HOME BUYING IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

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June 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Buying a home is a significant financial commitment. In the home-buying process, consumers must weigh many factors as they make their decision about which home to purchase: location, the features of the home, long-term objectives around employment and family, and short- and long-term costs.

It is also clear in SECC's ongoing research that consumers are paying attention to energy efficiency and are asking their electricity providers for information to help them manage comfort and cost. While overall participation in energy efficiency programs varies from program to program and region to region, incentive programs abound, and lifestyle changes have saved consumers money on their bills and helped them achieve some of their environmental and reliability goals.

Investment in education and programs have almost exclusively focused on the homes consumers currently occupy. Hence, SECC posed the question "Is energy efficiency important to consumers when they decide to move?"

In partnership with the National Association of REALTORS® and 257, SECC investigated the influence of energy efficiency and clean energy technologies on the home-buying process. What information about the home's energy efficiency is readily available? How important would this information be for consumers as they evaluate potential homes? Are Realtors® able to promote efficiency in listings and tours, and to what degree are they able to educate consumers who may be looking for answers about energy efficiency?

This research uncovered multiple opportunities for improvement throughout the home-buying process – opportunities for creating win-win-win outcomes for all participants.

Energy-efficient tools and technologies are driving change and creating a steep learning curve for Realtors® and consumers alike. Quickly evolving technologies, such as smart home features, high-efficiency HVAC systems, EV charging and rooftop solar, are challenging consumers' and Realtors®' abilities to understand, explain and appreciate how these affect the long-term livability and energy efficiency of a home.

Realtors® act as guides and promoters of available homes, driving the process. Often, they are unsure how to explain energy-efficient technologies. When listings don't highlight these features, value and a measurably higher sales price are left on the table. That said, Realtors® are beginning to take note yet are struggling to meet the moment with reliable information about the home or the technologies therein. They want to become trusted sources of information.

Consumers in today's housing market highly value energy efficiency. But they don't always verbalize this to their Realtor®, and efficiency features are often missing from listings. As a result, consumers are left in the dark about the long-term operating costs of a home that may be less energy-efficient than another home they consider.

Electricity providers are uniquely positioned to improve the availability and flow of information throughout the home-buying process. Being an active part of the home-buying process will provide short- and long-term dividends for providers and improve the knowledge base for consumers and Realtors® alike. This is just one more relationship-building opportunity – at a critical decision-making time.

INTRODUCTION

As consumers, most of our electricity consumption occurs in our homes. We continue to find ways to manage our usage through lifestyle practices and technology, with many of these options informed by the educational and program opportunities offered by our electricity providers.

Rising electricity prices remain a concern, even with these measures in place. Across the board, increasing electricity rates are the top concern for consumers and saving money on their electric bill is the top priority for over 85% of consumers. Similarly, consumers say keeping energy rates affordable is their top priority for their electricity providers.[1]

As the energy ecosystem evolves, SECC wondered how this evolution affects not only the choices consumers make about how they manage their energy usage at home but also how much their energy priorities and concerns influence the marketability and selection of homes they buy. From homebuilders to Realtors®, it is critical for electricity providers to understand the best ways to engage and assist these partners.

Additionally, to effectively promote energy efficiency and clean energy opportunities with consumers during the home-buying process, it is important to understand what is being said and what additional information might be needed to help them make the right energy decisions for their unique needs.

At the core, regardless of how individual consumers prioritize their criteria for finding their "perfect home," most include a broad range of considerations:[2]

- **Financial Readiness** – Budget, monthly expenses and the like
- **Location, Location…Lifestyle** – School districts, commute time, noise, safety, convenience of amenities
- **Long-Term Plans** – Job stability, mortgage terms, family growth, space to support the next chapter
- **Home Features That Make or Break Comfort** – Storage space, bathrooms, kitchen functionality/ appliances, outdoor space
- **Age and Condition of the Home** – Major systems (roof, HVAC, plumbing, electrical), energy efficiency
- **Resale Value and Market Trends** – Neighborhood growth, curb appeal and renovation potential, comparisons with other nearby homes

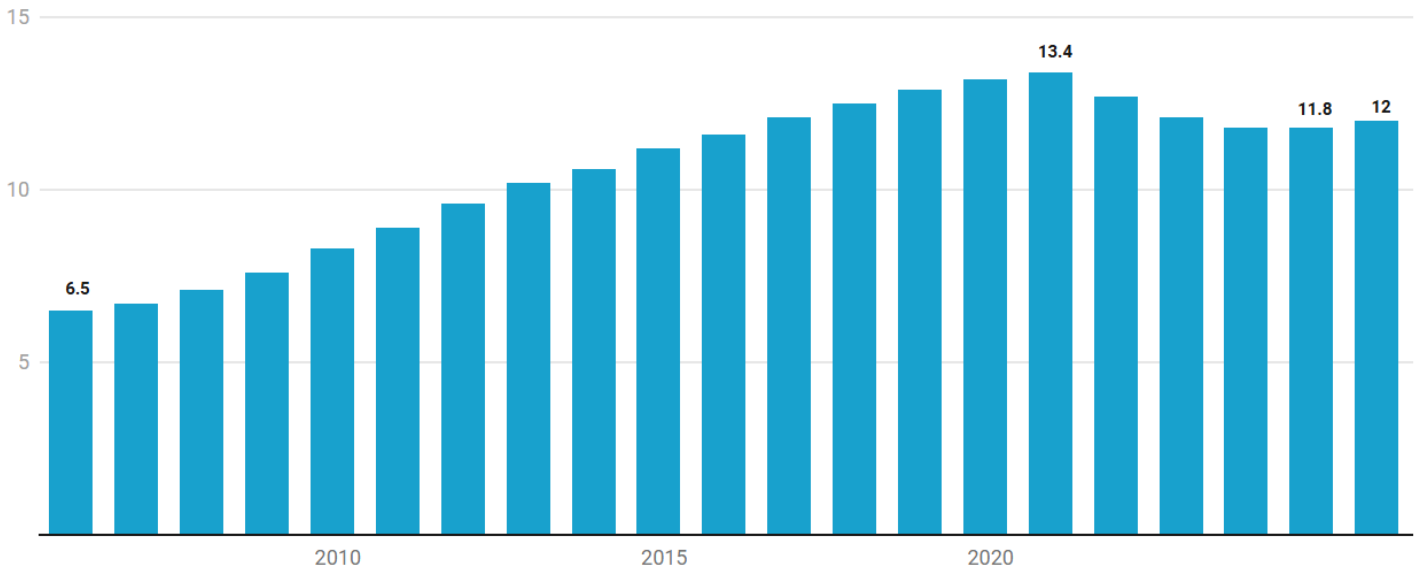
[1] https://smartenergycc.org/consumer-pulse-and-market-segmentation-wave-9/
[2] https://www.shoreunitedbank.com/shore-articles/top-things-to-consider-when-buying-a-house

Even though American homeowners are staying in their homes almost twice as long as in the early 2000s (*Figure 1*), searching for and buying a new home is a major life change and financial commitment made by at least 4 million families every year. Most of them engage a real estate agent to assist and guide them through the process.[3]

Limited housing options, along with the challenges embedded in the home-buying process, may cause many consumers to miss out on electrification options or be trapped with unexpectedly higher electricity bills. We believe that Realtors® have much to say about how homes are presented to potential buyers – their influence should not be underestimated.

We also believe there are opportunities for Realtors®, electricity providers and consumers to improve the amount of relevant energy efficiency information available during the home-buying process.[4]

Figure 1: Median Tenure of U.S. Homeowners



Source: Redfin analysis of county records • Created with Datawrapper

Searching for and buying a new home is a major life change and financial commitment made by at least 4 million families every year.

[3] https://www.redfin.com/news/homeowner-tenure-12-years/
[4] https://www.statista.com/statistics/226144/us-existing-home-sales/?srsltid=AfmBOoqpUfHKVDLthUE2PJByT4ekpvTwuEtq-7dlDtwdnQcz5jG2BWIZ

RESEARCH APPROACH

Electricity providers have long offered programs and educational resources that help consumers manage their usage and improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This engagement is almost entirely focused on the home the consumer currently occupies.

But what about when consumers decide it is time to move? Energy-efficient behaviors are likely to transfer with them to their new homes, but how much information about the energy efficiency of the systems in their potential new home is available to buyers as they evaluate their options?

Are consumers looking for specific energy-efficient or clean energy infrastructure (e.g., high-efficiency HVAC systems, rooftop solar panels and ENERGY STAR® appliances)? If these features are not already there, are they willing to add or make changes to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling they are about to purchase? Does the presence of energy efficiency or clean energy measures (or lack thereof) affect the price they are willing to pay for their new home?

With these questions in mind, SECC designed a 3-tiered research approach:

First, we conducted a market analysis of some of the energy efficiency and clean energy technologies and appliance innovations in homes across the country[5]: high-efficiency heat pumps, rooftop solar power, electric appliances (replacing fossil fuel sources) and electric vehicle (EV) chargers. We investigated market trends with these technologies and how those trends may affect the prevalence of these technologies in homes for sale and the sales price.

