

State PACE Loans Available to Make Your House More Energy Efficient

At Town Meeting in February, the Town of Chebeague Island adopted an ordinance making residents eligible to apply for PACE loans from the Efficiency Maine Trust to improve the energy efficiency of their houses. Efficiency Maine is an independent State agency that works with homeowners and local communities to encourage weatherization, efficient heating systems and solar and wind power. The PACE loans are designed to save as much money in utility bills over the life of the improvements as the homeowner would pay for the loan.

Any homeowner in the Town, regardless of income or year-round or summer residency, is eligible for these loans. There are some conditions, such as not owing outstanding taxes, designed to determine whether the homeowner is likely to default on the loan. The loans can be up to \$15,000 and can be paid off over a 5, 10 or 15 year term. The interest rate is 4.99 percent. They can be used to install insulation, to do air sealing with foam and caulk, to install more energy efficient windows and doors, to upgrade water heaters or heating systems, or their controls.

The way the program works is this:

The homeowner hires an energy auditor from Efficiency Maine's list of approved auditors (available at the Town Office and the Library and on efficiencymaine.com). The energy auditor evaluates the energy efficiency of your house by using such tools as a "blower door" and which sucks air out of the house, thereby showing clearly, using a smoke indicator, where air is leaking in. They may also use a thermal camera which shows how much heat is lost through walls and windows. After collecting this data, the auditor uses computer software provided by the state to analyze what the problems are and to suggest possible solutions. These are provided to the homeowner in a list of improvements from the most to the least effective. If the money saved from the improvements over their useful life would exceed the loan amount, the homeowner is eligible for a PACE loan.

If the homeowner decides to apply for the loan, they get a form from Efficiency Maine. Then they hire a contractor from Efficiency Maine's certified list. S/he provides a bid on the work that needs to be done. (If you want to use a contractor who is not on EM's list, they can register using forms available on the EM website). That bid is submitted to Efficiency Maine along with the PACE paperwork. The loan is reviewed and, if approved, the homeowner receives 30 percent of the money as an initial payment. When the work is completed, the original energy auditor returns to do a "post-audit" to see that the work has been done properly. If the work is satisfactory, the remaining funds from the loan are released to the homeowner.

The pre and post energy audits combined cost about \$500 and are paid for by the homeowner. The rest of the work is covered by the loan. It's not very visible or "exciting" work, but it is designed to lower your energy costs significantly.

If you want more information about the PACE program, contact a CICA Board member, particularly Beth Howe or Ruth Slagle. There are also some brochures available in the Library and the Town Office.

