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Last modified: Tuesday, March 23, 2010 12:04 AM EDT

Project would cut Lynn housing sites' energy demand by 40 percent

By David Liscio / The Daily Item

LYNN - A \$6.3 million energy efficiency and weatherization project is expected to trim energy costs at Wall Plaza and the Curwin Circle mixed housing development by nearly 40 percent.

The Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development has hired Ameresco, a Framingham-based energy services company, to handle the project at the two federally funded properties.

Improvements will include upgrading the hot water distribution systems by replacing aging, centralized boiler plants with 17 smaller, satellite boilers.

The future savings from those improvements will be used to pay for the construction costs over a 20-year period, said LHAND Executive Director Charles Gaeta, adding the project will be completed without using additional taxpayer dollars and with no relevant impact on the agency's budget.

Upgrades include water conservation improvements that are expected to cut water use by more than one-third, installation of high-efficiency lighting, gas clothes dryers and more efficient water heating.

To finance the project, LHAND will tap a U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development program that allows housing authorities to make energy and water efficiency improvements without having to make an up-front capital investment.

Under its regulations, HUD provides incentives for housing authorities to conserve utilities. The HUD program supporting this project allows LHAND to reallocate a portion of what it would have paid to utility companies and, instead, use those funds to pay off a loan to make the improvements.

"While we've seen energy costs consuming a larger and larger portion of our budget, year after year, it has been difficult to imagine solving some of our critical infrastructure issues of this size and scope without wiping out our capital budget," Gaeta said. "This HUD program will allow us to better control our utility costs and it will free up our capital needs funding to make other infrastructure improvements."

The project will focus on Curwin Circle and Wall Plaza, a mixed family community consisting of 455 units and a sizable population of elderly and disabled. Built in 1937, the public housing was among the earliest federally funded urban renewal projects in the country.

The centralized boiler system at Curwin Circle that generates heat for the buildings is the project's primary target. Like many older apartment-like structures, it is not uncommon for some residents at both sites to keep windows open during the winter months due to excessive and uncontrolled heat flow, said Gaeta, explaining that in such circumstances, heat flows into one end of the service line while occupants in buildings a few blocks away get less heat output and are uncomfortably cool at times. According to Gaeta, the project also has an important educational component, designed to instruct residents on how to conserve energy to further relieve the utility burden. By increasing energy efficiency and decreasing demand, the project will help reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Gaeta said the changes will be concentrated and have a significant effect on the quality of life for the residents.

Ameresco was selected from among a handful of other companies that specialize in performance contracting. Gaeta cited the national company's experience working with housing authorities and specialization in efficiency projects.



A \$6.3 million energy efficiency and weatherization project is expected to trim energy costs at the Curwin Circle mixed housing development, above. Item photo / Reba M. Saldanha

"Only through the HUD performance contract program, a large scale heating project like this one, can a housing authority achieve the kind of substantial infrastructure improvement," said Ameresco Executive Vice President David Anderson.

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