Next, we explored the energy-related issues encountered during a housing transaction. We investigated how much information about energy-efficient and clean energy technologies and initiatives were highlighted in property listings or discussed during the buying process. We sought to uncover the level of understanding and the value placed upon home energy offerings and smart home technologies by Realtors®. We also examined how (and if) Realtors® believe the presence of these options affects the price of a home.

Lastly, we surveyed consumers to identify key features and housing preferences consumers had in their home search. Our objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the types of questions consumers ask of the housing professionals they partner with in the home-buying process and whether they want more details about a potential home's systems and energy efficiency history. This survey showcases what energy efficiency and clean energy measures consumers value when selecting a home and exposes gaps in the information available through the buying process.

This report details what we learned from all three perspectives and offers observations and opportunities for Realtors® and electricity providers to increase engagement with consumers around energy efficiency and clean energy technologies during this critical home-buying process.

[5] SECC's partner 257 conducted a detailed analysis of property listings and 2 causal inference studies for this research: one study on heat pump technology and one on solar. These studies examined the incidence and language around these technologies in home listings and assessed the potential effects on sales price.

Market Analysis: Technologies Driving Change

Energy-efficient technologies have become commonplace in many American homes. Some technologies are widely available and easy to install – smart thermostats, LED lighting and ENERGY STAR appliances, for example. Easy installation, portability from one home to another and relatively low cost make these measures a popular choice in any home.

To answer the question about how higher-end energy efficiency features might drive the home-buying market, our research focused on a small number of emergent technologies that would be considered part of the home infrastructure – systems with higher costs, relatively lower market saturation and high energy-efficiency potential: high-efficiency HVAC systems, rooftop solar, next-generation electric appliances and EV charging.

Heat Pump HVAC Systems

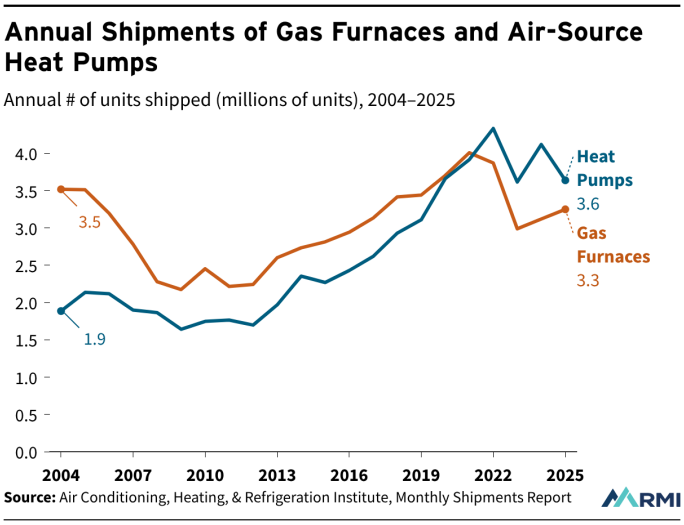
High-efficiency heat pumps are widely available across the country. By 2020, 17 million heat pump HVAC systems were installed in American homes.[6] In 2024 and 2025, heat pumps accounted for over half of HVAC system sales in the United States.[7] As a result, starting in 2021, heat pumps have outsold traditional gas furnace heating systems. (*Figure 2*) Why are they so popular?

Minimizing Environmental Impact - Heat pumps use electricity to transfer rather than create heat, making them much more efficient than traditional HVAC systems. Higher efficiency = lower carbon emissions when renewable resources represent a higher percentage of electricity generation resources.

Lowering Energy Bills - Less energy usage = lower utility bills. Depending on the size of the home, local climate and energy efficiency of the home, savings can average over $500 per year.

Cashing In on Tax Credits and Rebates – During the early 2020s, federal tax credits of up to 30% on the total cost of buying and installing a heat pump were available. Some states also provided residents with additional rebates.

Figure 2



By 2020, 17 million heat pump HVAC systems were installed in American homes.

[6] https://www.energy.gov/articles/pump-your-savings-heat-pumps
[7] https://rmi.org/insight/tracking-the-heat-pump-water-heater-market-in-the-united-states/

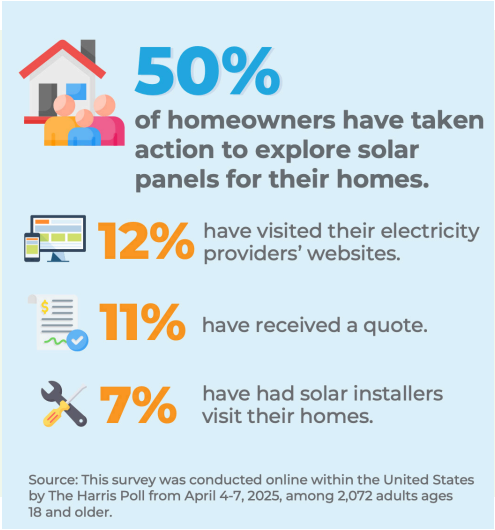
Rooftop Solar

Rooftop solar power investment is on the rise, too. In a recent Smart Energy Snapshot Survey, half of consumers surveyed have explored rooftop solar for their home.[8] (*Figure 3*) As with high-efficiency heat pump HVAC systems, the reasons consumers investigate these technologies are the same:

1. **Minimizing environmental impact**
2. **Expectation of lower energy bills**
3. **Availability of financial incentives**

With all this interest and available incentives, rooftop solar systems are currently installed on about 5 million homes, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.[9] While this represents just 7% of American homes today, the industry group expects that 15% of U.S. homes will be outfitted with rooftop solar by 2030.

Figure 3



High-Efficiency Electric Appliances

Appliance electrification programs offered by electricity providers are also raising interest in electric home appliances. We've already shown how the installation of electric heat pumps now outpaces more traditional natural gas-fueled heating systems. Cooking appliances are changing, too.

Convection ovens and microwaves are essential for home kitchens, offering speed and ease of use when making meals at home. New, high-performance induction cooktops are joining the appliance inventory, particularly as homeowners replace and upgrade older appliances. These electric alternatives boast the control of a natural gas cooktop with ease of installation and cleanup.

All around the home, efficient, electric choices are available. With incentives and ongoing education, we expect more consumers to consider electric alternatives when it's time to replace or upgrade their current appliances.

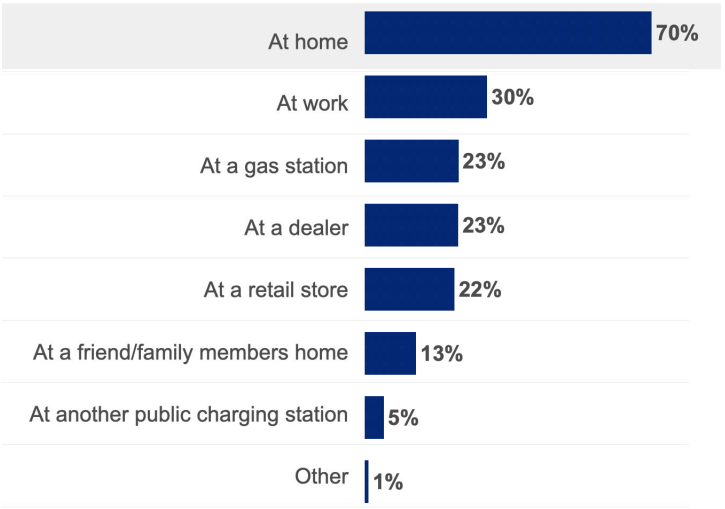
[8] https://smartenergycc.org/shining-a-light-on-solar-storage-infographic/
[9] https://seia.org/news/5million/

Electric Vehicle Home Charging

Ownership of an electric vehicle poses a unique challenge for consumers want to charge their vehicle at home. According to Experian, about 4 million of the cars on the road today are EVs, and the numbers are growing. Out of 12.4 million new vehicle registrations in 2024, approximately 1.1 million (9.2%) were for EVs.[10] SECC's research found that 70% of consumers who own an EV or plug-in hybrid charge their car at home.[11] (*Figure 4*) An increasing number of consumers will be looking for charging capabilities in their homes as they replace gas-powered vehicles with EVs and plug-in hybrids.

While these energy-efficient and clean energy technologies are more likely to be present in a home for sale today than just a decade ago, does the presence of any of these technologies make a home more attractive to a buyer or increase the value of a home? Are these technologies promoted in listings and during tours of homes for sale? Are Realtors® able to educate consumers, answer questions or make connections to contractors who can install these technologies? Are consumers willing to pay more at purchase or invest in upgrades once they move in? We answer these questions in our next sections.

Figure 4: Typical EV Charging Location



Base: BEV/PHEV Owners (n=412), Use a Home Charger (n=286)
Q_EVCharge. And where do you typically charge your electric vehicle?

