Home Energy Retrofit Program

Program Design Study

Prepared for:

Town of Aurora

February 2026

dunsky Energy + Climate

Submitted to:

Town of Aurora

Natalie Kehle
Program Manager, Energy and Environment

Dunsky Project Number: 24145

Prepared by:

Dunsky Energy + Climate Advisors
50 Ste-Catherine St. West, suite 420
Montreal, QC, H2X 3V4

www.dunsky.com | info@dunsky.com
+ 1 514 504 9030

This project was carried out with assistance from the Green Municipal Fund, a Fund financed by the Government of Canada and administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Notwithstanding this support, the views expressed are the personal views of the authors, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Government of Canada accept no responsibility for them.

About Dunsky

Dunsky supports leading governments, utilities, corporations and others across North America in their efforts to accelerate **the clean energy transition**, effectively and responsibly.

With deep expertise across the Buildings, Mobility, Industry and Energy sectors, we support our clients in two ways: through rigorous **Analysis** (of technical, economic and market opportunities) and by designing or assessing **Strategies** (plans, programs and policies) to achieve success.

Dunsky is proudly Canadian, with offices and staff in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa and Halifax. Visit dunsky.com for more information.

Executive Summary

In 2019, the Town of Aurora declared a climate emergency and committed to reducing community greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 80% by 2050. With low-rise homes accounting for 37% of community emissions, residential energy retrofits are essential to meeting these goals. However, the current pace of home retrofits—less than 1% per year—falls far short of the estimated 4% annual rate required to remain on track. This Program Design Study presents a comprehensive, phased approach for a home energy retrofit program that supports all residents while providing enhanced assistance to low-income homeowners.

Building on the feasibility study, the study concludes that a program focused on market transformation and supporting low-income residents is the most realistic and impactful solution for Aurora. Given limited Town capacity and the closure of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities grant program for municipalities, a local financing program was deemed not feasible at this time. Instead, the proposed program is designed with low-cost, scalable actions that raise awareness, strengthen the retrofit ecosystem, and reduce barriers for homeowners—especially those with low incomes. The proposed program is designed to dovetail and stack on top of existing programs to fill remaining market gaps.

Short Term Program Offering to Support all Aurora Residents

In the short term, the program involves education and outreach to help all Aurora residents to benefit from the York Region Greener Homes Program, which offers energy retrofit coaching, home energy ratings, and customized retrofit roadmaps. Over time, these activities will build market literacy, improve retrofit quality, and enable deeper retrofits aligned with future energy and building code evolution.

Medium Term Offering to Support Low-Income Town of Aurora Homeowners

In the medium term, the program can offer an Aurora Retrofit Grant Program, which would dedicate annual funding to help income-qualified homeowners install cold climate heat pumps—the most impactful technology for reducing emissions and improving comfort during both extreme heat and cold. By offering these supports to participants of the Ontario Independent Electricity System Operator's (IESO) Energy Affordability Program or Enbridge's Home Winterproofing Program, the Town will ensure that funding flows to qualified homeowners without requiring them to disclose sensitive financial information, while also ensuring that homes receiving heat pumps have already undergone basic home energy upgrades from existing programs.

Longer Term Program Components Leverage Regional Collaborations for Impact

The longer-term elements of the program are more complex to deliver and will require partnerships to be established, funds to be allocated, and further specifics to be developed before they can be implemented. The activities include a regional incentive and/or financing program and building emissions performance standards. Some of these activities may be adjusted depending on the announcements of the federal and provincial governments and utilities.

Program Delivery Model

The program is designed for staged implementation, enabling the Town to scale activities as funding, staffing, and partnerships evolve. Early program elements can be implemented using existing staff capacity. Medium term components can be implemented by the Town with identified resources, while longer term components will require regional collaboration and new resources.

Conclusion

This Program Design Study provides the Town with an actionable, cost-effective roadmap to work with partners to increase awareness of home retrofit opportunities, reduce emissions, and improve community resilience. By combining broad resident supports with targeted programming for low-income homeowners, Aurora can reduce energy poverty, enhance comfort and safety, build market capacity, and position itself for potential future program expansion.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Glossary of acronyms and terms 5

1. Introduction 7

1.1. Aurora's climate change targets 7

1.2. Purpose of this study 7

1.3. Overview of Aurora residential buildings 8

1.4. Energy poverty in Aurora 8

1.5. Feasibility study overview 9

Loan program 9

Market support elements 10

Changes since the feasibility study 11

1.6. Program Design Study approach 12

2 Program Offering to Participants 14

2.1 Short term program components 14

2.2 Medium term program component 16

2.3 Long term program components 16

3 Program Manual 18

3.1 Participant eligibility 18

3.2 Short term program components 18

Outreach and education 18

Energy retrofit coaching 20

Performance monitoring 21

Advocacy and collaboration 21

3.3 Medium term program components 24

Aurora Retrofit Grant Program 24

3.4 Longer term program components 24

Regional incentive program 25

Financing program 25

Building Emissions Performance Standard 25

Implementation timeline 26

4 Program Budget 28
4.1 Estimated delivery costs 28
4.2 Other funding sources for the Town 28
Appendix A: Current Provincial and Federal Funding Programs related to Home Energy Retrofits 1

Table of Figures

Figure 1-1 Town objectives from a home energy retrofit program 7
Figure 1-2 Town of Aurora properties by type of residential dwellings 8
Figure 1-3 Energy sources used in low-rise Aurora homes 8
Figure 1-5 Characteristics of Aurora households in energy poverty 9
Figure 1-4 Aurora households experiencing energy poverty 9
Figure 1-6 Market support elements identified as important in Aurora's Feasibility Study 11
Figure 2-1 Rationale for chronology of program elements 14
Figure 2-2 Program components to be delivered by Aurora in the short term 15
Figure 2-3 Short term advocacy actions to be delivered via collaboration with regional partners 15
Figure 2-4 Medium term action to support the emissions reduction targets 16
Figure 2-5 Longer term actions to complement previous efforts and further reduce GHGs from Aurora homes. 16
Figure 3-1 Timeline of program implementation activities of the Town 26

Table of Tables

Table 1-1 Three Program Model Options identified in 2025 Aurora Feasibility Study 10
Table 4-1 Budget for Medium Term Program Components 28
Table 4-2 Alternative Funding Sources 28

