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Municipalities Launch Residential Energy Score Project

ITHACA, NY – Five Tompkins County municipalities are working together to develop a plan for scoring the energy performance of local homes. The goal: to use market forces to improve the energy efficiency of existing housing stock by providing meaningful home performance information to future home buyers.

The Towns of Ithaca, Caroline, Danby and Ulysses, along with the City of Ithaca, are partners in the Residential Energy Score Project. Tompkins County and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County are also providing guidance to the project, which draws inspiration from the growing number of successful energy rating and disclosure programs across the country. Like fuel efficiency “MPG” ratings for cars, the energy efficiency of homes can be measured in a standardized way. The project will study such rating methods and consider how to create value for energy efficiency in the local housing market.

At this stage in the discussion, participants and stakeholders in a Technical Advisory Committee are formulating the details of the program, which is expected to be developed by spring of 2016. The committee includes representatives from realtors, builders, lenders, home performance contractors, low-income housing advocates, and utility companies.

“Home buyers not only ask about taxes, but they want to know about the energy efficiency of the homes they are considering,” said Melissa Miller, 2015 President from the Ithaca Board of Realtors®. “This is why the Ithaca Board of Realtors® developed a Green Features Statement to begin capturing information about the homes listed in its multiple listing service.”

“Simply looking at the monthly utility costs of a home is not reliable,” said Greg Thomas, CEO of Performance Systems Development (PSD), the Ithaca-based energy efficiency consulting firm that is managing the project’s development. “One homeowner may set the thermostat low, while another keeps the windows open. The energy efficiency score will be a standardized rating based on the attributes of the home, not the behavior of the occupants. These ratings create a market value for investments in energy efficiency, allowing homeowners who make efficiency investments to recover some or all of that cost upon the sale of their home.”

The program is supported by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) Cleaner, Greener Communities program. “Governor Cuomo's Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) encourages all manner of clean energy and energy efficiency around the state. Rating the efficiency of a home will help increase the value of these types of investments, while helping home

buyers save energy costs and increase comfort,” said John B. Rhodes, President and CEO, NYSERDA. “This is a great example of how an innovative community program can help promote the value of energy efficiency improvements here and in other regions of the state.”

According to the Department of Energy, space heating and cooling accounts for more than 50 percent of a typical U.S. home’s energy use, making it the largest energy expense for most homes. Home owners can reduce these energy costs with improvements in insulation and air-sealing. There are state incentives as well as financing assistance to help homeowners make these improvements.

“We are excited about this project, which will help homeowners improve the comfort, quality, and value of their homes, while also helping our region reduce its greenhouse gas emissions,” said Herb Engman, Town of Ithaca Supervisor. The Town of Ithaca is the grant administrator for this project.

The Residential Energy Score Project officially kicked off in October 2014; since then, the group has studied existing rating methods and programs and conducted legal research into municipal involvement in such programs. The group expects to begin outreach efforts this summer to get feedback from the public about the idea.

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