An increasing number of consumers will be looking for charging capabilities in their homes as they replace gas-powered vehicles with EVs and plug-in hybrids.

[10] https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/how-many-evs-are-in-us/
[11] https://smartenergycc.org/electric-vehicles-driving-the-customer-experience/

Energy Efficiency in the Home-Buying Process

Property Listings Set The Stage

Working with 257, an intelligence platform that profiles hundreds of property and energy characteristics for every home in the U.S., we analyzed 143 million real estate listings nationwide from 1995-2025 for mentions of energy efficiency and clean energy features. Mentions were grouped into 5 core categories:

Energy Efficiency: The broadest bucket, including LED lighting, insulation, windows, smart thermostats, and appliances.

Heat Pumps: Any form of heat pump HVAC system, including ducted and ductless.

Solar: Panels, PV, net metering, solar-plus-storage.

Battery Storage Systems: Powerwall, Enphase, VPP.

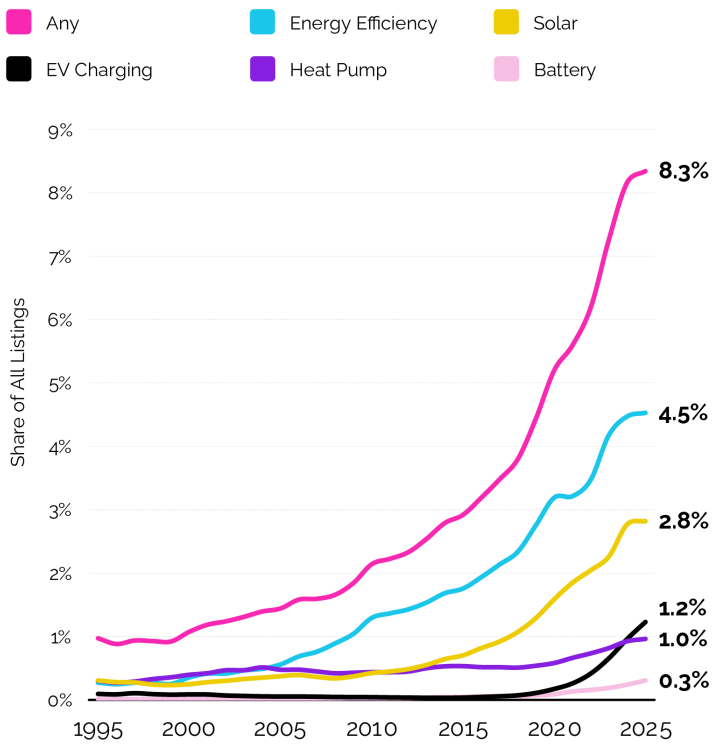
EV Chargers: L2, EVSE, 240V, bidirectional.

We found explosive growth in how often energy efficiency and clean energy technologies were mentioned over the last 30 years. However, overall, the percentage of listings that contain these references is still in the single digits. Just over 8% in 2025 mentioned energy efficiency at all, even though about 25% of all U.S. homes today have at least one major asset, according to the 257 market analysis. (*Figure 5*)

Given the wide gap between features present and features advertised, examining listings from 2020-2025 tells us not only about the adoption of technologies, but about market awareness, understanding and perceived value:

Solar appears in over 30% of all energy mentions, making it the top technology highlighted. Looking specifically at listings from 2024-2025, in homes where solar was present, the listing mentioned it 67% of the time. This is unsurprising considering how visible rooftop solar panels are.

Figure 5: Growth of Energy Efficiency Mentions in MLS Listings (U.S., 1995-2025)



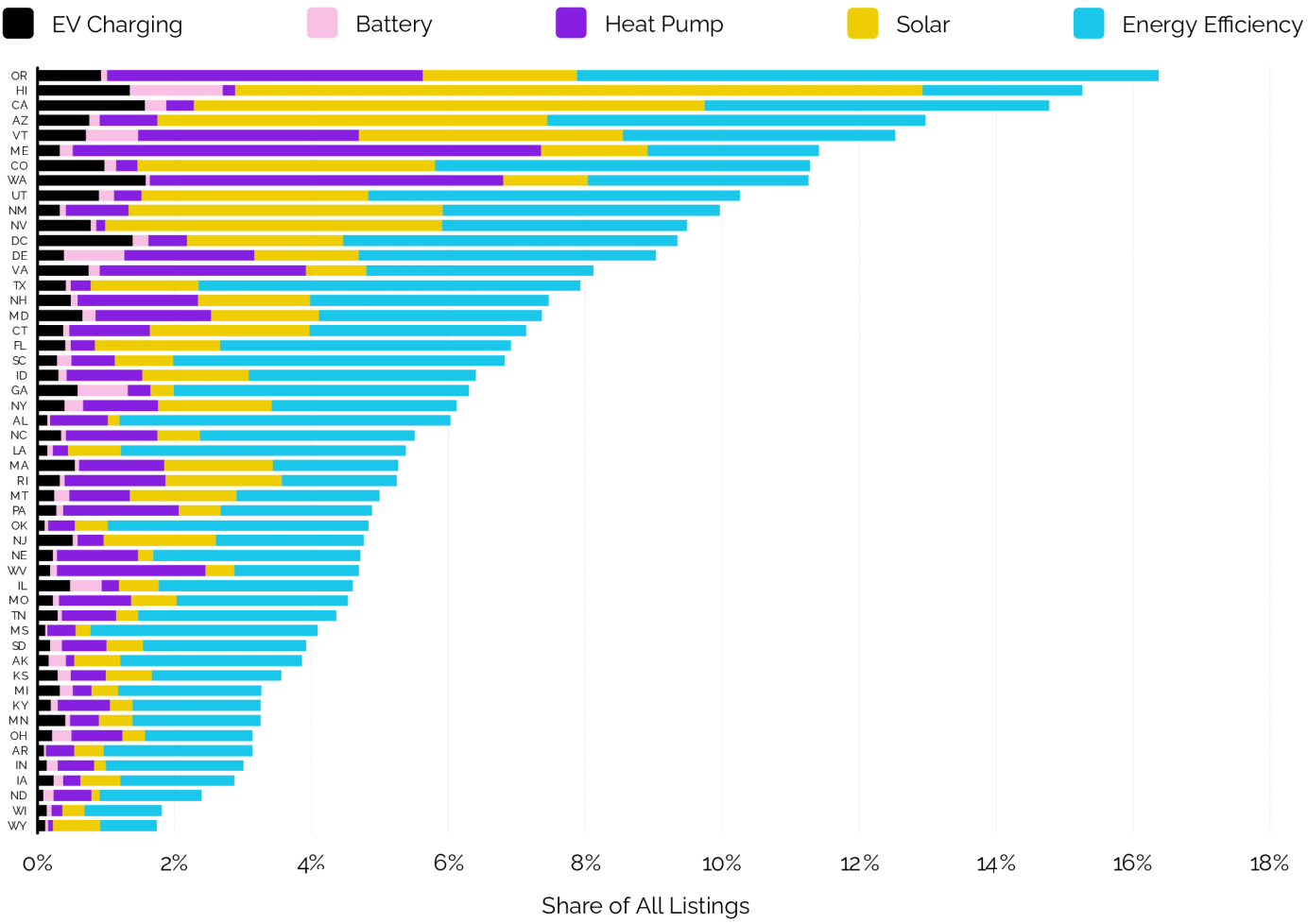
Looking again at listings from 2024-2025, despite policy tailwinds, **in homes where a heat pump was present, the listing mentioned it just 8% of the time**, highlighting a large awareness gap. This may be due to the "hidden" nature of heat pumps; listing agents may simply not know they're there. Or it could be attributed to a perceived lack of buyer interest.

EV charging appears in 5% of mentions, on par with EV penetration. This implies that a large number of owners who install charging in their homes make room in the property listing to highlight it.

The generic term "energy efficient" beats most specific technology claims (e.g., LED lighting, Nest, heat pump), suggesting that there's genuine, if not well-formed, interest in this topic from both consumers and listing agents. Listings talk about "efficiency" far more than electrification.

While these trends are reflected nationwide, there is also wide variability by state, based on geography. Variations are likely further influenced by the availability of incentives at the state or local level. (*Figure 6*)

Figure 6: Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency Mentions by State (2020-2025)



Listings in Hawaii and California – sunny states with historic strong net metering and high electricity costs – advertise solar much more heavily than those from other states. Heat pumps, alternatively, are showcased heavily in Maine, where many residents are attempting to transition off expensive oil heating, and the Pacific Northwest, where hydropower has historically brought lower-cost electricity.

Realtors® Guide the Process

Marketplace trends aside, sellers in a real estate transaction have some influence over what is in a listing, but Realtors® have significant influence throughout the process – from listing through the close of the sale.

While the listings we analyzed reflect how Realtors® advertise homes, agents' own perspectives can tell us why they make these choices, as well as illuminate opportunities to close gaps between what's happening in theory and in practice.