Glossary of acronyms and terms

CCAP: Climate Change Adaptation Plan

CEP: Community Energy Plan

FCM: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

GHG: Greenhouse Gas

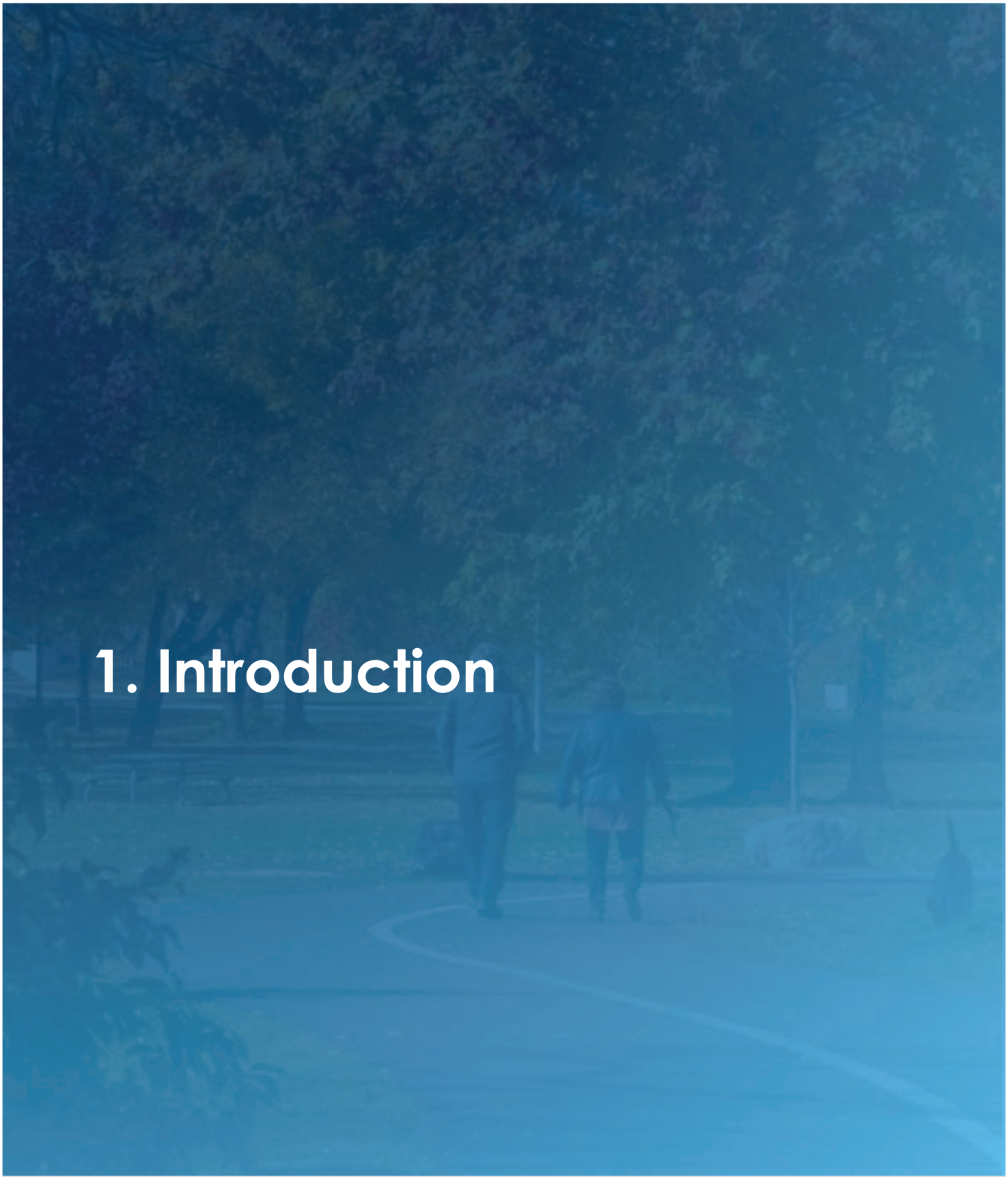
Heat pumps: A type of heating equipment, powered by electricity, that use a compressor to efficiently generate heat or cool, depending on the required conditions of the building. Air source heat pumps exchange thermal energy with the outside air while ground-source heat pumps exchange thermal energy with the sub-surface through a well or buried pipes. They can be installed in a home with or without ductwork.

Home energy retrofits: Improvements to an existing home that improve the energy efficiency or reduce emissions. Measures may include such things as insulation, air sealing, energy efficient heating and cooling equipment, insulating windows and doors, solar panels, home batteries and smart thermostats

HRAI: Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada

IESO: Independent Electric System Operator

LIC: Local Improvement Charge



1. Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1. Aurora's climate change targets

The Town of Aurora's vision, as stated in their Strategic Plan, is to be an innovative and sustainable community where neighbours care and businesses thrive.[1] In service of the sustainability portion of this vision, the Town is committed to taking meaningful action on climate change, aiming to achieve an 80% reduction in community emissions by 2050. The Town has launched numerous policies, strategies, plans and initiatives to achieve this goal. Guiding much of this effort is the Town's Community Energy Plan (CEP),[2] adopted in 2021. The CEP provides strategic direction to move the Town towards a sustainable energy future by improving energy efficiency, reducing energy consumption and energy costs, cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and fostering a culture of conservation.

The residential sector is a key focus for the Town given that housing accounts for 37% of total community emissions.[3] The CEP's primary strategy to address emissions in the existing housing stock is to develop a voluntary program that will encourage and support homeowners with deep energy retrofits such as improving the insulation and air tightness of homes; replacing heating and cooling equipment with efficient and low emissions heat pumps; installing solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicle chargers; or improving the extreme weather preparedness of a home. Note, heat pumps are a type of heating equipment, powered by electricity, that use a compressor to efficiently generate heat or cool, depending on the required conditions of the building. They can be installed in a home with or without ductwork.

The Town recognizes the critical importance of enabling climate adaptation alongside emissions reductions. Extreme climate and weather-related events are becoming more frequent, intense, and long lasting, while slow onset changes like increasing average temperatures and precipitation levels will have long-term impacts on the community. As such, the Town adopted a Climate Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP)[4] in 2022 to help Aurora better prepare for, respond to, and recover from the impacts of climate change, both by reducing climate-related risks and vulnerabilities and by improving the community's overall climate resilience.

1.2. Purpose of this study

To support the implementation of the CEP, the Town has pursued a study of a home energy retrofit program. This study was made up of two phases, a feasibility study followed by a program design.

The Town's objectives from a home energy retrofit program are to both reduce emissions in all Aurora homes and

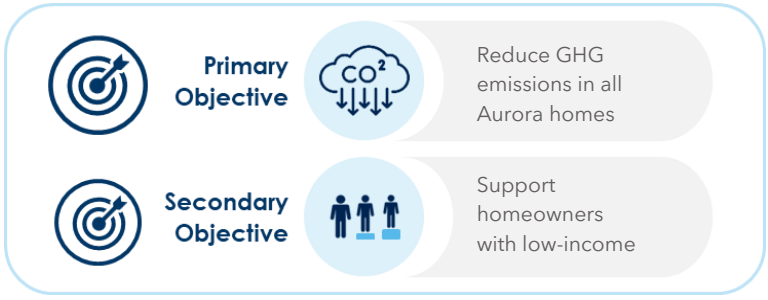


Figure 1-1 Town objectives from a home energy retrofit program

[1] Town of Aurora. (2012). Strategic Plan Aurora 2031: Today, Tomorrow, Our Future Together.
[2] Town of Aurora. (2021). Community Energy Plan
[3] Town of Aurora. (2021). Community Energy Plan
[4] Town of Aurora. (2022). Climate Change Adaptation Plan

protect residents with low income, as shown in Figure 1-1.

The purpose of the feasibility study was to assess the opportunities available to develop a home energy retrofit loan program for the Town of Aurora. Based on the findings of the feasibility study, the Town opted to proceed to continue to develop a more detailed program design.

1.3. Overview of Aurora residential buildings

Low rise residential dwellings (those of 3 stories or less) were found to contribute the most emissions. Eighty-Eight percent of the residential sector is comprised of low rise, detached and semi-detached dwellings, townhouses, and duplexes, as shown in Figure 1-2. To achieve Aurora's GHG targets in the low-rise residential sector by 2050, approximately 800 homes will need retrofitting each year, which is an annual retrofit rate of 4%. The current rate of retrofits is approximately 1% per year (approximately 230 home energy assessments completed in 2024)[5]. Moreover, reaching the targets will require that many of those retrofits focus on the electrification of end-uses, as 67% of homes are using natural gas as their main energy source, as shown in Figure 1-3.

