibility:
 - Applicant did not meet the financial requirements of the program.
 - Applicant was looking to complete a retrofit outside of the scope of this program.
 - Applicant had already installed an air-source heat pump and was looking for assistance carrying the payment.

Wherever possible, applicants who did not meet the requirements for the Better Homes Burlington loan were provided with information about alternative incentive programs.

Out of the 19 applicants who returned their Funding Request Forms, 16 received the zero-interest loan. Two of the prospective applicants withdrew voluntarily, and one was deemed ineligible and declined.

Of the 16 applicants who received the loan:

- 14 applications were for detached homes, and two were for semi-detached homes. None of the loans went toward townhomes.
- 15 applications were for homes currently heated by natural gas, and one was for a home heated by oil. Electrically heated homes were ineligible for the program.
- Six applications were for homes in Ward 2, four for Ward 1, two for Ward 3, two for Ward 5, one for Ward 4 and one for Ward 6.
- 13 received loans for the maximum amount of \$10,000, three received loans for less than \$10,000.



The loan recipients provided very positive reviews of the Better Homes Burlington Pilot Program, emphasizing the loan’s role in their decision to switch to an air-source heat pump.

- “Having bought a house in a volatile housing market and after seeing the mortgage payments go up, Better Homes Burlington Program made all the difference in our switch to an air source heat pump. Without the aid this program offers we would not have taken the decision of getting the heat pump.” – Pilot Program Participant
- “We have been talking about doing this for years, but it was learning about the program with the city that pushed us to take action.” – Pilot Program Participant

The Better Homes Burlington pilot program participants are expected to reduce their home energy consumption by an average of 52GJ/year from switching to an air-source heat pump. This represents a 40% reduction in energy consumption from the participants average pre-retrofit consumption of 130GJ/year.

Lessons Learned

This is a summary of lessons that should be considered in a future rendition of the Better Homes Burlington Program.

1. Increase Application Window

Applications for the Better Homes Burlington loan opened in mid-September 2023 and remained open until the end of January 2024. The application window closed at the end of January to ensure applicants had enough time to install the heat pump before the beginning of March, to have the loan amount added to the tax roll and approved as a Local Improvement Charge in April.

The pilot program received several applications from residents who expressed that while they were very interested in participating, they would not be able to complete the work in the pilot timeframe. Completing an energy audit and receiving and comparing quotes from contractors, in addition to the administrative processing timelines for the loan, can make it challenging to complete the process quickly. It took the pilot program participants an average of 81 days between first contacting the program coordinator to inquire about the loan and getting their heat pumps installed, and an average of 33 days to receive the funding disbursement after the heat pump was installed. In total, it took the pilot participants an average of four months to complete the program. Many of the pilot participants had performed their home energy audit prior to applying for the zero-interest loan, which would have shortened their project timeframes.

For residents who learned about the program toward the end of 2023, the time constraint was a significant barrier to participation.

To remove this barrier to participation, the application window should be increased from four-and-a-half months as in the pilot program, to a minimum of six months. Should an extension of the Better Homes Burlington zero-interest loan be approved, staff have the processes and infrastructure in place to begin accepting applications in the beginning of Q3 2024.

2. Maintain Flexibility With Other Incentive Programs

86% of applicants who received the Better Homes Burlington loan also applied to an additional financial incentive program – 60% applied to the HER+ Program, 13% applied to the Canada Greener Homes Loan, and 13% applied to both.

The Better Homes Burlington program took a flexible approach to coordinating with other financial incentive programs. The Better Homes Burlington program did not require participants to have completed the post-energy audit or received confirmation from other financial incentive programs in order to release funding. The HER+ and Canada Greener Homes programs have significantly longer application processing and funding disbursement timelines than the Better Homes Burlington program. The Better Homes Burlington pilot program was praised by the participants for its agility, and this should be built into a future iteration of the program.

- “The Better Homes Burlington Program is easy to apply to, processing times are quicker than the other programs and accessing the funds is much faster.” – Pilot Program Participant
- “Burlington definitely exceeded my experience with Canada Greener Homes! Navigating a new approach to heating with a very knowledgeable contact and someone who you knew "had your back" was a pleasure.” – Pilot Program Participant

3. Benefits of the Concierge Service

As staff expected, the value of the Better Homes Burlington Program extended beyond the zero-interest loan for air source heat pumps. In addition to assisting the loan participants, the concierge service was accessed by 142 Burlington residents who sought guidance on their home energy efficiency retrofit project. Many residents who accessed the concierge service expressed relief and gratitude to have a representative of the City be able to personally address and respond to their questions. The concierge service removes barriers for residents to implement heat pumps by helping them navigate the complex home energy retrofit environment. As the home energy retrofit environment continues to change, and incentive programs are paused or modified, maintaining the concierge service is important to continue the momentum of the heat pump installations and provide support to Burlington residents.