To understand what these professionals know and say about energy efficiency, SECC partnered with the National Association of REALTORS® to gather just over 1,500 responses to an in-depth survey on energy efficiency and clean energy in the home-buying process.[12] The results discussed here are reflective of residential Realtors® with more than one year of experience in real estate who have had at least two transactions in the past 12 months.

We explored many aspects of the home-buying process with these Realtors®, including:

- Their experience and knowledge of energy efficiency topics
- Specific features they highlight in listings or on a home tour
- How often consumers ask for energy efficiency information
- Challenges they face when discussing energy efficiency
- Resources they use to address consumers' questions
- Whether they think energy-efficient features increase the value of a home

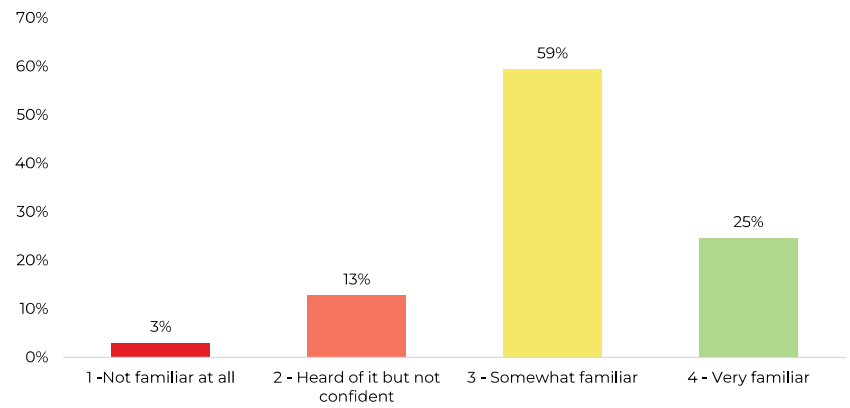
Experience and Knowledge of Energy Use and Efficiency

The vast majority (84%) of Realtors® say they are somewhat (59%) or very (25%) familiar with energy efficiency. Respondents with more than 10 years in real estate are significantly more likely to state familiarity with energy efficiency topics than the less experienced professionals. (*Figure 7*) Along with widely available external sources (which we discuss later), their experience in their own homes provides a basis for much of their knowledge.

Figure 7

How familiar are you with the concept of home energy use and energy efficiency topics as they relate to residential housing?

N = 819 | Mean = 3.06



[12] The National Association of REALTORS® is an American trade association involved in all aspects of residential and commercial real estate. Learn more at www.nar.realtor/about-nar.

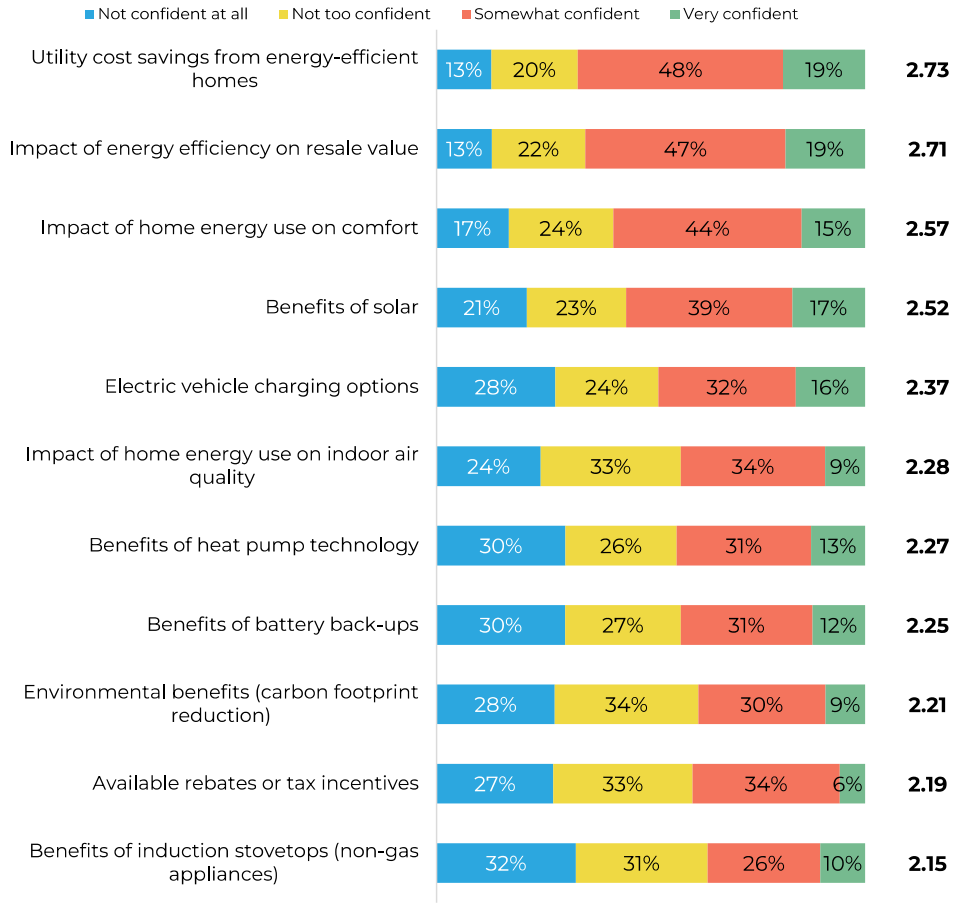
However, familiarity does not equal confidence in the energy efficiency conversations Realtors® have with buyers or sellers. The typical respondent is "somewhat confident" when explaining utility cost savings from energy-efficient homes (48%), the impact of energy efficiency on resale value (47%) and the impact of home energy use on comfort (44%). They are less confident explaining the benefits of heat pump technology, environmental benefits, available rebates and tax incentives and the benefits of induction stovetops. (*Figure 8*)

Notably, the areas where they are the least confident are focused on the benefits of specific technologies. This is because specific guidance requires an in-depth understanding of the systems and each unique consumer's situation. Consumers look to their electricity providers for assistance around many of their efficiency questions. Even then, there is significant variability in the answers they receive.

Figure 8

How confident are you in explaining each of the following to clients?

N = 819



National Association of REALTORS® | 2026 SECC Survey
Produced exclusively for SECC.

The vast majority (84%) of Realtors® say they are somewhat (59%) or very (25%) familiar with energy efficiency.

Energy Efficiency in the Sales Process

Realtors® play a big role in how homes are presented to potential buyers – what they include in the listing description or highlight on a tour. Many professionals report highlighting heating/cooling system efficiency (65%), window insulation (59%), smart thermostats (56%) and rooftop solar (51%) if it exists when showing or listing homes. (*Figure 9*)

The vast majority of Realtors®, however, say they don't highlight battery storage or induction stovetops, even when the Realtor® knows these features are in place – perhaps because these less-prevalent technologies aren't yet well understood. They are also less likely to discuss the quality of a home's insulation or the electrical capacity, which contribute to energy efficiency and flexibility for additional electrification.

Challenges Discussing Energy Efficiency

Ninety percent of Realtors® cite at least one challenge preventing them from discussing energy efficiency with their clients. The most frequently cited challenge is limited client interest (60%). We glean from this survey that their perception is that if their client doesn't ask, this isn't important to them. This assumption is debunked in our survey of consumers, which we discuss in the next section.

Forty-two percent of Realtors® report a lack of personal knowledge, while 22% cite a lack of accessible resources or tools. Only 10% cited no challenges and stated that they discuss this with most clients. (*Figure 10*)

Figure 9

Which of the following energy efficiency-related features do you typically highlight when showing or listing homes? Select all that apply.