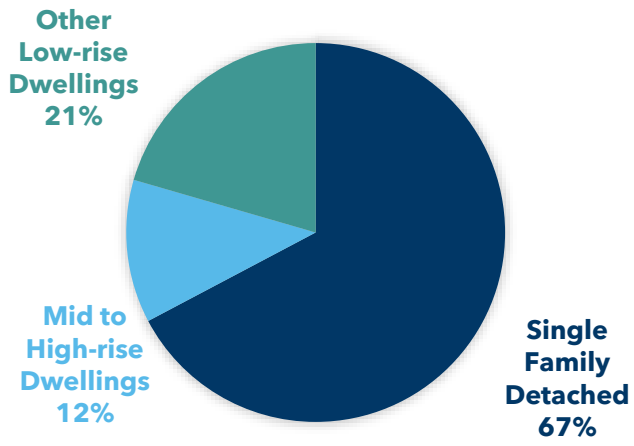


Figure 1-2 Town of Aurora properties by type of residential dwellings

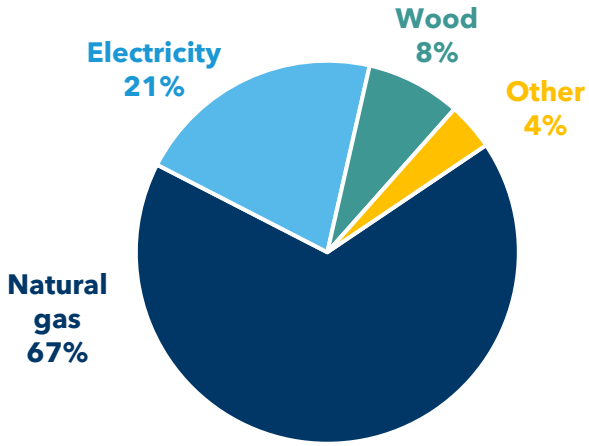


Figure 1-3 Energy sources used in low-rise Aurora homes

1.4. Energy poverty in Aurora

The feasibility study found that 11% of Aurora households are experiencing energy poverty (defined as households who spend more than 6% of their income on energy bills (based on 2021 Census data), see Figure 1-5. In Aurora, one in ten households is affected by this, which may force families to cut spending on necessities like food, clothing, or medication to pay for energy.

[5] Natural Resources Canada. EnerGuide Rating System Open Data. Accessed March 2025.

Based on the 2021 Census data, Aurora residents experiencing energy poverty are the Town's most vulnerable populations and include low-income[6] households, equity-deserving groups[7] seniors, and renters. They face additional barriers to benefiting from home energy upgrades including access to financing or capital and language barriers.

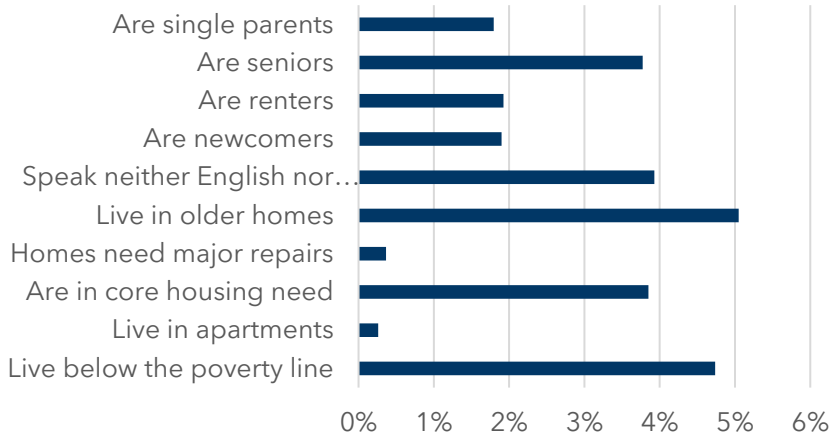


Figure 1-4 Characteristics of Aurora households in energy poverty

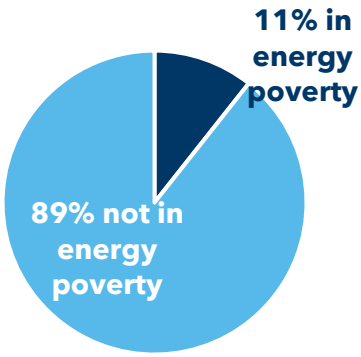


Figure 1-5 Aurora households experiencing energy poverty

1.5. Feasibility study overview

The Town undertook a feasibility study in 2025[8] to assess the needs of Aurora for a home energy retrofit program, specifically the conditions for the development of a financing program to support Aurora residents to retrofit their homes. Two main elements were assessed from the feasibility study, a loan program and other strategies to support home energy retrofits.

Loan program

Home energy retrofit loan programs offered by local municipalities have been found to improve retrofit rates in the community, with high upfront costs being one of the most challenging aspects of a retrofit. For the financing elements of the feasibility study, the three options listed in Table 1-1 were identified as options that should be carried into the next phase of assessment to determine viability. It also found that all these solutions would benefit from a regional approach, due to the increased economies of scale and consistency across the market.

Many municipalities have leveraged their ability to place a priority lien on a property, using a mechanism of a Local Improvement Charge (LIC) applied to one property, to allow homeowners to voluntarily borrow funds from the municipality and repay it on their property tax bill. This allows the

[6] "Income qualified," as noted throughout this report, is intended to reference the definitions established by the IESO's Energy Affordability Program and Enbridge's Home Winterproofing Program (described in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**) and is loosely used interchangeably with the term "low- to moderate-income" (LMI).

[7] Equity-deserving groups defined as individuals and groups that have been and continue to be underserved and underrepresented, including people of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, etc. genders, religions, cultures, sexual orientations and socio-economic status.

[8] Dunsky Energy. (2025). Aurora Home Energy Retrofit Loan Program Feasibility Study.

repayment obligation to rest with the property rather than the individual during the sale of a home, given that the upgrades and energy savings stay with the property. In a turnkey loan program model (as per models A and B below), a private delivery agent administers the loans and involves the municipality in the case of loan default. Municipalities can also lend to individuals not using the LIC mechanism, as per model C below, which is less administratively heavy but lacks some of the rick-mitigation benefits achieved by attaching the loan to the property tax bill.

Table 1-1 Three Program Model Options identified in 2025 Aurora Feasibility Study

PROGRAM MODEL	KEY FEATURES	RISKS
A Turnkey Local Improvement Charge (LIC) Loan Program with FCM funding	• Third-party agent delivers program.	• Depends on receiving funding and grants from FCM's CEF (program currently closed) • A municipal services corporation is costly.
B Turnkey LIC Loan Program without FCM funding	• Third-party agent delivers program. • Loans at higher interest rates & less grant funds for operations.	• Low uptake expected. • A municipal services corporation is costly. • Loan conditions not competitive to market
C Targeted Loan Program with grant funding	• Targeted loans for short term financing, seniors, net zero retrofits. • In-house delivery may be possible.	• Loan terms may not be competitive. • Delivery costs may outweigh benefits. • No existing external grants available currently to support the program costs.

All three loan models, though technically feasible, were found to be cost prohibitive for a municipality the size of Aurora due to economies of scale and being part of a two-tiered government system. The study found that the most feasible option was to access the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Community Energy Financing (CEF) program capital funds to improve the economics of the program and / or collaborate with regional municipal partners on a regional loan program.

Market support elements

The feasibility study also identified that the market support elements shown in Figure are valuable in a home energy retrofit program. Market support elements refer to activities that support uptake of home energy retrofits but do not include loans. Each element is described briefly below and in more detail in Section 2.

- Outreach, education, and training involve educating the public and the workforce about the benefits and concepts of deep energy retrofits.