- “The response was immediate any time we had questions. Our expectations were absolutely exceeded as far as working with the city on this program.” – Pilot Program Participant
- “I always have lots of questions and I appreciate someone who takes the time to deal with all of that. It makes the process easier than it may appear. [The Program Coordinator] was also timely in her response to my email questions or phone calls.” – Pilot Program Participant

4. Support for Heat Pumps is Still Needed

Heat pumps are still in the early state of adoption and have significantly increased in popularity throughout 2023. Over the past year, Burlington residents have seen advertisements for heat pumps at bus stop stations and heard them on their radios for the first time. Google searches for “Heat Pumps” in Ontario were two to three times higher than in the four years preceding. This trend is expected to continue into 2024 and beyond. Although knowledge about heat pumps is growing, staff still see the need to continue working with external organizations to raise awareness of the benefits of heat pumps and the different types of technologies that are available.

- “The program raises the profile of the benefits of heat pumps for homeowners as individuals and for the greater good of Burlington.” – Pilot Program Participant

Opportunities to Expand the Mandate of Better Homes Burlington

On January 16, 2024, the Government of Canada and the City of Burlington [announced a \\$21 million agreement](#) to encourage more affordable homes in Burlington, through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF). A co-benefit of the funding and the City’s associated objective is to support low carbon and climate resilient communities, as highlighted in the funding application.

One of the seven initiatives outlined in the City's HAF Action Plan is to build community and partner capacity by creating a Housing Connections Centre. The purpose of the Centre is to connect residents with resources such as pre-approved unit designs, and information about the benefits of creating more diverse and sustainable housing.

During the delivery of the Better Homes Burlington pilot, the concierge service was accessed by residents looking for information on accessory residential units, and how they could utilize the Better Homes Burlington loan to make the new unit energy efficient with an air-source heat pump.

In addition, Council approved Climate Resilient Burlington – A Plan for Adapting to Our Warmer, Wetter and Wilder Weather in 2022 ([EICS-12-22](#)). One of the actions in the plan is to develop a Community Climate Resilience Education Program and help residents understand the climate risks, adaptation actions and funding opportunities that are available. Staff see an opportunity for Better Homes Burlington concierge service to promote some of the measures available to residents to help improve the climate resiliency of their homes.

Recommended Next Steps

The Better Homes Burlington pilot program has been enthusiastically embraced by residents who are eager to see the program continue beyond the pilot stage. As noted above, staff have witnessed the positive outcomes of providing the concierge service as well as a zero-interest loan for air source heat pumps.

These are the recommended next steps to continue the Better Homes Burlington program beyond the pilot stage, expand its mandate and continue providing assistance to Burlington homeowners.

1. Continue Concierge Service

The concierge service continues to be accessed by Burlington residents seeking assistance navigating the changing home energy retrofit environment. The concierge service has been socialized with other City departments, including Planning and Building, whose staff know to direct residents interested in home energy retrofits to the concierge service. Continuing this service supports the City's commitments to take action on climate change and to offer excellent customer service to Burlington residents. The Better Homes Burlington Coordinator position was approved for a one-year contract extension by the Strategy and Risk Team allowing for the continuation of the concierge service into 2025.

2. Extend Heat Pump Loan Program

Using the remaining funding as approved in [EICS-04-23](#), the Better Homes Burlington program can support up to six additional loans in 2024. This is based on the remaining funds in the program and, the loan repayments scheduled for 2024.

The program extension would maintain the same eligibility criteria, application process (although with a longer application window), and program structure as outlined in [EICS-04-23](#). The extension would allow for additional residents to participate in the program and continue to build on the momentum achieved during the pilot. Staff propose to reopen the application window in Q3 2024.

In addition, an annual funding contribution could be considered through the Mayor's 2025 budget to increase the number of zero-interest loans to provide to Burlington homeowners. Although the Better Homes Burlington original pilot program funding of \$200,000 can self-sustain six loans of \$10,000 per year in perpetuity, with supplementary funding, the number of annual loans could be increased. Further details are included in the Financial Matters section of this report.