N = 819

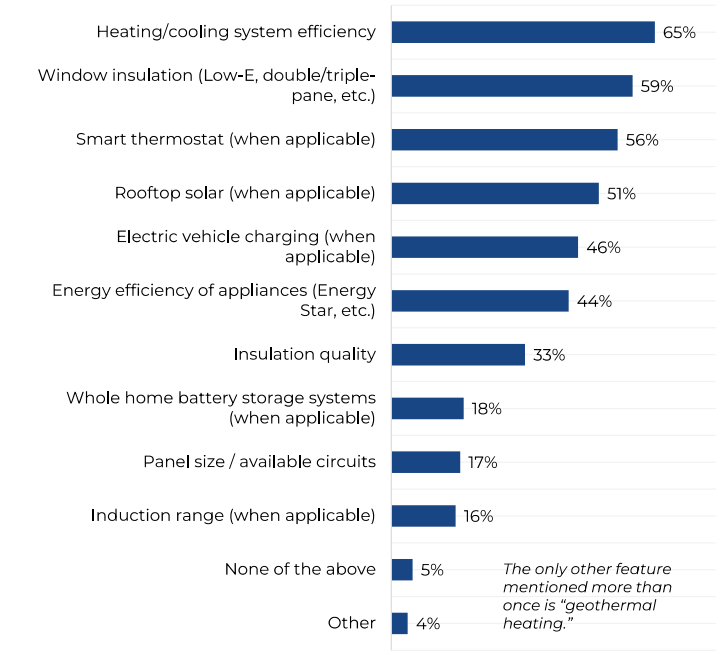
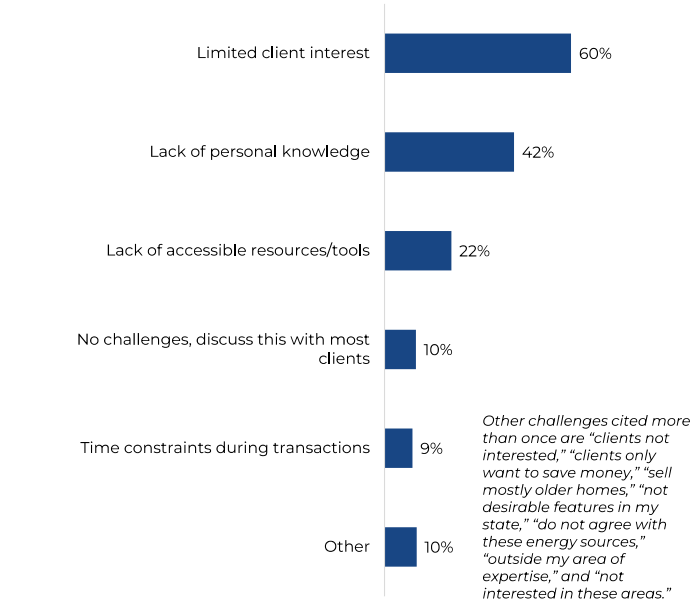


Figure 10

What challenges, if any, prevent you from discussing energy efficiency with clients?

N = 819

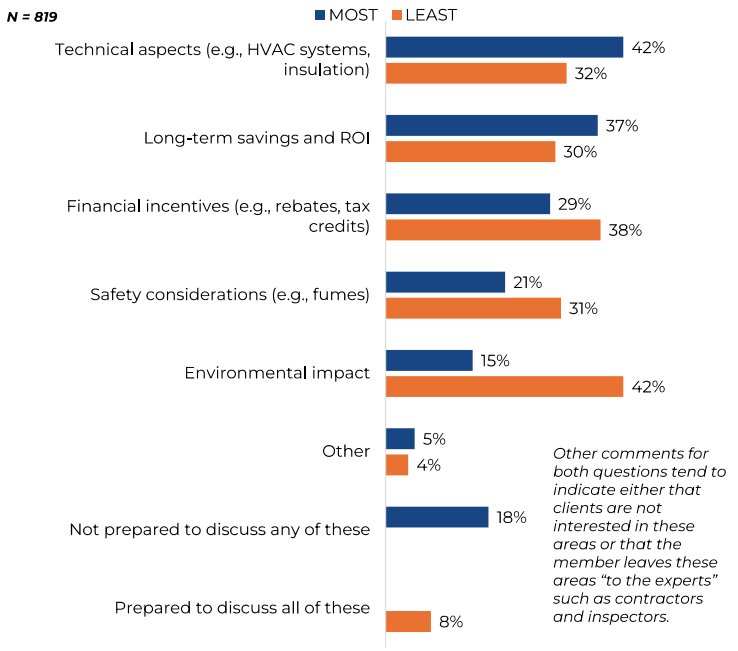


National Association of REALTORS® | 2026 SECC Survey
Produced exclusively for SECC.

When agents are asked about energy efficiency, they feel most prepared to discuss the technical aspects of energy (e.g., HVAC systems and insulation) (42%) and long-term savings and return-on-investment (37%), and least prepared to discuss environmental impact (42%) and financial incentives (38%). (*Figure 11*) What they can offer will come from their personal experience or a generally available search – a source that may not be applicable to the client's specific situation. This is at least one reason for their lack of confidence in these discussions as we noted earlier in this section.

What real estate agents can offer will come from their personal experience or a generally available search.

Figure 11: Realtor® Technical Knowledge Most and Least Prepared



National Association of REALTORS® | 2026 SECC Survey
Produced exclusively for SECC.

Referrals Are the Norm for Energy Efficiency Conversations

Realtors® say clients rarely ask about any of the energy efficiency-related areas tested in the buying process. A quarter of Realtors® say they have never been asked. When asked, some Realtors® feel that providing information in this area is "not in their lane" and would prefer to refer buyers interested in these areas to other sources.

When Realtors® don't highlight energy-efficient systems and appliances and aren't confident in talking about environmental benefits, tax incentives or rebates, where do they refer buyers? Half (48%) of respondents typically refer clients to other expert sources, and the 17% who provide detailed information tend to cite online sources for utility programs and government programs, as well as make direct referrals to contractors and tradespeople in these areas. Referrals like these are commonplace. We quote:

"Google."

"ENERGY STAR rating."

"I advise them to look up appliance manufacturer ratings from their website."

"Qualified HVAC contractor."

"Home inspectors."

"Local utility company."

"HVAC companies, electricians, plumbers, other licensed vendors."

These sources are directly available to the public, though many Realtors® view their responsibility to connect and refer as a way to ease their clients' information-gathering efforts. Agents typically do not, however, have the expertise or confidence to personally add to the information consumers can, and already do, access.

Energy Efficiency – A Competitive Differentiator?

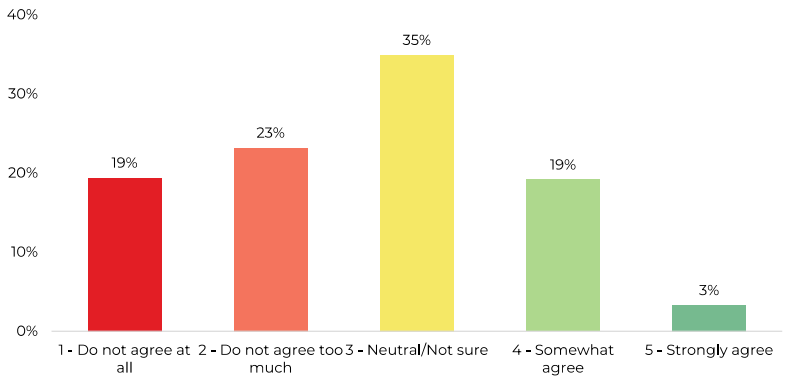
Given all the factors at play in the valuation of a home – location, current maintenance, quality finishes, desirable features, price, etc. – the typical Realtor® is neutral or unsure whether energy efficiency is becoming a competitive differentiator in their local housing market. Thirty-five percent are neutral; 42% either do not agree too much (23%) or do not agree at all (19%). (*Figure 12*)

As for regional differences, those on the West Coast and in the Northeast are most likely to agree with this statement. Respondents in the Midwest and Mountain States are least likely to agree.

Figure 12

To what extent do you agree with this statement: Energy efficiency is becoming a competitive differentiator in my local housing market?

N = 819 | Mean = 2.64



We have evidence from the 257 analysis that energy efficiency can, in fact, be a differentiator that commands a higher sale price. For homes sold between 2024-2025, listings that explicitly mentioned solar garnered a 2% uptick in the final sale price, or the equivalent of +$10K per home on a median sales price of $557K. For homes with ducted heat pumps that sold 2024-2025, listings that mentioned heat pumps were also associated with higher sale prices, selling on average for 0.6% to 1% more, or +$2.3K to +$3.9K per home on a median sales price of $399K.

In Short, Energy Efficiency Is One Element of the Buying Decision

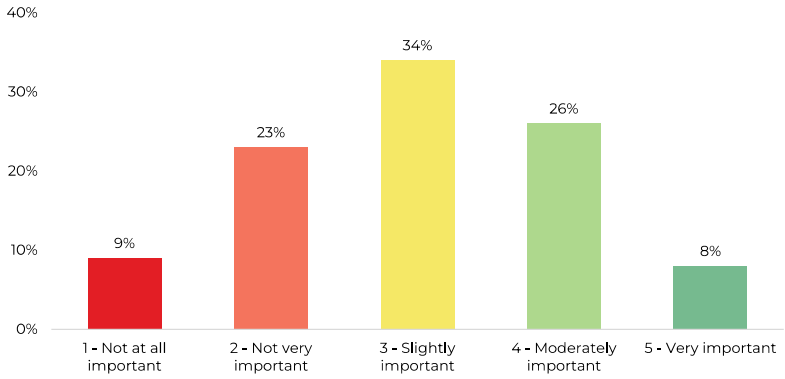
Realtors® feel that energy efficiency is slightly important in influencing home-buying decisions. One in three (34%) rate this slightly important; an equal proportion rate it moderately (28%) or very (8%) important. The only regional difference for this question is that those in the Mountain states and the Midwest are more likely to rate energy efficiency significantly lower than in other regions. (*Figure 13*)

It is safe to say that Realtors® believe energy efficiency plays a role, but other factors about a home are more important to buyers. The question moving forward is this: what opportunities are available to either increase the likelihood that buyers will be well-informed or place a higher priority on energy efficiency?