- Energy retrofit coaches are neutral experts, available to provide advice and support throughout the retrofit journey.
- Home energy ratings are labels given to homes based on their energy efficiency and emissions. They can be visible to just the homeowner or to the public. They are often accompanied with a retrofit roadmap, typically only visible only to the homeowner. That outlines the steps to reduce energy use and emissions from a home.
- Equipment cost reduction includes engaging with industry and supply chains to reduce the costs of impactful but costly equipment such as heat pumps to make them more attractive to more homeowners.
- Incentives and rebates are funds given to homeowners to take desired actions.
- Emissions performance standards are typically implemented as municipal bylaws that set an annual cap on annual emissions from existing buildings based on their archetype and age.

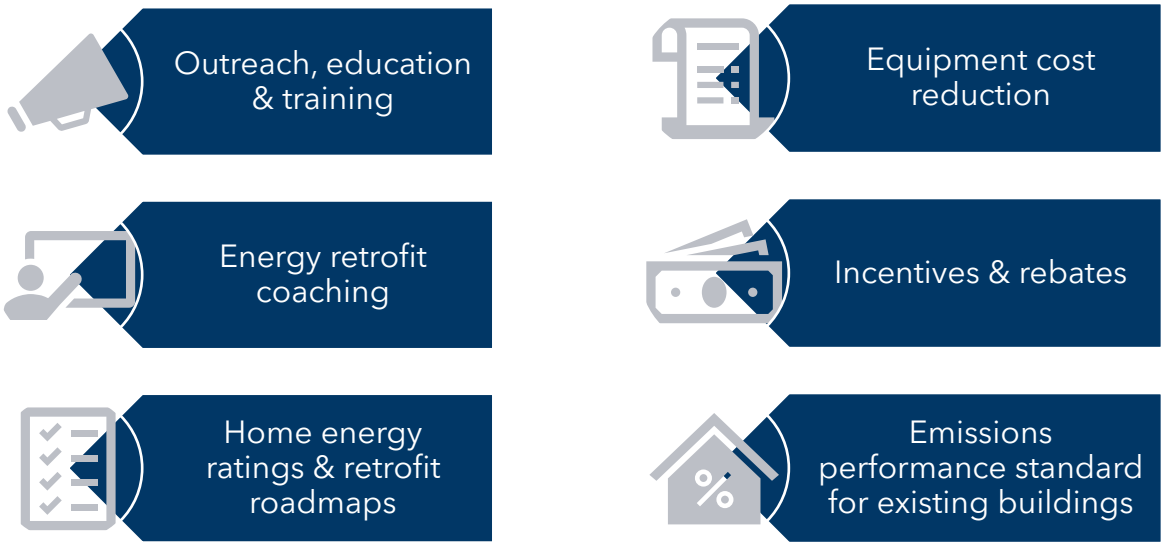


Figure 1-6 Market support elements identified as important in Aurora's Feasibility Study

Efforts of the federal and provincial governments to date have been primarily incentives and rebates. A list of ongoing funding programs related to home retrofits is available in Appendix A.

Changes since the feasibility study

There have been many changes to the landscape since the feasibility study was completed, namely:

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is no longer funding the municipal loan programs through their Community Efficiency Financing initiative, as of the Fall 2025.
- The Canada Greener Homes Loan and Grant program has ended, which offered rebates for specific energy efficient upgrades and 10-year loans up to $40,000 at 0% interest.
- York Region announced the development of their Greener Homes program, which will provide home energy ratings and retrofit roadmaps to all residents, an online one-stop-shop

information platform, and energy retrofit coaching services for all York Region residents. This is estimated to launch in mid-2026.

- Neighbouring municipalities of Markham and Richmond Hill have embarked on feasibility studies like Aurora's.
- Newmarket is re-evaluating a home retrofit program approach

Given all these changes, the Town has determined that none of the three financing program options identified in the feasibility study are possible at this time. The most feasible way forward with a loan program would be a collaborative program approach with regional partners in the long run.

Other trends and interventions are expected to drive demand for home retrofits within the coming years, including:

- Rising energy prices.
- Expected launch of a federal Greener Homes Affordability Program, which may provide loans or grants to low- and moderate-income homeowners for home energy retrofits.
- Building renovation codes, such as Canada's future Alterations to Existing Buildings, which may define the upgrades that must be completed to a building at the time of major renovation; and
- A national Home Energy Rating standard, which will provide a common approach for assigning energy ratings to homes across Canada.

The program outlined in this Program Design Study is intended to dovetail with existing and future market initiatives but not wait for all variables to align before taking action.

1.6. Program Design Study approach

For this Program Design Study, the approach involved data analysis and research, market insights, and consultation with interested parties. Based on the findings of the feasibility study, the program model best suited to meet the program objectives and community needs was identified, taking into consideration opportunities and constraints. From there, key program design elements, future considerations, and implementation steps for the short, medium, and long term were identified.

While there are significant benefits associated with energy efficiency, numerous financial, behavioural and structural barriers remain that slow the adoption of home energy retrofits. These barriers include high upfront costs, access to capital, difficulty managing contractors, and a general lack of awareness and knowledge about energy efficiency and its benefits. In addition, homeowners often face competing priorities, have limited time to make sense of the ever-changing retrofit process to apply for rebates and financing, and are concerned about possible disruptions to their home. There are also other support programs assessed in the feasibility study, and this program is designed to dovetail and stack on top of existing programs to fill remaining gaps.

2. Program Offering

2 Program Offering to Participants

The program has multiple components which are proposed to be rolled out in phases. This allows the Town to manage staff time and budgets, adjust the program around future announcements from senior government and utilities, and accommodate the shifting needs of its residents. To achieve economies of scale and market consistency, many of the components of this program will be done in collaboration with municipal partners.

Given that a loan program not feasible at this time and given that York Region has committed to launch the York region Greener Home Program, this program design focuses on market support elements. It is designed to leverage existing programs in the market and fill gaps that remain. The rationale for the chronology of the phases of the program roll out are outlined in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 Rationale for chronology of program elements

There are many existing and fluctuating programs to support homeowners with energy upgrades or retrofits. The recommended role of the Town is to steer residents toward the York Region program, perform outreach and education to its residents, monitor the program and add additional supports for the homeowners with low-income. This role leverages the Town's close connections with residents and cost-effective communication channels to raise public awareness.

2.1 Short term program components

The main components of the program that are to be delivered by Aurora in the short term are outlined in Figure 2-2 and further detailed in Section 3.2. These elements, including education and outreach, energy retrofit coaching, performance monitoring, and advocacy and collaboration, can be delivered at no to low cost and are designed to leverage the existing programs in the market.