As exemplified throughout this report, there is strong support from residents to see the Better Homes Burlington program continue beyond the pilot stage:

- “We highly endorse the program and really hope the city keeps it going. This was the first very big step in making our home more efficient but not the last and we’d love to see more homes in Burlington switch to greener energy sooner than later.” – Pilot Program Participant
- “Hopefully this can be extended beyond the pilot to help support all Burlington residents” – Pilot Program Participant

3. Pursue Collaboration with the Housing Connections Centre

The Better Homes Burlington program is well positioned to provide a framework for the Housing Connections Centre. The pilot program developed much of the infrastructure needed to successfully roll out the Housing Connections Centre, including a general inquiries email, phone line and webpage that have all been socialized with Burlington residents, and could be supplemented with more information relevant to the goals of the Housing Connections Centre.

The Manager of Environmental Sustainability and Better Homes Burlington Program Coordinator will work with the Manager of Policy and Community and the Government Relations Manager to help develop the framework for the Housing Connections Centre, including the required resources and materials to support an integrated approach with the Better Homes Burlington program.

Strategy/process/risk

Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, recognizing the impacts that a changing climate is having on the community. City Council approved the [Climate Action Plan](#) in 2020 with a goal to be a net carbon community by 2050. The Climate Action Plan identified seven program areas to achieve this goal with a home energy efficiency retrofit program identified as one of the key program areas. This program was also included as an action in the Vision to Focus 2018-2022 workplan.

In September 2020, Council directed staff to develop a pilot program. With funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Community Efficiency Fund, staff worked with the Centre for Climate Change Management at Mohawk College to complete the Recommendations Report for the City of Burlington's Home Retrofit Program, presented in 2022 (Report [EICS-01-22](#)). With funding approved in the 2023 budget, the Better Homes Burlington program was launched in 2023.

A one-year contract extension for the Better Homes Burlington Coordinator position was approved by the City of Burlington Strategy and Risk Team, which will allow for the continued delivery of the concierge service into 2025. However, if approval is not given to utilize remaining funds, including the amount received through loan repayments, the City risks losing important momentum in the implementation of the Climate Action Plan. The Climate Action Plan identifies an ambitious goal of retrofitting 51,993 dwellings and installing 60,826 heat pumps by 2030, as a stepping-stone to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Without the continued funding of the Better Homes Burlington program, the City risks reputational impairment in not meeting its 2050 net zero emissions goal.

There is an additional external risk identified that the federal Canada Greener Homes program will be modified in 2024, which provides incentives for air-source heat pump installations. As of January 19, 2024, Enbridge Gas announced that they are pausing intake of new applications to the [Home Efficiency Rebate Plus \(HER+\) Program](#), which includes the administration of the Canada Greener Homes Grant in Ontario. On February 5, 2024, [Natural Resources Canada announced](#) that the next phase of the Canada Greener Homes Initiative will offer supports that are more accessible to Canadian households with low to median incomes. It is expected that while the Canada Greener Homes Loan will continue to provide interest-free loans to Canadians of all income levels, the Canada Greener Homes Grant will only be available for income-eligible residents. A reduction in available incentives through the current pause and future restructuring of the Canada Greener Homes Grant could negatively impact the rate of future installations in the community.

Fortunately, having completed the pilot program, the City of Burlington is well-positioned to fill this potential gap for residents through extending the Better Homes Burlington program.

Options Considered

In addition to the recommended next steps above, staff will continue to pursue and assess other options to support maintaining the Better Homes Burlington program to support Burlington homeowners.

1. Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund

Staff have started to investigate the possibility of applying to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Green Municipal Fund's [Community Efficiency Financing \(CEF\)](#) Initiative. This program is designed to offer funding to help municipalities create, launch, and expand innovative financing programs for home energy upgrade projects.

Staff have learned that the CEF program has recently surpassed the 50% make of its \$300 million funding mandate and will be more selective when approving funds. Staff are also aware that there are less than three years remaining in this program's mandate.

With increased funding, staff could explore the possibility of adding additional eligible retrofit measures to the Better Homes Burlington program. For example, staff see potential for the Better Homes Burlington program to provide financing in the future to support the installation of solar systems in addition to air source heat pumps. Please refer to report [EICS-02-24](#) for information about existing and proposed solar incentives.