Figure 13

In your opinion, how important is energy efficiency in influencing home buying decisions today?

N = 819 | Mean = 2.99



Realtors® feel that energy efficiency is slightly inmportant in influencing home-buying decisions.

Training and Engagement: A Win-Win-Win Opportunity

What training and support would best help Realtors® assist their clients? Realtors® are bound by a code of ethics that emphasizes protecting and promoting the interests of their clients – while being honest. They are obligated to discover and disclose. This does not impose upon the professional the obligation of expertise in other professional or technical disciplines.[13]

It would be easy to be disappointed that Realtors® don't always offer detailed information on the energy efficiency of each home under consideration, but technical areas are often beyond their individual knowledge and experience. And, as we noted previously in this section (and will expand on in the next one) there is perhaps a misconception around buyer interest in energy efficiency. While listings that include larger energy-efficient assets, such as solar and heat pumps, garner higher sale prices, agents report that clients rarely ask about any of the specific energy efficiency-related areas tested in the buying process. If clients ask at all, they will likely ask general questions about energy efficiency; 48% frequently or occasionally ask about this general topic. (*Figure 14*)

When asked, many Realtors® would prefer to (and do) refer buyers interested in these areas to other sources. That said, over half (58%) of respondents would be interested in receiving training on energy efficiency, policies, incentives and technologies. They would be most interested in quick reference materials, such as checklists or fact sheets (54%), online webinars (41%) and self-paced online modules (34%). The topics they are most interested in are financial incentives and rebates (56%) and valuation of energy-efficient features (47%). (*Figure 15*)

Making this information available will require some investment, but it is not outside the expertise or scope of electricity providers. We will discuss this opportunity further in the final section of this report.

Figure 14

How often do clients ask you about the following in the buying process:

N = 819

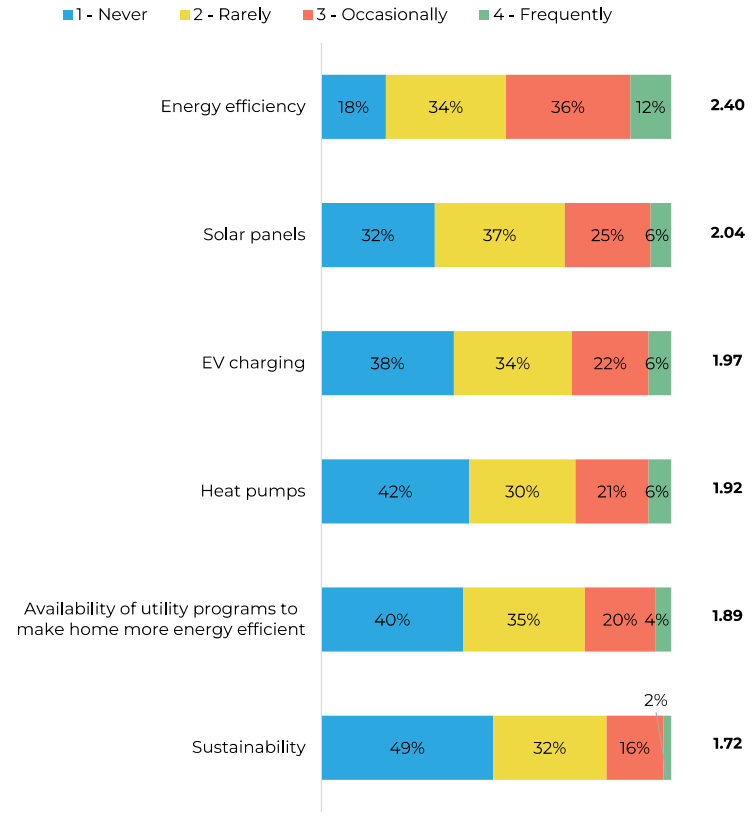


Figure 15

In what specific topics would you like to receive education?

N = 819

National Association of REALTORS® | 2026 SECC Survey
Produced exclusively for SECC.

[13] https://www.nar.realtor/about-nar/governing-documents/code-of-ethics/2026-code-of-ethics-standards-of-practice#clients

Listening to Consumers in the Home-Buying Process

To gather perspective from consumers, SECC partnered with E Source to conduct a 10-minute online survey among 1,027 Americans who purchased a home in the last five years. The survey was fielded from March 16-24, 2026, and the survey data was weighted to Census regions based on sales volumes from 2021 to 2025.

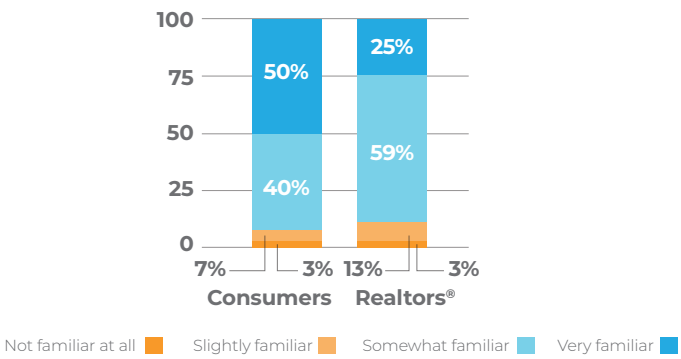
This consumer survey explored the following:

- Consumer awareness of energy efficiency topics.
- The energy efficiency information homebuyers received about the homes they considered.
- The weight buyers place on energy efficiency during the home-buying process.
- Energy efficiency features that are most important in their selection process and how often they saw these features highlighted in listings or on tours.
- Whether consumers believe the presence of energy-efficient features impacts property value.

Consumers Are Energy Conscious

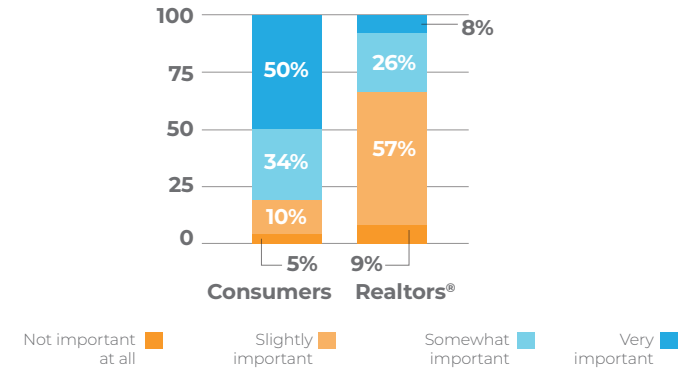
Consumer Knowledge: A bit more so than Realtors®, around 90% of recent homebuyers state they are very or somewhat familiar with energy efficiency topics, while 84% of Realtors® state they are familiar with energy efficiency. Also note the major difference between the percentage of consumers who are "very familiar" (50%) and Realtors® who are similarly "very familiar" (25%). (*Figure 16*) This difference in the level of familiarity may reflect lack of confidence in Realtors® and/or overconfidence among consumers.

Figure 16: Familiarity With Energy Efficiency Topics
(% Respondents)



Importance of Energy Efficiency: Two-in-three homebuyers stated their home's energy efficiency is, in general, very important to them. During the home-buying process, 84% of homebuyers stated that energy efficiency is very or moderately important in their decision making. It is notable that, as with knowledge, there is a significant disconnect between Realtors® (34%) and buyers (84%) in the level of importance placed on energy efficiency. (*Figure 17*)

Figure 17: Importance of Energy Efficiency In the Buying Process
(% Respondents)

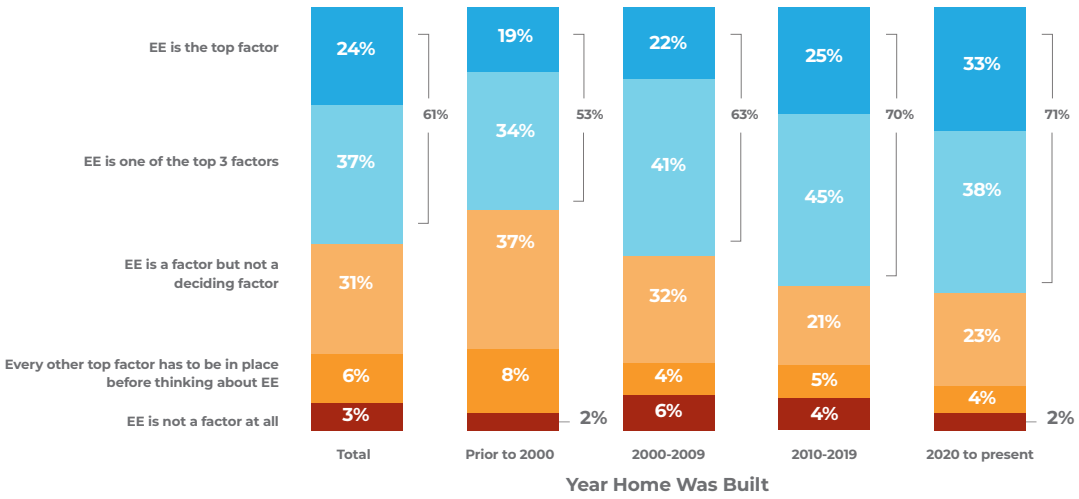


Important for Realtors® to know – buyers in the Midwest are a bit less likely to rank energy efficiency as very or moderately important when they are buying a home (78% vs. 85+% for other regions).