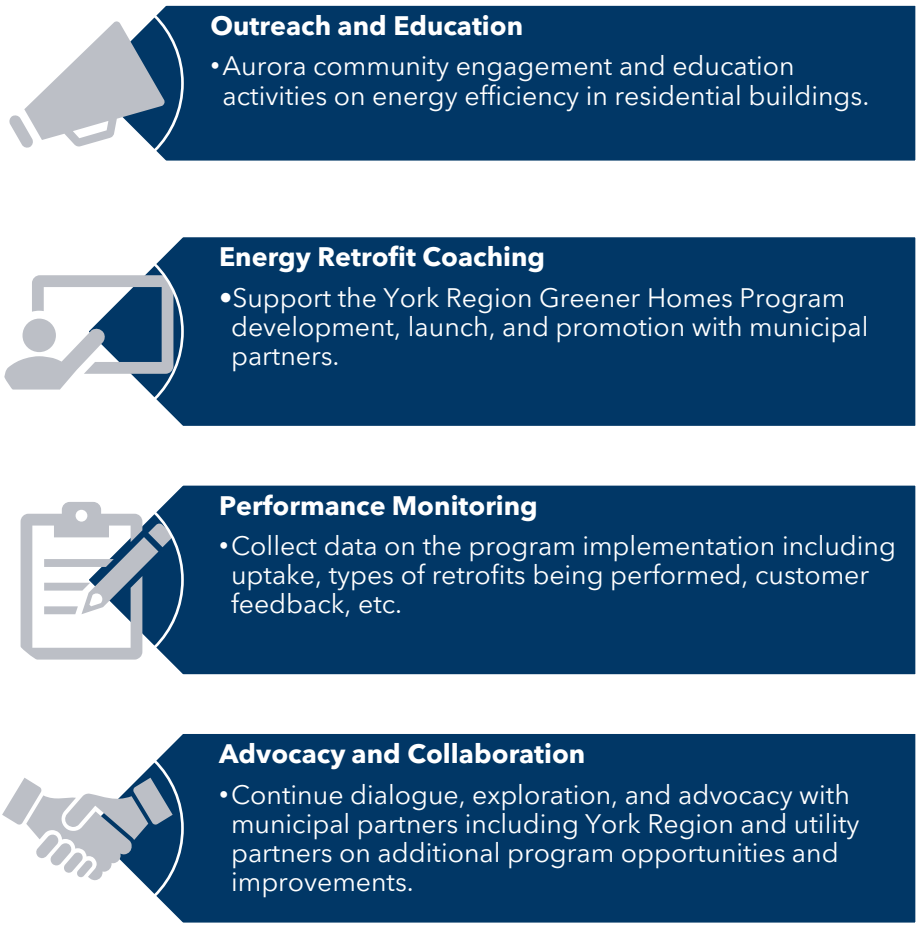


Figure 2-2 Program components to be delivered by Aurora in the short term

Figure 2-3 summarizes the activities under advocacy and collaboration, while Section 3.2 provides further details. These activities benefit from being implemented at scale and are recommended to be delivered through collaboration with York Region and the lower tier municipalities that constitute York Region.

Home Energy Ratings	•Make the ratings public for market alignment. •Consult interested parties prior.
Heat Pump Cost Reduction	•Explore strategies to reduce cost of heat pumps through industry engagement.
Workforce Training	•Explore strategies to support worforce training.

Figure 2-3 Short term advocacy actions to be delivered via collaboration with regional partners

2.2 Medium term program component

The medium term element of the program, an Aurora Retrofit Grant Program, can be delivered by Aurora independently. It is outlined in Figure 2-4 and further detailed in Section 3.3. This activity will require funds to be allocated and further specifics to be developed before it can be implemented.

Aurora Retrofit Grant Program	• For income-qualified homeowners, offer grants towards heat pumps and other retrofit measures.

Figure 2-4 Medium term action to support the emissions reduction targets

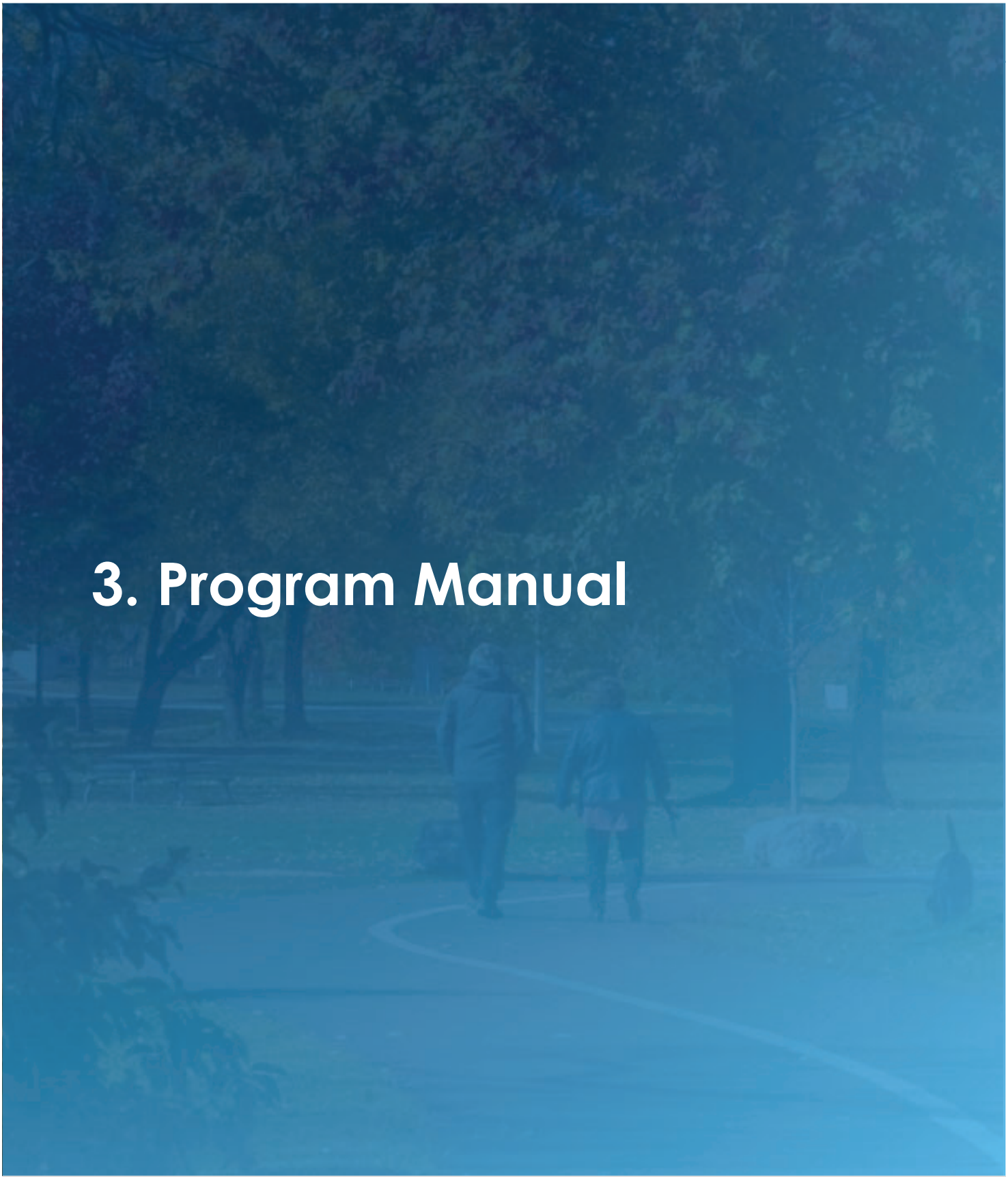
2.3 Long term program components

The longer-term elements of the program to complement the GHG emissions reductions of the Town, to be delivered through collaboration with others, are outlined in Figure 2-5 and further detailed in Section 3.4.

These components can be further explored as programs of this nature continue to evolve and mature. These activities are more complex to deliver and will require partnerships to be established, funds to be allocated, and further specifics to be developed before they can be implemented. Some of these activities may be adjusted depending on the announcements of the federal and provincial governments and utilities.

Retrofit Incentives across York Region	• Collaborate with York Region and other lower tier municipalities to secure funding for an incentive program across York Region for all residents.
Financing Program	• Engage with York Region regarding the feasibility of developing a financing program. • Follow Federal announcements regarding Greener Homes Affordability Program and any other incentive program.
Building Emissions Performance Standards	• Work with York Region and municpal partners on a building performance standard. • Collaborate with other municipalities such as the city of Toronto on best practices.

Figure 2-5 Longer term actions to complement previous efforts and further reduce GHGs from Aurora homes.



3. Program Manual

3 Program Manual

This program manual is designed to outline all the steps for the Town of Aurora to take to implement the program components identified in Section 2.