Municipalities are eligible to apply for up to \$10 million through the CEF program to delivery home energy retrofit programs. However, the City would be required to contribute 20% of the funding, some of which can be in-kind contributions.

- “It would be great to see an expansion of the program to include other green energy projects like solar panels. The city of Guelph is currently offering interest free loans to residents for solar and heat pumps.” – Pilot Program Participant
- “I think this program is a step in the right direction to combat climate change. I would like to see it expanded to include other green projects. Having access to interest free loans makes it easier for people to make the changes to reduce our carbon footprints.” – Pilot Program Participant

2. Pursue Municipal Collaboration

Staff continue to discuss potential opportunities to collaborate with our regional partners including our neighbour, the City of Hamilton. The City of Hamilton launched the [Better Homes Hamilton](#) pilot program in December 2024, which has similarities with Better Homes Burlington, and will be reporting to council in 2025.

There are currently no active home energy retrofit programs run by the other municipalities in Halton Region. Halton Hills launched their [Retrofit Halton Hills](#) pilot program in 2022, with assistance from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund. This program is currently on pause due to funding issues. Neither Oakville nor Milton have plans to pursue a home energy retrofit pilot program at this time.

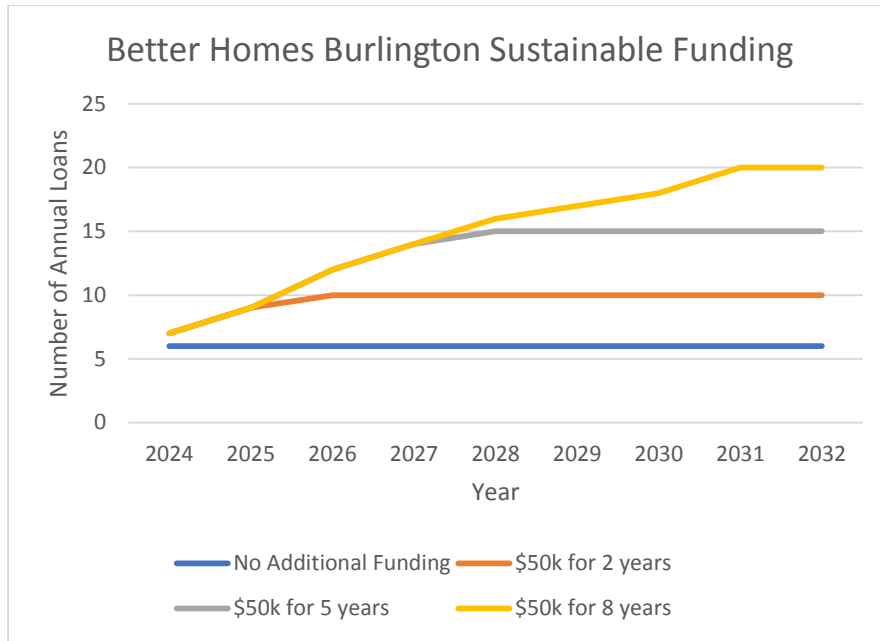
Financial Matters:

The following sections outlines the necessary financial resources required to extend the Better Homes Burlington program for an additional year.

Total Financial Impact

The financial impact of creating a self-sustaining fund for the Better Homes Burlington program depends on the number of additional annual loans that council is interested in providing.

- **\$100,000 top-up (10 loans):** With contributions of \$50,000 in the 2025 and 2026 (two) budget cycles, the Better Homes Burlington program could offer ten zero-interest loans of \$10,000 in perpetuity as of 2026. The program would be limited to seven loans in 2024, increasing to nine loans in 2025, until the fund can support ten loans annually by 2026.
- **\$250,000 top-up (15 loans):** With contributions of \$50,000 in the 2025-2029 (five) budget cycles, the Better Homes Burlington program could offer 15 zero-interest loans of \$10,000 in perpetuity as of 2028. The program would be limited to seven loans in 2024, increasing to nine loans in 2025, 12 loans in 2026, and eventually supporting 15 loans annually by 2028.
- **\$400,000 top-up (20 loans):** With contributions of \$50,000 in the 2025-2032 (eight) budget cycles, the Better Homes Burlington program could offer 20 zero-interest loans of \$10,000 in perpetuity as of 2031. The program would be limited to seven loans in 2024, increasing each year to where the fund can support 20 loans annually by 2031.