Where does efficiency rank in the top priorities for buyers? Everything about home purchases is local and personal: the neighborhood, the local market, the local housing inventory and buyer priorities, to name just a few. In this respect, it is hard to generalize. But energy efficiency is nearer to the top of buyer priorities than we might expect.

In our survey, recent homebuyers ranked energy efficiency among the top 3 priorities 60-70% of the time. (*Figure 18*) That said, we found a pattern of priority differences based on the age of the home under consideration. The newer the home, the higher the priority buyers place on energy efficiency. It is an interesting pattern to ponder:

Figure 18: How much of a buying factor is energy efficiency?
(Among All Respondents)



Base: All Respondents – Recent homebuyers (n=1,027), Prior to 200 (n=419), 2000-2009 (n=188), 2010-2019 (n=162), 2020-current (n=196)
Q9. Thinking about all of the factors that you considered when purchasing your home, like price, location, and size, how much of a factor is energy-efficiency?

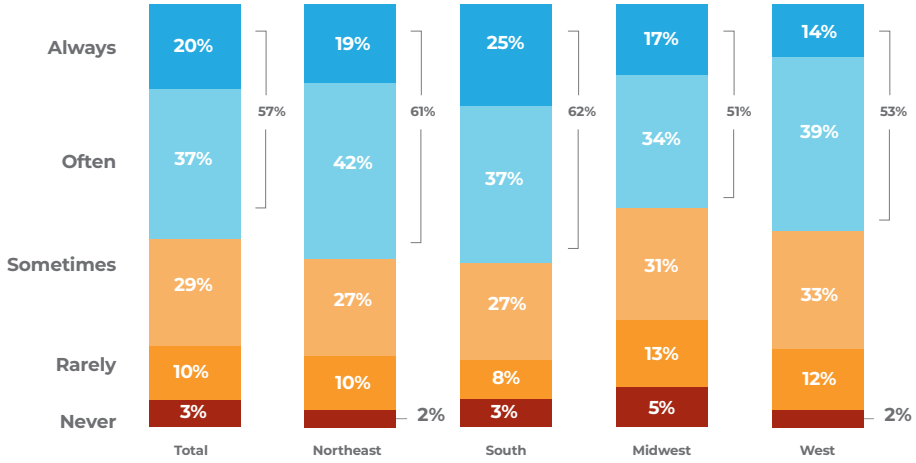
- Do buyers recognize that older homes are less likely to have newer, energy-efficient features?
- As buyers consider an older home, are they already thinking about upgrades that might increase efficiency and comfort?
- Are financial concerns weighing more heavily as buyers consider older homes, which may come with a lower price tag?
- And how might other priorities rank as buyers weigh the advantages and disadvantages of any home?
- Is energy efficiency table stakes – features that must be there before further consideration?
- Can energy efficiency swing the decision to one property over another? Or is it other priorities around location, financial commitments or something else that hold sway?
- Are there priority patterns left to be discovered among buyers of different ages, gender, region of the country, consumer segment?

We can hypothesize; however, these questions offer an opportunity for further research around the priorities that drive homebuyers' decisions.

Energy Efficiency Information: Is It Available During the Buying Process?

The short answer is "not always". While buyers consider energy efficiency important to their decision making, they don't always have what they want at their fingertips. Just 20% of buyers overall recalled finding energy efficiency items in listings of all the homes they considered. Missing information may be the case, but it is also possible that efficiency features simply are not present in the homes they are considering. (*Figure 19*)

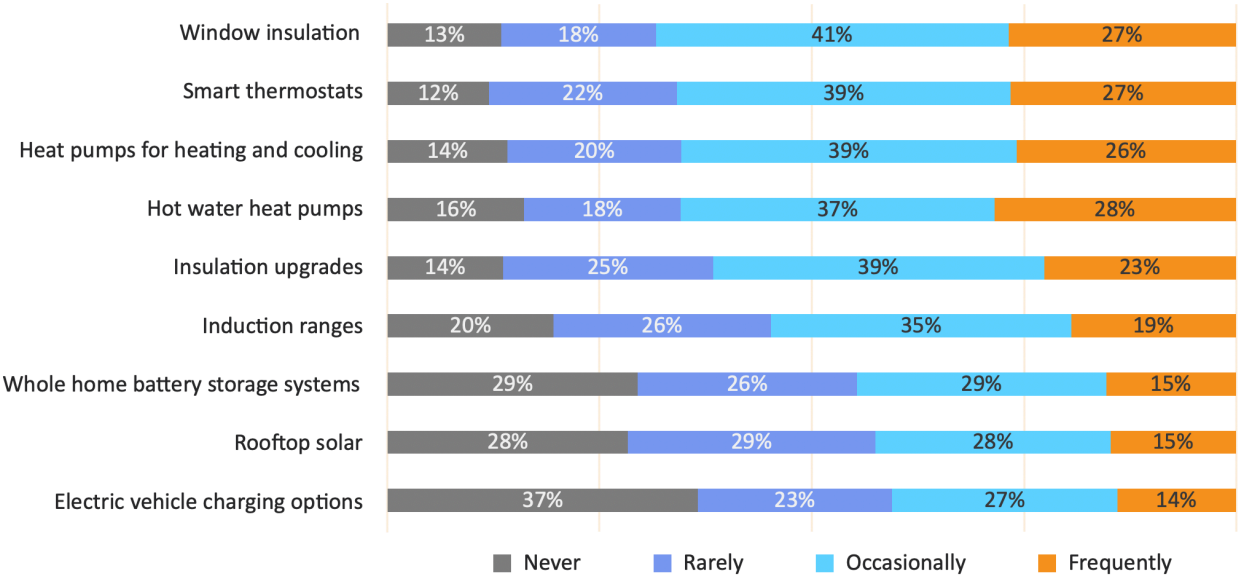
Figure 19: Frequency of Real Estate Listings Featuring EE Items in Homes
(Among All Respondents)



Base: All Respondents – Recent homebuyers (n=1,027), Northeast (n=259), South (n=253), Midwest (n=253), West (n=262)
Q5. Thinking about when you were shopping for a home, how often did real estate listings feature energy-efficient items in the homes?

Regionally, buyers in the Northeast and South were a bit more likely to find efficiency features highlighted. And what buyers report finding highlighted most often in listings are window insulation (27%), smart thermostats (27%) and heat pumps for hot water (28%). (*Figure 20*)

Figure 20: Specific Features Listed as Recalled by Consumers
(Among All Respondents)

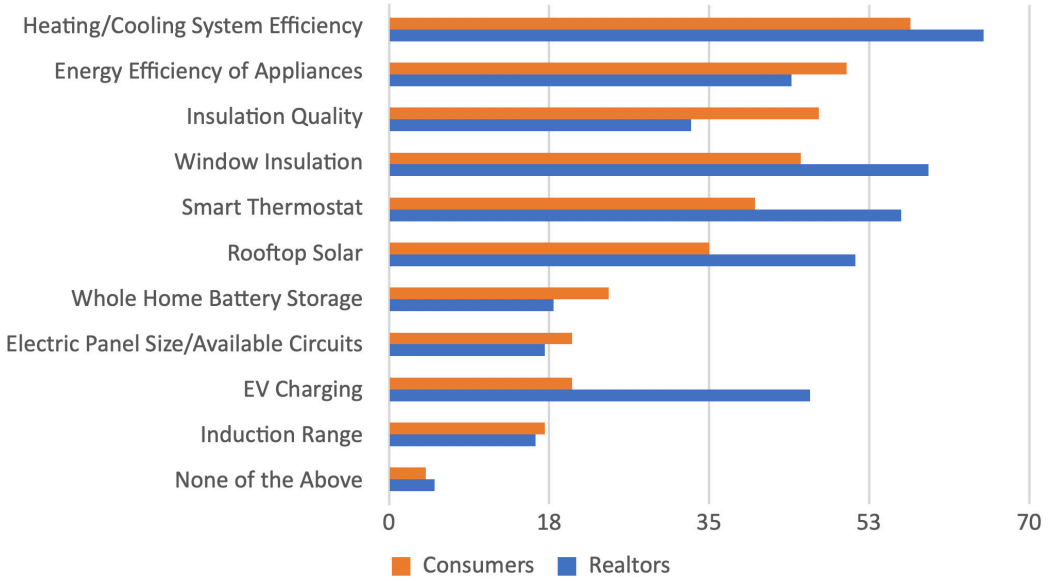


Base: All Respondents – Recent homebuyers (n=1,027)
Q7. Thinking about when you were shopping for a home, how often did the homes you looked at feature any of the following items:

According to buyers, induction ranges, whole-home battery storage systems, solar and EV charging show up least frequently in listings, largely because they are not as widely installed as other efficiency measures we tested. This is consistent with our findings in the last section that Realtors® overwhelmingly choose not to highlight induction ranges and batteries. Notably, while solar is the most-mentioned energy-efficient technology in the listings 257 analyzed, this is likely attributable to the prevalence of solar in Western states like California and Hawaii.