3.1 Participant eligibility

All Aurora residents are eligible to benefit from the outreach and education activities to be implemented through the short term plan. All Aurora homeowners of permanent low-rise residential properties can access the benefits of the York Region Greener Homes Program, once launched. This includes homeowners being able to access their home's energy ratings (which are visible only to the homeowner under the York program), retrofit roadmaps, one-stop-shop information platform, and energy retrofit coaching services.

3.2 Short term program components

This section includes details on the program components that are of focus for the Town of Aurora and the role of collaborators in those components. They have been selected to complement the planned activities of other parties including York Region, the Province of Ontario and their agencies, utility partners and the federal government, though those activities are not detailed here.

The main program activities are four-fold:

- Outreach and education
- Energy retrofit coaching
- Performance monitoring
- Advocacy and collaboration

Other considerations to explore for the Town of Aurora to develop by itself or in collaboration with other partners is outlined later, in Section 3.3.

Outreach and education

Benefits

This element of the program is designed to promote the existing programs in the market to help residents of Aurora take advantage of them. Existing programs are listed in Appendix A.

Outreach and education activities can be used to promote awareness of the York Region Greener Homes Platform, through which residents will be able to easily navigate to access support services and available funding.

Key Components

Using the Town's communication channels and resources and the communications package to be provided by York Region, develop outreach materials (posters, flyers, social media posts, newsletter blurbs, online advertisements) and schedule activities.

The Town can pursue the following outreach activities through low-cost channels, including:

- Aurora Online, which is echoed through partnering organizations
- Town notice board
- Town e-newsletter
- Pylon signs (digital signs on the street)
- Posters in recreation centres
- Posts on Town social media platforms
- Booth at Aurora Home Show
- Information tables at the library, Seniors Centre, and Town Square
- Information on building permit application webpage

The Town can leverage paid outreach channels to effectively reach more residents, such as:

- Social media advertisements
- Targeted digital advertisements
- Information table at the Metrolinx train station
- Purchase home energy testing kits (thermal camera, plug-in meters, water tap measuring device) to educate homeowners on their home energy performance. These kits can be left at the Aurora Library to be borrowed under the Library of Things Program and the Senior's Centre.

In collaboration with York Region, the Town can use the following regional outreach channels:

- Messaging through utilities
- Doors Open events
- Radio advertisements
- Messaging through industry associations including Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Industry Association (HRAI), and North American Insulation Manufacturers Association (NAIMA).

The Town can develop specific educational tools with expert advice including:

- **Heritage Home Retrofits Information Brochure**: A brochure for owners of heritage homes explaining the ways that heritage homes can be renovated to reduce energy use and emissions while respecting and maintaining their heritage designation.
- **Landlord/Tenant Information Brochure:** A brochure for landlords and tenants explaining the home retrofit process and the respective roles and responsibilities of both parties. The brochure should include the benefits of home energy retrofits for occupants (comfort, reduced energy bills, climate action).
- **Financing Options Cheat Sheet:** A homeowner cheat sheet outlining existing financing options for home retrofits and their respective applications, risks, and benefits.

Role of Town

- Program Lead to work with Town communications staff to implement the communications activities outlined above.
- Program Lead to work with York Region on collaborative activities.
- Program Lead to develop collaborations for outreach with the library, Senior's Centre, etc.

Role of Collaborators

- York Region has committed to providing a communications package and arranging outreach through regional channels and the energy utilities and industry associations.
- Aurora Library and Senior's Centre as locations for information table, workshops, and promote the Home Energy Kits.
- Local contractors to learn about the program via industry associations and promote it through their communications with homeowners.
- Energy retrofit coaches to promote the Aurora program for outreach and education to residents in Aurora.

Energy retrofit coaching

Benefits

A common barrier to home retrofits is the complexity of the technologies and decision making. Another barrier is navigating the changing support programs from utilities and government. Energy retrofit coaches are experts who are available to advise homeowners throughout the decision-making process, ask the right questions of contractors, help them apply for the incentives available, and maintain motivation.

Key Components

- Free, virtual access to home energy experts for neutral advice throughout the retrofit journey.
- Experts provide advice on home energy upgrades, climate risk assessments, considerations for installing EV chargers, etc.

Role of the Town

- Continue supporting the York Region's program development and promote the energy retrofit coaching service to residents once launched, mid 2026.

Role of Collaborators

- York Region to hire and manage the delivery provider.

Performance monitoring

Benefits

Performance monitoring is used to assess the impact of actions to improve effectiveness. It also allows for program efforts to be adjusted to accommodate changes to other program offerings and emerging needs of residents.

Key Components

- Monitor uptake of the York Region Greener Homes program and energy retrofit coaching services.
- Monitor impact of the Town's outreach efforts.
- Monitor developments of Toronto's efforts regarding, home retrofit workforce training, heat pump cost reduction strategies, and home energy and emissions bylaws.
- Monitor the development of federal policies including the Home Energy Rating Standard and Alterations to Existing Buildings.
- Monitor the announcements of new home retrofit programs including the federal Greener Homes Affordability program, The Atmospheric Fund's solar support program, changes to programs from Enbridge and the IESO.

Role of the Town

- Program Lead to collect and analyse data on program impact and follow the advancements of related initiatives and policies.

Role of Collaborators

- York Region to provide data on uptake of the York Region Greener Homes Program and energy retrofit coaching service from Aurora residents.

Advocacy and collaboration

This portion of the program involves Town staff engaging with York Region to add elements to their Greener Homes Program and/ or collaborate with municipal partners that are best delivered at the scale of a Region and would be complementary to their initial program offering. These include making the home energy ratings public regionally as well as partnering with the City of Toronto on their heat pump cost reduction efforts and their workforce training efforts.

Home energy ratings

Benefits

The York Region Greener Homes Program is expected to make virtual home energy ratings available to each homeowner only, but not available to the public. To make the home energy ratings for all homes public in York Region, there is no additional fee expected from the delivery partner of the Greener Homes Program. This change can effectively increase the impact of the program.

By making all home ratings public, not just to each homeowner, public virtual home energy ratings can contribute to market transformation by aligning interested parties toward more efficient homes.

Homeowners can easily understand their opportunities to save energy at home, and buyers and renters can incorporate considerations of energy efficiency when purchasing a home as they also allow for an apples-to-apples comparison.

Key Components

- Virtual home energy ratings are based on the physical attributes of a home (e.g. age, size, and orientation) and standard operating conditions (standard number of people per household, set thermostat temperature, etc.), not the energy usage of occupants.
- Prior to making the virtual home energy ratings public, interested party consultation is recommended. This should include homeowners, tenants, utilities, real estate agents, and mortgage and insurance providers.

Role of the Town

- Engage the Region and lower tier municipalities on a collaborative approach.
- Consult interested parties in Aurora.

Role of Collaborators

- Natural Resources Canada is working on a National Home Rating Standard, which is expected to be released in 2026. The Region's ratings should align with this standard.
- The York Region Greener Homes delivery partner can make the home ratings public on their platform.

Heat pump cost reduction

Benefits

Given that cold-climate air source heat pumps have been identified as the most impactful measure for emissions reductions and resiliency improvements in Aurora's housing stock, lowering their cost through market forces will help expedite their installation without long term dependence on costly incentive programs. As a relatively new technology, the marketing and customer acquisition costs on heat pumps are higher than mature technologies like gas furnaces. Through targeted education campaigns that help customers make purchasing decisions more quickly, and industry training to increase the supply of qualified installers who are skilled at installing heat pumps and the rebate programs available, these costs can be reduced.

