

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Affordable, Resilient Net-zero Homes*

- **Year Complete:** 2021
- **Local Government:** City of Evanston, IL
- **Local Foundation:** Chicago Community Trust; Evanston Community Trust

Project Purpose

To identify and ultimately remove barriers to achieving affordable, resilient net-zero homes in Evanston, Illinois.

Key Lessons Learned

Lessons learned about tools and tactics through the project that other sustainability directors could use to advance their work.

Over the second half of 2021, the project managers of this project turned over at both the City and lead partner organization. This underscores the difficulty in public sector innovation when leadership or champions are in flux. To address this, the team moved from barriers-centered approach to a solutions-centered approach.

The project supported an equity-centered design thinking framework that prioritizes the lived experience of residents most in need of this type of program. The result was a suite of program recommendations that respond directly to the needs of the residents intended to derive benefit from the program. The strongest lesson learned during this project was connecting climate challenges and equity. It acts as way to frame environmental issues as a bigger part of the broader climate focus. The team learned that there is a strong perception that climate/environmental work is the primary concern of white-led organizations within the community and does not address the immediate needs or experiences of the community at large.

Lessons for developing a collaborative process between a local government sustainability director and local place-based foundation(s).

The specificity of project work helps focus conversations on tangible challenges and initiatives that each organization is focused on. The City and local foundation have built strong relationships across many different project areas in the past including climate, but earlier relationships were not as focused on project areas that met goals for both organizations. This work has created opportunities to jointly imagine future work to advance addressing climate change and equity through other projects, such as community grants and training.

Additional Information and Resources

Learn more about the Affordable, Resilient Net-zero Homes program [here](#).