

2024 Commercial Roundtable Report: St. John's, NF

On November 6, 2024, ReCover met with building owners, policy makers, lenders, and building/property managers in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador.

This session surfaced frank insights about the region's unique challenges and opportunities as stakeholders work toward advancing deep retrofits across Atlantic Canada.

These sessions were co-facilitated by Building to Net Zero (BTZx).



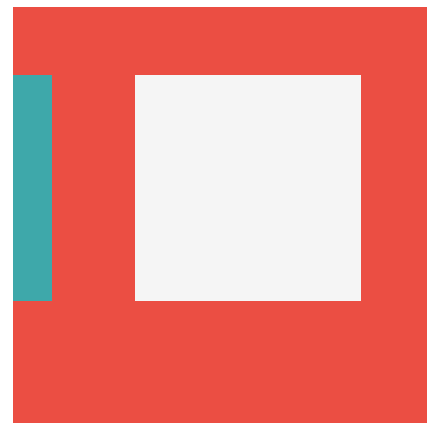
Roundtable Participants:

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



Analysis:

This Roundtable highlighted a set of challenges and opportunities that are distinct within Newfoundland & Labrador, while also echoing patterns seen across Atlantic Canada. Several consistent themes emerged across the discussion: workforce limitations, low awareness of retrofit benefits, financial complexity, and the absence of streamlined navigation for building owners.



Challenges

Workforce Capacity

- Skills gaps across trades and technical roles
- Limited availability of certified energy auditors
- Unique constraints for Labrador (costs, transportation, climate)
- Lack of early “local success stories” to build confidence

Knowledge, Culture & Buy-In

- Low awareness of retrofit benefits
- Focus on upfront cost rather than lifecycle savings
- Rental market dynamics — high rental rates but low owner engagement
- Out-of-province owners often not invested in long-term retrofit work
- Strong reliance on consultants, creating confusion about who to trust

Navigation & Standards

- No one-stop-shop for retrofit support
- Complexity in life-safety, code triggers, design, permits
- Lack of standardized, adaptable retrofit certification
- LEED often misaligned with local context and needs

Solutions

Workforce & Capacity Development

- Targeted, specialized training for deep retrofit skills
- Experiential learning and early “taker” projects to build local examples
- Focus on certifying qualified energy auditors
- Build awareness of what’s possible through case studies
- Start small — “we don’t need 10,000 people, we need a few”

Culture, Awareness & Outreach

- Expand education on lifecycle costs and long-term building value
- Provide clarity around retrofit pathways and technical expectations
- Improve communication to help owners understand benefits beyond energy (health, comfort, tenant satisfaction)

Financial & Funding Improvements

- Create a centralized, accessible listing of incentives, financing, and grants
- Provide business-case-focused feasibility studies with financial analysis
- Explore aggregated financing opportunities for smaller projects
- Increase awareness of federal housing and CMHC programs
- Support grant writing for owners lacking capacity

Challenges

(continued)

Financial & Economic Barriers

- Short incentive timelines vs. long planning cycles
- Lack of federal/provincial programs similar to NB's 50% incentive model
- Limited awareness of existing funding
- Application processes difficult to navigate
- Concerns about ROI, schedule, and inflation
- Misalignment between ownership and operations (landlord/tenant split incentives)

Geography, Weather & Supply Chain

- Harsh climate, long winters
- Materials delays, ferry reliability, transport challenges
- Higher costs in Labrador

Solutions

(continued)

Policy & Regulatory Alignment

- Better coordination between federal, provincial, and municipal programs
- Guidance for navigating code triggers and life-safety requirements
- Explore incentives similar to NB's 50% retrofit funding model

Navigation Support

- Build wrap-around services so owners know where to start
- Provide a clear end-goal and pathway for each building
- Expand the Building Transformation Program as a single point of contact

Conclusion:

The discussion in St. John's revealed a clear appetite for greater clarity, with building owners seeking straightforward explanations of why deep retrofits matter, what steps are required, and how to move from planning to implementation. Participants emphasized the need for simple, end-to-end navigation that supports owners and tenants through the entire process.

Regional differences—particularly the cost and logistical challenges in Labrador—play a major role in shaping feasibility and must be factored into solutions. Funding gaps emerged as a significant barrier compared to neighbouring provinces, underscoring the need for accessible, well-communicated financial support. Across the board, stakeholders expressed a desire for more case studies and real-world examples that illustrate success and build confidence in deep retrofit approaches.

Contact us



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