Key Components

The Town of Aurora on its own is not large enough to influence the market, but by coordinating across the Greater Toronto Area, municipalities can have collective impact. The City of Toronto is already leading efforts with their Furnace Replacement Program. This program is implemented with the support of Toronto Hydro and works with installers and distributors to increase awareness of heat pumps. If York Region, with another 1.3 million residents, were to mirror their efforts, the influence on market forces would be multiplied.

Role of Town

- Engage the Region and lower tier municipalities on a collaborative approach.

Role of Collaborators

- York Region and their lower tier municipalities work together on a similar program. They could assign a liaison to collaborate with the City of Toronto's Furnace Replacement Program team and replicate their activities across York Region.
- Alectra, the electric utility, may also be a valuable partner to develop and implement the approach across York Region.

Workforce training

Benefits

- Training increases the knowledge base of available contractors, improving the experience of homeowners implementing retrofits.
- Promoting the trainings on offer also engages contractors in the program and encourages them to promote the program to their clients.

Key Components

- The City of Toronto offers net zero courses with the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), heat pump sales courses with HRAI, and building envelope courses with North American Insulation Manufacturers Association (NAIMA). Contractors work across the GTA, so Aurora residents are already benefiting from Toronto's initiative.
- Aurora, in collaboration with municipal partners across York Region, can collaborate with Toronto by promoting their series of training courses for local contractors.
- In addition to promoting these training opportunities, the Town can provide information about the York Region Greener Homes Program to heat pump installers and directly to residents. This will increase contractor trust in the program and encourage them to advise their clients about it.

Role of Town

- Promote the City of Toronto net zero courses to expand their workforce training efforts.
- Promote the courses offered by industry associations (BILD, HRAI, and NAIMA) through colleges and other networks.

Role of Collaborators

- City of Toronto to continue to organize workforce trainings.
- BILD, HRAI, and NAIMA promote their members to take the courses.

3.3 Medium term program components

The following elements are all in service of the Town's goals and can be reviewed and reconsidered once the preparatory consultations, collaborations, and municipal programs and partnerships have been further explored. These medium term program components are ordered starting with the lowest cost and easiest to implement, to the more expensive and complex components.

Aurora Retrofit Grant Program

Preliminary Grant Program Concept

Based on a review of the current incentives available to support retrofits for Aurora's low-income residents, this design report recommends that the Town consider using some available resources to fill gaps to enable more low-income homeowners to benefit from the available Provincial programs.

The program concept description below provides a high-level grant program approach for the Town to consider establishing over the medium term. Should the Town decide to move ahead with this component, it is recommended that the analysis of the Provincial programs be revisited at that time, and the program offer (measures and grant values) be established formally at that time, along with the implementation plan and tools.

This program element targets income qualifying homeowners or tenants who heat with natural gas and have completed either the IESO's Energy Affordability Program[9] or Enbridge's Home Winterproofing Program.[10] Currently these programs are free, direct-install programs that provide insulation and air sealing to income-qualified homes provide building envelope upgrades. However, they do not cover heat pumps for those heating with natural gas. Only homes using electric or oil-based heating systems are eligible. In addition, the Ontario Renovation Savings Program only offers an up to $2,000 rebate for a heat pump, which is not enough to make this measure cost effective for most Aurora homeowners with low-income.

Qualifying residents would be offered rebates for heat pumps, which are the most effective emissions reduction measure which also improve climate resiliency and comfort during increasingly more heat ways by supplying air conditioning.

The Town could consider allocating approximately $50,000 annually for Aurora Retrofit Grant Program, on a first come first serve basis, utilizing the Town's Green Initiatives Reserve Fund. The annual available grant amount would maintain the principle of the Reserve for long term sustainability. This fund is to support the Town's environmental objectives.

3.4 Longer term program components

All the program components described below are best implemented in collaboration with York Region, municipal partners or the Province. As such, to lay the groundwork for these longer-term actions, the Town should continue dialogue with York Region, the local municipalities, and the Province of Ontario.

[9] IESO. Energy Affordability Program. Accessed January 27, 2026, from https://saveonenergy.ca/en/For-Your-Home/Energy-Affordability-Program.

[10] Home Winterproofing Program (HWP) | Ontario | Enbridge Gas

Regional incentive program

Incentives are a popular and straightforward way to promote desired actions. Their limitation is funding and complexity for homeowners and contractors. A Regional incentive program that takes advantage of economies of scale for all nine local municipalities would be of greater benefit and have one voice in roll out.

New incentive programs are expected to be announced from the federal government, The Atmospheric Fund, Enbridge, and Alectra. The Town and Region should monitor the announcements from these entities before determining if a gap remains. Then, the Town should explore securing funding for an incentive program for all residents in the region, focusing on high impact measures to reduce GHGs such as heat pumps (see Section 4.2 for more details).

Financing program

Access to low-cost financing was identified as a barrier to some residents in the feasibility study. FCM loan program funding is no longer available to municipalities interested in developing a local retrofit loan program, making a stand-alone program cost prohibitive. Depending on the details of the expected federal Greener Homes Affordability Program, this barrier may be overcome for low- and moderate-income homeowners, who are the ones typically facing the most barriers to financing.

Following the launch of the federal Greener Homes Affordability Program, the Town should work with the Region and local municipalities to assess the needs of residents regarding financing. If access to financing remains a barrier, the Town should engage with York Region and lower tier municipalities regarding a regional financing program.

Building Emissions Performance Standard

The most common regulatory tool used by municipalities to reduce emissions from existing buildings is a Building Emissions Performance Standard, which sets a cap on annual emissions from buildings based on their archetype and vintage. These annual caps then reduce to the target, such as net zero by 2050.

Such regulations are found to be within the bylaw authorities of both Regional and lower-tier municipalities in Ontario.[11] To successfully implement such a regulation, significant public and industry consultation and education would be necessary. As such, this form of regulation is most often first initiated in large cities and typically has an initial focus on large buildings.

Toronto has been working towards implementing a building emissions performance standard for large, existing buildings, which is the building stock often targeted first under emissions standards and can provide a model for other Ontario municipalities to learn from.

The data gathered from the York Region Greener Homes ratings and platform will help inform a study on the design and implementation of an appropriate building emissions performance standard for homes. The homeowner engagement throughout the earlier phases outlined in this study will also help raise awareness and build rapport amongst residents, facilitating future conversations about a building emissions performance standard.

[11] Canadian Environmental Law Association. October 2023. Report on Mandatory Building Performance Standards.

Implementation timeline

This section outlines the timelines for the various implementation activities. It focuses on preparation and outreach activities of the Town. The Town's activities will be complemented by activities of the Region and other collaborators. Figure 3-1 outlines a potential high-level schedule for roll-out based on the anticipated program schedule. It should be adjusted in response to actual program delivery timelines.

