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Organizations for Reform Now
(ACORN)

Adsum for Women and Children

Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund

Antigonish Women's Resource
Center

Community Advocates Network

Community Society to End
Poverty

Dalhousie Legal Aid Service

Ecology Action Centre

Every Woman's Centre, Sydney

Face of Poverty Coalition

North End
Community Health Centre

Nova Scotia Public Interest
Research Group

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Transition House Association of
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Women's Centres Connect!

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April 19, 2018

Privy Council Office
Attn: Impact and Innovation Unit
Room 1000,
85 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Re: Support for Town of Bridgewater Smart Cities Challenge Grant
Application

To the Smart Cities Challenge jury panel,

This is a letter confirming the full support and confidence of the Affordable Energy Coalition in the Town of Bridgewater to address energy poverty by pursuing the Smart Cities Challenge grant.

Energy Poverty in NS

Energy poverty has a vital impact on the 40% of Nova Scotians with the lowest incomes throughout the province, including in Bridgewater, especially the lowest 20%. A household is in energy poverty when it spends more than 6-8% of its income on electricity and heat. In 2011 (the latest figures available) the lowest quintile of Nova Scotian households (about 78,000 households) spent an average of 11.8% on home energy compared to the average among all NS households of only 3.8% of income. The second lowest quintile spent an average of 6.6%.

Recent research has also demonstrated that about 55% of low income Nova Scotian households are renters. It is important that renters be assisted as well as homeowners to effectively address energy poverty.

The Affordable Energy Coalition

The Affordable Energy Coalition is a group of Nova Scotian organizations and individuals whose mission is to work with community groups, the non-profit sector, government and business to

1. Ensure universal access to electricity;
2. Eradicate fuel poverty in Nova Scotia;
3. Represent the interests of low-income Nova Scotians regarding energy issues.

The Affordable Energy Coalition advocates for better electricity regulation and for better efficiency programs to help low income households with their “energy burden”, the percent of their income they spend on energy.

Specifically, we have long advocated for a Universal Service Program to ensure energy costs remain below 6% of income for low income households and we have worked with NS Power to improve their policies and regulations in dealing with low income households. One of our member organizations is helping the town of Antigonish to implement a modified pilot Universal Service Program.

Our advocacy led to approval of 2 pilot programs operated by Efficiency NS to encourage landlords serving low income households to substantially improve the energy efficiency of their buildings. We continue to play a lead role in helping to make those pilot programs a success.

Members of the AEC work directly with low income Nova Scotians to help them with arrears and electricity disconnections and to prevent such problems from occurring.

In our advocacy, we at AEC view energy poverty from a human rights perspective.

The NS Human Rights Act Section 5 (1) titled “Prohibition of discrimination”, says: **No person shall in respect of (a) the provision of or access to services or facilities.... discriminate against an individual or class of individuals on account of**

- (h) age;
- (i) race;
- (j) colour; ...
- (m) sex;
- (o) physical disability or mental disability; ...
- (q) ethnic, national or aboriginal origin;

Electricity services and heating as a service derived from other energy sources are vulnerable to cutoff due to unpaid bills associated with low incomes and energy poverty, disproportionately affecting individuals in the above categories. This amounts to a violation of the human rights of those individuals, contrary to NS law.

We also see energy poverty as one of the social determinants of health. Improved energy services for low income households improves health outcomes by reducing excruciating choices between paying for heat and power vs. food or medicine. Improved energy services also lead to more comfortable homes and lives.

The Town of Bridgewater's track record

The Town of Bridgewater recently received the national Small Municipal Trailblazer award at the 2018 Globe Climate Leadership Awards and for reducing the town's energy use by 23%. The Community Energy Investment Plan that was approved by the town in January shows a comprehensive far sighted approach to continued energy efficiency and innovation. We believe these 2 events demonstrate a very effective team is in place in Bridgewater who we have full confidence in. Leon De Vreede's leadership is an important part of this.

We are also especially thrilled to see through this application that the Town recognizes the importance of focussing on those at the lower end of the income scale who are particularly acutely affected by high energy costs.

The AEC's support for the Smart Cities application

The Affordable Energy Coalition has formally approved supporting this application and playing a role in helping the Town's efforts in reducing energy poverty. Practically, we can offer assistance in how best to work with landlords in implementing energy retrofits. We expect the rental efficiency pilot programs operated by Efficiency NS to continue and to create a very useful, detailed template in how best to work with the varying kinds of landlords that serve low income households. Jurisdictions across North America have grappled with how best to work with landlords given the "split incentives" between landlords and tenants. Efficiency NS' pilot rental programs are leading edge in creating innovative, detailed solutions to this problem.

Efficiency NS has already operated an efficiency program for low income homeowners for years through what is now called the HomeWarming program. It provides 100% funding for efficiency upgrades and delivers the upgrades as a turnkey project where project management is done by HomeWarming for low income homeowners. In the current version of this program Clean is a partner in the HomeWarming program. These 2 features – 100% financing and project management address 2 of the greatest barriers to low income households achieving energy efficiency. We are discovering some parallels in barriers facing small landlords who rent to low income tenants – limited capital and limited organizational ability.

We can also offer advice on how to improve financial assistance to low income households to reduce the likelihood of repeated loss of energy services on an emergency basis.

The value of Bridgewater's approach

The comprehensive, innovative energy poverty initiative that Bridgewater is proposing is unique and will provide lessons for other communities across the country. Their community wide approach means that a high percent of low income households will be engaged and assisted.

The proposed data collection and use will help the Town identify households that can benefit from efficiency retrofits and make better use of existing programs that help with efficiency upgrades as

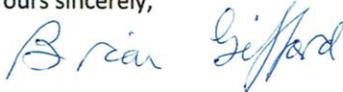
well as financial assistance in paying for energy bills. The provincial HomeWarming program's energy retrofits for low income homeowners lead to savings in the order of \$500/ year for electrically heated homes and \$900/year for oil heated homes. The initiatives proposed by Bridgewater will increase these savings and they will make such savings more broadly available. Such savings are permanent, year after year savings.

The savings that this proposal will engender will reduce the likelihood of low income households facing emergency loss of heat or power, which leads to many additional problems. Reduced energy costs make households far less prone to "heat or eat" dilemmas, in which households must at times choose between healthy food and heat and power – or medications and heat and power. Retrofits also make homes more comfortable. In all of these ways, improved energy services will improve the health of the low income population in Bridgewater.

Conclusion

The Affordable Energy Coalition is excited by the prospect of assisting with Bridgewater's initiative. Winning the Smart Cities Challenge grant would be a vital step toward fulfilling Bridgewater's enlightened goal of reducing energy poverty in their community. We look forward to working with them on this goal.

Yours sincerely,



Brian Gifford
Chair

Affordable Energy Coalition

