

Investigation of Energy Rebates for Improvements to Be Installed During the HIP
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Part of the Pilot Program work the Buildings Committee performed was to search for grants and other forms of funding that could lower the cost to GHI members for the needed improvements. One program that was identified and sounded promising, EmPower Maryland, is funded by Maryland Energy Administration but delivered by specially approved contractors; individual homeowners can obtain an inexpensive energy audit that qualifies the home for 50% discount on the cost of contractor-installed energy saving improvements, up to total savings of \$2,000.

During 2015, GHI's staff and representatives of the Board of Directors and Buildings Committee held several meetings with an approved contractor, GreeNewit (www.greenewit.com), to explore whether GHI members could benefit by obtaining rebates to lower the costs for installing energy efficient improvements such as attic insulation, wall insulation, and crawlspace insulation during the Homes Improvement Program. We learned that, while it is possible for coop members to qualify under the EmPower Maryland guidelines, there are a number of aspects of the program for which our homes are not a very good fit.

GreeNewit proposed to conduct pre- and post-improvement home energy audits, at a cost of \$300 per housing unit, to install needed energy efficiency improvements using its own group of subcontractors, and to submit rebate applications on GHI's behalf for those improvements. Some requirements of the grant program are that improvements must be done in a specific order, starting with the attic and working down, that insulation levels must be brought up to published standards (e.g., R-49 for attics), and that energy reductions must satisfy a minimum savings-to-investment ratio. Since our H.I.P. program specifies that adding attic insulation is at the member's option, and since we need to maintain storage space in our attics, it became apparent that whether GHI units could meet these requirements is questionable; and we wouldn't know whether a given home would qualify for a rebate until after the work was done and the home retested.

The GHI Board decided to do a test, and requested GreeNewit to conduct pre-improvement audits at a brick, a block and a frame unit, and to provide reports with cost estimates for energy efficiency improvements and rebates that could possibly be obtained. After reviewing these reports, staff determined that, based on Pilot Program actual costs, other contractors that GHI hires would be able to install the energy improvements at costs that are significantly lower than GreeNewit's contractors. It is noted that these other contractors are not eligible to participate in the EmPower Maryland program. More importantly, GreeNewit representatives were unable to 'guarantee' or state with confidence that the improvements would yield a savings-to-investment ratio that would qualify a given home for the program rebate, leaving GHI in the possibly difficult position of having paid too high a price for the work.

Hence, GHI has concluded that it is not beneficial for our cooperative to enter into a partnership with GreeNewit to install energy improvements that may not satisfy EmPower Maryland's stipulated savings-to-investment ratio.

However, individual members who wish to install H.I.P. optional attic and wall insulation, are free to contact GreeNewit directly if they wish to investigate the feasibility of obtaining energy rebates for their units through that company.

There is a separate rebate available for mini-split heat pump systems; this is available to GHI members, and will be discussed in a subsequent report.