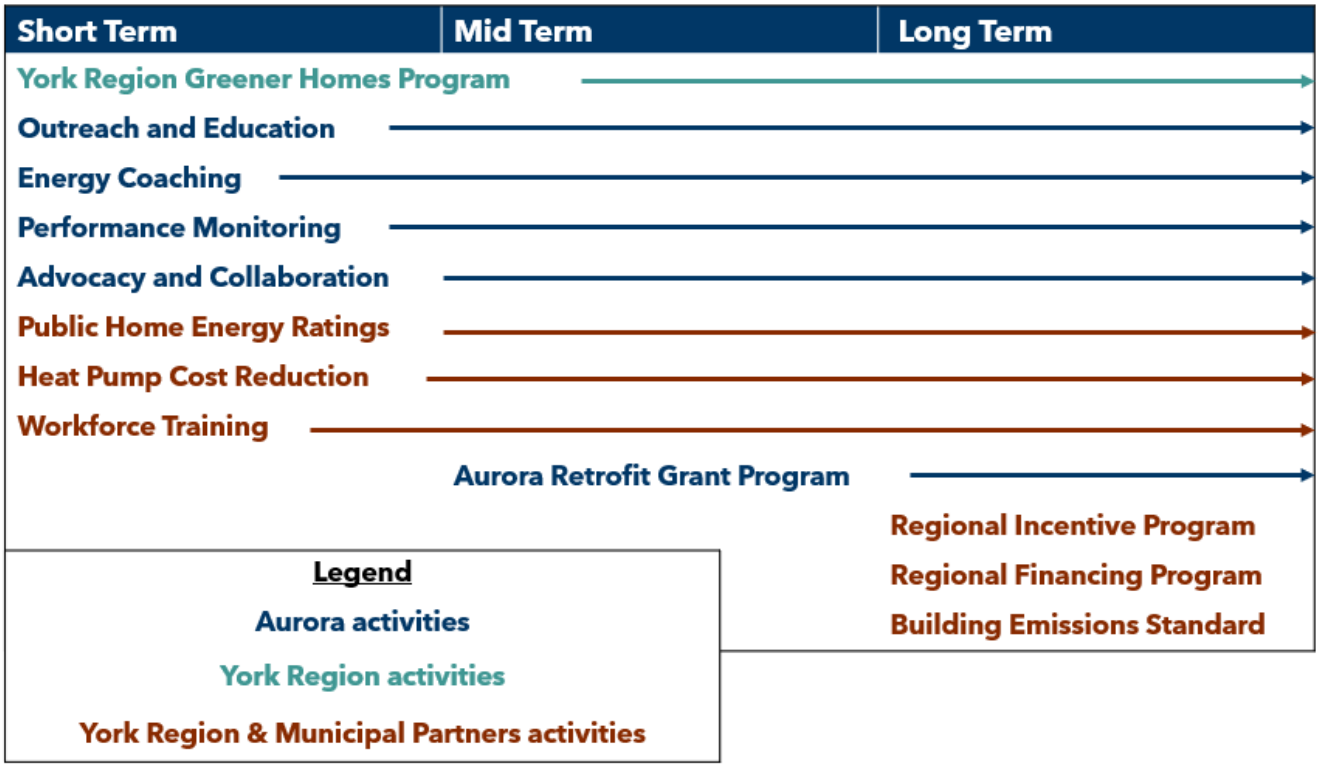


Figure 3-1 Timeline of program implementation activities of the Town

4. Program Budget

4 Program Budget

4.1 Estimated delivery costs

This proposed budget is an estimate of the program's operating and staff needs for a three-year term, aligned with the initial phase of the York Region Greener Homes Program. By pooling resources with other municipalities in York Region and collaborating, costs can be kept low for many of the future program elements.

The short term program elements can be accomplished with existing staff time and budget. Medium term actions, shown in Table 4-1, can utilize the Green Initiatives Reserve Fund as a funding source.

Table 4-1 Budget for Medium Term Program Components

Medium Term Program Components	Estimated Budget ($/yr)
Aurora Retrofit Grant Program	$50,000
TOTAL	$50,000

4.2 Other funding sources for the Town

To support program costs, we identified potential alternative funding sources. Table 4-2 presents each program's funding potential, eligibility criteria and key considerations to meet the requirements. Those avenues for alternative funding would require further analysis and may orient some future program design decisions. They are presented from the highest potential fit to the lowest.

Table 4-2 Alternative Funding Sources

Program	Description	Funding available	Eligibility	Considerations
The Atmospheric Fund	Grants for projects and approaches that can generate large-scale carbon reduction in the GTHA. For design or implementation of climate policy solutions, demonstration of new and scalable approaches to reduce emissions.	Maximum grant not disclosed. Previous grants up to $300k.	Municipalities, non-profits or registered charity are eligible. Project must have the potential to scale across the GTHA.	May require justification about financing programs and services being innovative.

Intact Municipal Resiliency Grants	Initiatives that implement proven adaptation solutions, protecting the community at large or homeowners.	Up to $200k per project.	Municipalities eligible.	Specific adaptation measures at the homeowner level for resilience to floods are funded. The program would need to include home flooding resilience interventions.
Ontario Clean Home Heating Initiative	Residents in some communities received top-up incentives for electric heat pumps.	$8.2M total allocated in 2021 and 2023. Up to $4,500 in incentives per applicant.	Residents are the applicants, but specific municipalities identified by the Government of Ontario.	Could enquire with the government and/or Enbridge (who delivered the incentives) to understand if this program could be expanded/renewed.
Program	**Description**	**Funding available**	**Eligibility**	**Considerations**
Canada Community Building Fund	Permanent source of federal funding for local infrastructure, distributed through the AMO. Includes projects for community energy systems, resilience and capacity-building.	Aurora receives around $2M yearly.	Funds already allocated to municipalities.	Funds are reserved for infrastructure investments. If funds are not all earmarked, it could be explored if there is flexibility to use it for related initiatives that are not strictly municipal infrastructure.
Greener Neighbourhood Pilot Program: Sustainable Buildings Canada	Funds already awarded for Market Transformation Team, for social housing (including part 9 row housing and MURBs).	$602k awarded	N/A	Discussing with Sustainable Buildings Canada could help understand their funded project for part 9 row housing. Some resources might help with program implementation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Current Provincial and Federal Funding Programs related to Home Energy Retrofits

The following Table A-1 summarizes all the related funding programs offered by the federal and provincial governments for home retrofits.

Table A-1 Current Provincial and Federal Funding Programs related to Home Energy Retrofits

	Available programs	Description
1.	**Home Renovation Savings Program** | Save on Energy and Enbridge	• Eligible measures include space and water heat pumps, smart thermostats, solar PV and battery storage, insulation, air sealing, and energy efficient windows and doors • Certain rebates are only offered to projects that include two or more upgrades • Energy Assessments are required for two or more measures
2.	**Enbridge Sustain | Enbridge**	• Offers an energy-as-a-service solution with the turnkey installation, service and maintenance of selected measures • Eligible measures include geothermal, dual fuel systems (air source heat pump and natural gas furnace), solar PV & EV chargers
3.	**Winterproofing Program | Enbridge**	• Offers income eligible homeowners and renters' access to a home energy assessment and the installation of energy efficient measures at no cost • Eligible measures include wall, attic and basement insulation; draft proofing; and smart thermostats • Coordinates with the Energy Affordability Program (below) so selected measures across the two programs can installed at the same time
4.	**Energy Affordability Program** | Save on Energy	• Offers energy-saving products and services at no or low cost, depending on a household's circumstances and income • Eligible costs the program covers may include the replacement of inefficient appliances and the installation of insulation and draft-proofing, smart thermostats, cold climate heat pump and free energy saving kits • EnerGuide Assessments are required
5.	**Oil to Heat Pump Affordability Program** | Natural Resources Canada	• Offers a heat pump incentive of up to $10,000 to low to moderate income (LMI) homeowners with oil as their primary heating fuel • Recent changes have expanded the list of eligible heat pumps and increased income eligibility to account for inflation • Incentive is disbursed prior to installation • Requires proof of purchasing heating oil (500L)
6.	**Canada Greener Homes Affordability Program** | National Resources Canada	• Expected to be announced in 2026 • Will support energy and emissions reductions in low-to-moderate income households

"NO DISCLAIMERS" POLICY

This report was prepared by Dunsky Energy + Climate Advisors, an independent firm focused on the clean energy transition and committed to quality, integrity and unbiased analysis and counsel. Our findings and recommendations are based on the best information available at the time the work was conducted as well as our experts' professional judgment.

Dunsky is proud to stand by our work.