Source of Funding

The source of funding for the Better Homes Burlington program coordinator position will be through the Housing Accelerator Funding.

The source of funding for the six zero-interest loans will be from the from the initial \$200,000 in approved funding. Approximately \$40,000 remains in the funding envelope after approving 16 loans in year 1.

The source of proposed additional funding to the Better Homes Burlington program would be approved through the annual budget process.

If the direction to create sustainable funding for the Better Homes Burlington program is approved, the Manager of Environmental Sustainability and Better Homes Burlington Program Coordinator will work with Finance Staff to create a revolving fund account to support the loans program.

Other Resource Impacts

Other resources required will be identified as staff work to collaborate on the integration of Better Homes Burlington with the Housing Connections Centre (i.e., additional staff, guides for homeowners, and marketing and outreach materials).

Legal staff contributed approximately 30 hours to the Better Homes Burlington pilot program through planning meetings, research, and preparing the program by-laws and Property Owner Agreement.

Finance staff contributed approximately 20 hours to the Better Homes Burlington pilot program through planning meetings, reviewing applications for eligibility criteria and adding the local improvements to the tax system. The tax office will contribute additional

staff time over the next five years for program maintenance including future payments and clearance requests.

As procedures and template materials required for the Better Homes Burlington program have been developed in the pilot, legal staff's involvement in the proposed program extension would amount to approximately 10 minutes per participant, and finance staff's involvement would amount to approximately 15 minutes per participant.

Climate Implications:

The purpose of the Better Homes Burlington program is to support the adoption of air source heat pumps in the residential sector to transition away from the burning of fossil fuels to generate heat (thermal) energy, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The use of natural gas in Burlington represents just under half of all GHG emissions across the community (for all sectors – residential, industrial, commercial and institutional). The program is one of seven program areas identified in the Climate Action Plan to help the community reach net carbon neutrality by 2050.

Engagement Matters:

Ongoing updates of the implementation of the Better Homes Burlington program were provided to the Climate Action Stakeholder Team, as well as shared with our other external networks (i.e., Bay Area Climate Change Council, and the Halton Municipal Climate Team).

A marketing campaign to promote the program was created with support from Communications, Creative and Digital Services, and Community Engagement Staff. The [Better Homes Burlington website](#) was developed to support the program with information on home energy retrofits, available incentive programs and the Better Homes Burlington loan, which received over 5,000 views by 3,500 users. Staff promoted the Better Homes Burlington program and website through Get Involved Burlington, Take Action Burlington blog, the City's social media accounts, radio and arena board ads.

In addition to receiving and responding to inquires through the concierge service, staff went out into the community to speak with 300+ residents about opportunities for home energy retrofits. Staff attended community events including Ward meetings, Food for Feedback, external events hosted by community partners, and hosted a series of information sessions for the public to learn more about heat pumps and retrofits.

Staff circulated a survey to the 16 participants who received the zero-interest loan. 15 of the 16 participants responded to the survey:

- 10 of the 16 applicants who received the Better Homes Burlington loan learned about the pilot program from the City of Burlington Website, 4 from social media, 1 from a neighbor/friend/family, and 1 from a community event.
- Concern for the environment, wanting to improve home comfort, and the Better Homes Burlington interest-free loans were the three most common responses to what prompted participants decision to switch to an air source heat pump.
- Participants reported that their new heat pumps have exceeded (53%) or met (47%) their expectations with respect to comfort.
- Participants reported that they were definitely (80%) or somewhat (20%) easily able to find a heat pump contractor, and that the installation process was smooth.
- Participants reported that they were very satisfied (80%) or satisfied (20%) with the amount of time that passed between submitting their application to receiving the funding distribution.
- 100% of participants reported that they were very satisfied with the support they received from the Program Coordinator of the Better Homes Burlington program.
- Participants reported that they are very likely (93%) or likely (7%) to recommend a future iteration of the Better Homes Burlington program to a friend, family member or neighbour.

Conclusion:

The Better Homes Burlington pilot program was a great success and generated public support from residents who are eager to see the program continue to aid Burlington homeowners to improve energy efficiency and reduce their carbon footprint. The Better Homes Burlington program merits continued funding, as it is strongly aligned with the City of Burlington's Climate Action Plan, From Vision to Focus 2022-2026, Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan, and demonstrates the City of Burlington's leadership on climate action.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren McAusland

Better Homes Burlington Coordinator

905-335-7600 x. 7974

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.