

2024 Commercial Roundtable Report: Halifax

On October 18, 2024, ReCover, in partnership with Building To Zero Exchange met with building owners, policy makers, and building/property managers in New Brunswick. As a result of this session, we captured the insights and ideas that emerged from a dynamic discussion among industry leaders, policy experts, and community partners working to accelerate deep retrofits in Atlantic Canada.

Analysis:

The roundtable discussion on Deep Retrofits for commercial buildings in Halifax highlighted several critical challenges, proposed solutions, and outstanding gaps that need to be addressed to facilitate successful retrofitting initiatives.



Roundtable Participants:

- Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional Building Owners
- Facility Managers
- Property Managers
- Energy Managers
- Corporate Sustainability Officers
- Project Managers
- Architects and Engineers
- Community Interest Representatives



Challenges

The challenges identified were multifaceted, encompassing both financial and operational barriers.

The high upfront costs of retrofitting were a recurrent theme, with participants stressing the need for more accessible financing solutions.

Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of demonstrating the long-term value of investments in retrofits, as well as the need for a more streamlined approach to navigating available incentives and rebates.

Workforce capacity emerged as another significant concern. The discussion revealed that there are shortages in skilled labor, particularly regarding specialty knowledge required for retrofitting complex, older, or heritage buildings.

Additionally, the potential disruptions to tenants during retrofitting processes were highlighted, along with the challenges posed by “renovictions” and the need to maintain affordable rents.

Moreover, participants pointed out the inefficiencies in the current ecosystem of contractors and service providers, which complicates the identification of available resources and expertise.

Solutions

In addressing these challenges, the roundtable participants offered several potential solutions:

Cost and Financing Solutions:

- Emphasizing government investments and the need for an alliance among regional funders to enhance financing options.
- Advocating for the creation of a financing matrix that combines various funding sources and provides a clear pathway for obtaining capital.
- Promoting building labeling and case studies that showcase successful retrofit projects to underline financial viability and long-term benefits.

Capacity Building:

- Proposals to enhance workforce capacity included the mapping of existing resources, contractor training initiatives, and the development of micro-credentials in relevant industries.
- Encouraging partnerships between educational institutions and the industry to ensure that new entrants to the workforce are adequately trained in necessary skills, such as heat pump maintenance.

Mitigating Disruption:

- Participants advocated for clear communication strategies to manage tenant expectations and minimize disruptions during retrofitting.
- Establishing affordability criteria in financing and policy was suggested to balance the financial burdens of retrofits while protecting tenants.

Solutions (continued)

Policy and Communication Improvements:

- There was a call for better storytelling and metrics that highlight the successes of retrofitting initiatives to engage a broader audience.
- The need for new policies that reflect the value of deep retrofits was emphasized, including adapting frameworks to recognize embodied carbon in building renovations.

Gaps and Questions:

Despite the proactive solutions discussed, several gaps and questions remained unresolved:

- **Equity Considerations:** How will retrofitting policies ensure equity, particularly for vulnerable groups facing energy poverty?
- **Single-family Homes:** The role of single-family homes within the broader residential portfolio remains unclear, especially in the context of financing and support mechanisms. (GNPP is residential)
- **Project Viability and Expectations:** Participants raised questions about the bankability of retrofitting projects and whether expectations regarding financing and timelines are realistic.
- **Cost of Inaction:** The need to articulate the financial implications of not undertaking retrofits was recognized, but mechanisms for quantifying this effectively were not established.
- **Collaboration:** The necessity for partnerships with existing service providers to leverage their expertise and resources was noted, but further exploration and clarity on how such collaborations can be structured effectively are required.

Conclusion:

The roundtable discussion provided a valuable platform for addressing the intricacies of deep retrofits for commercial buildings. While the identification of challenges and proposed solutions offers a pathway forward, resolving the outstanding gaps and questions is essential for building a robust framework that supports sustainable, equitable, and economically viable retrofitting efforts.

Continued dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders will be crucial to overcoming these barriers and advancing the agenda on deep retrofits.

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