

OUR BLOG

Transforming lives through homeownership and energy efficiency

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by [Josie Pivec](#)



“The wealth of homeownership is much more than monetary, it is what it can do to provide value, stability, and community to families.”

-Brenda Lano-Wolke, executive director of the nonprofit Homes Within Reach

Owning a home is life changing. It fosters fruitful communities and promotes prosperity by helping to strengthen economic stability in families. In today’s real estate market, many homebuyers prioritize cost and end up compromising on criteria such as location, home safety, and energy efficiency. [Homes Within Reach](#) (HWR) is a nonprofit, community-based organization that aims to solve this problem and eliminate compromise for low-income home buyers, helping them maximize the benefits of homeownership.

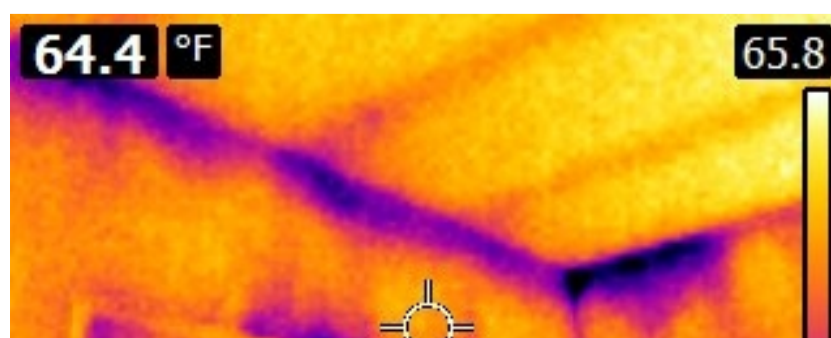
Funded by local, state, and federal grants as well as individual and organizational private donations, HWR uses a [community land trust practice](#) to help new homebuyers build wealth and equity while providing energy efficient, safe, and affordable homes. In the simplest terms, a community land trust practice makes homes more affordable by selling the home while retaining ownership of the land. HWR purchases homes through listings or referrals, updates and refurbishes the properties, and then sells the home to a qualified buyer while leasing the land to the homebuyer at a nominal fee.

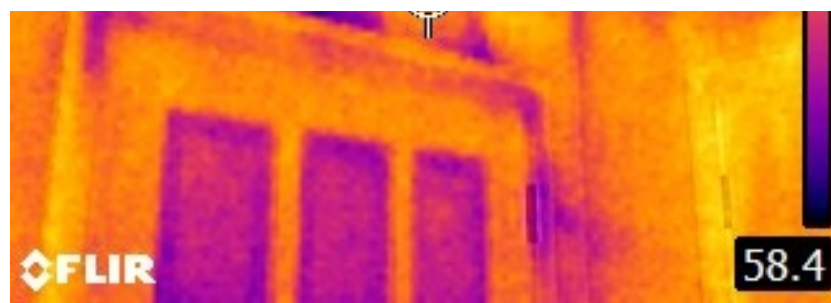
Eliminating land value from the mortgage creates permanent affordability of the property and preserves the property in the community. Since 2001, HWR has helped 200 families earning less than 80% Area Median Income (AMI) become homeowners through this model.

Because HWR believes homeownership should be affordable and accessible without compromising safety or energy standards, they have contracted [CEE’s New Homes team](#) since 2016 to support these standards. “Homes Within Reach does a great job of helping create affordable housing, and we are happy to help make sure their buildings are energy efficient, comfortable, and healthy for new homeowners,” says New Homes program manager [Phil Anderson](#).

For HWR and CEE, energy efficiency is a key factor when improving homes for purchase. “We want our homeowners to be successful, so we want to solve health, safety, and energy efficiency issues before they purchase,” says Brenda Lano-Wolke, HWR’s executive director.

CEE has serviced 45 HWR homes, providing initial and final blower door testing for safe insulation, full energy audits through the [Home Energy Squad](#) service, and recommendations for energy ratings and savings. After our inspections, we offer a list of energy upgrades that help reduce energy costs for the homeowner and help the property reach the required HERS (for [Home Energy Rating System](#)) rating of 85. Some examples of upgrades include furnace or water heater updates, wall or attic insulation, and various levels of air sealing.





“When the buyers sit down at closing, we show them what their annual savings will be because of the work we’ve done in the home. It’s often \$800 to \$1,000 a year thanks to the improvements CEE suggested,” says Brenda.

Since 2016 CEE’s New Homes team has serviced HWR homes for assessments, energy testing, and final testing. When Brenda joined HWR in early 2021, she prioritized including the team’s energy efficiency focus in every home sold. For each home, CEE is involved in the entire remodeling process from initial inspection to the final blower door test, documenting the shift from initial HERS rating to final rating after improvements. “It is very valuable seeing what the home is like from the beginning to what we get it to, so it is important to have CEE involved from the very start,” says Brenda. “The team has been great to work with. They’re fast, they accommodate our timeframe on the front and back end, and we really appreciate their flexibility and expertise.”

HWR currently works in 14 communities across Hennepin County, and just recently helped their 200th family. Their mission to transform lives through homeownership has made homebuying more accessible, affordable, and equitable across Hennepin County. “The wealth of homeownership is much more than monetary; it is also what it can do to provide value, stability, and community to families,” says Brenda. CEE is proud uphold the HWR mission and provide the benefits of safe, affordable, and energy efficient homes to communities through HWR.

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