Digging a little deeper into the features buyers will pay more for and what Realtors® highlight, it's easy to identify opportunities where more information will be helpful as buyers evaluate their options. (*Figure 21*)

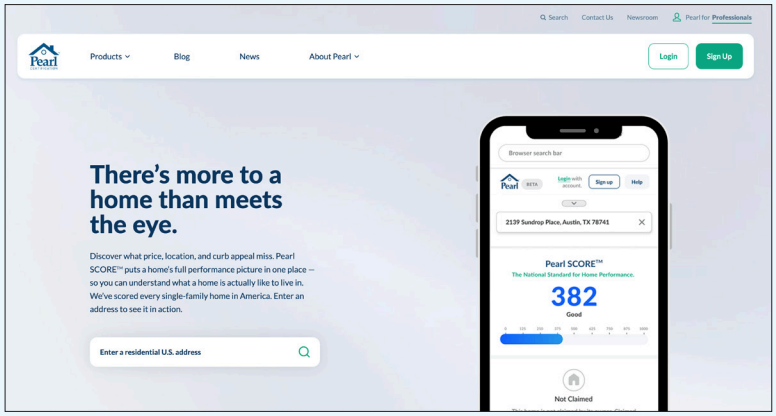
Figure 21: The Disconnect Between Highlighted Features and Features Consumers Will Pay More For



Appraiser-led research suggests that a feature's presence in a potential home is not the key to increased value, but it is the marketing of that feature that makes the difference. A Realtor® who is able to explain the benefits of a feature and highlight it to buyers will convince buyers to assign increased value in the sale price.

An emerging information source for single-family homes for sale can be found at **pearlscore.com**.

How a home performs shapes what it's like to live in every day – from the air you breathe to how comfortable you feel to what it costs to run each month. For the first time, every single-family home in the U.S. has a comparable home performance profile. Pearl SCORE™ is how that picture comes together, a single rating across five dimensions: safety, comfort, operations, resilience and energy.



[14] https://www.elevatenp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-EE-realizing-the-value-paper-v1.pdf

Most Sought-After Energy Efficiency Features

By examining the clean energy and energy-efficient features of homes recently purchased and the upgrades recent buyers have made, we get a clearer picture of the features in which buyers are willing to invest. (*Table 1*)

By a good margin, smart thermostats and energy-efficient appliances are the features most likely to be installed after purchase. These are two easy and relatively inexpensive changes to make as a buyer settles into a new home. A third of recent buyers made these changes since they purchased their new home.

The least-likely feature installed after purchase is the HVAC upgrade – 18% of recent buyers made this change. Consumers will continue to make choices about replacing the energy-dependent features in their homes. The more complex and expensive an installation, the more likely it is that a failure will prompt an upgrade – and that may not happen early in the buyer's tenure in the new home.

Table 1: Energy Efficiency Installations After Purchase of Home

Energy Efficiency/ Clean Energy Feature	% Buyers Who Added This Feature After Purchase
Energy-Efficient Appliances	33%
Smart Thermostat	33%
Window Insulation	26%
Heat Pump Water Heater	23%
Induction Range	23%
Rooftop Solar	22%
Whole-Home Battery Storage	21%
EV Charging Station	19%
Heat Pump HVAC	18%

Electricity providers take note: Being part of the replacement decision is critical to the success of efficiency upgrade or electrification programs. Whether the provider achieves this connection through home improvement advertising, partnerships with contractors, or a direct-to-consumer outreach, consumers need to know "in the moment" options that can save them money and improve their decision-making for long-term energy efficiency.

Energy Efficiency and Home Value

Will buyers pay more for a home when energy-efficient features are present? Across the country, recent homebuyers believe that energy efficiency increases property value, which is supported by the analysis of solar- and heat pump-inclusive listings detailed in the prior section. Only 2% of consumers say energy efficiency doesn't matter, and 90% strongly or somewhat agree that energy efficiency overall is a selling point. (*Figure 22*)

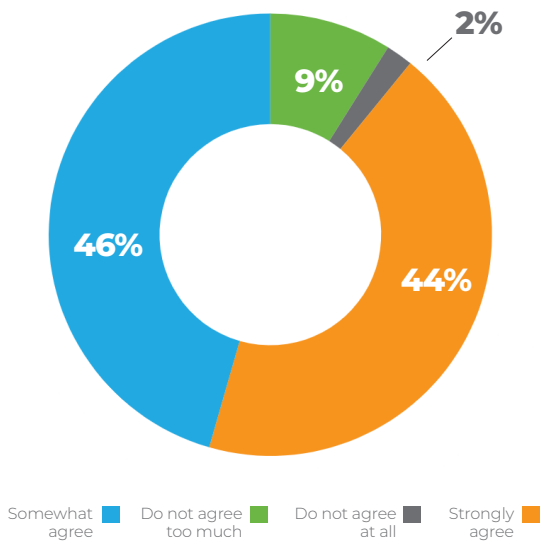
The energy efficiency features outlined in this research tell a tale of popularity but also of necessity. Our homes are all about comfort, and for one SECC consumer segment, comfort is the top priority.[15] HVAC systems and insulation are significant contributors to comfort in the home. If these elements are insufficient or inefficient, heating and cooling costs are higher, and the in-home environment is more difficult to maintain in comfort.

Guided by comfort and cost control priorities and the knowledge that HVAC systems are the largest energy consumers in the home, recent homebuyers told us they will pay more for an efficient heating and cooling system. In all regions, as Figure 21 earlier in this section shows, 57% of buyers are willing to pay more for a home that already has an efficient HVAC system. And 45-50% of buyers will pay more for better insulation and energy-efficient appliances.

Buyers also believe that rooftop solar increases property values. Eighty-one percent of respondents said the presence of solar in a home increases property values, while only 2% said it decreases value.

Other newer energy-efficient features with lower market penetration don't seem to draw additional home value – yet. There is an argument to be made that as adoption of EVs, induction ranges and solar continue to rise, these features will drive additional value for homebuyers.

Figure 22: Agreement with Energy-Efficiency Becoming a Selling Point
(Among All Respondents)



Base: All Respondents – Recent homebuyers (n=1,027), Northeast (n=259), South (n=253), Midwest (n=253), West (n=262)
Q13. To what extent do you agree with this statement: Energy efficiency is becoming an important selling point for homes in my local housing market?

"Across the country, recent homebuyers believe that energy efficiency increases property value.

[15] Learn about the Turnkey Comfort segment in SECC's *Consumer Pulse and Market Segmentation – Wave 9* report at https://smartenergycc.org/consumer-pulse-and-market-segmentation-wave-9/

Seizing the Opportunities in the Home-Buying Process

Homebuyers face a variety of competing considerations as they evaluate their choices of homes to buy. According to our survey, 60-70% of recent homebuyers put energy efficiency in their top 3 priorities as they make their decision. There are many opportunities for Realtors®, consumers and electricity providers to better align real estate marketing and homebuying resources with buyers' energy-saving preferences.

Realtors® Can:

- **Highlight energy-saving features in home listings.** There is evidence that sale prices increase when larger, energy-efficient assets such as solar and heat pumps are explicitly and proactively advertised. Buyers understand the potential for longer-term cost savings and want to know about these features up front as they consider homes.
- **Provide information on the age of appliances and systems in the home.** If available, provide energy efficiency ratings for appliances and HVAC systems in the home for sale, regardless of age. New does not always equal more energy efficiency.
- **Stay up to date on energy-saving technologies** and how these technologies can affect energy consumption in the home.
- **Along with referrals to knowledgeable contractors, refer buyers to the local electricity provider** for more information on energy-saving options and programs.
- As we noted earlier, most buyers include energy efficiency in their top 3 priorities when evaluating a home. **Don't assume the buyer will ask and don't make them ask in order to receive pertinent information** that may sway their decision.

Consumers Can:

- **Ask about energy-saving measures** in the homes you consider.
- **Contact the local electricity provider for typical usage patterns** in homes like those being considered.
- **Focus a portion of the home inspection on energy efficiency measures** (present, in need of improvement or missing).
- **Consider a home energy audit** alongside the home inspection.
- **Ask about the age and efficiency ratings of appliances** and HVAC systems in the home.

Electricity providers can offer support to Realtors® and consumers alike. The home-buying process is a missed opportunity for electricity providers to intervene and promote energy efficiency upgrades – an area receiving little focus in current programs and educational efforts. As consumers prepare a home for sale or move into a new home, upgrades are often part of the process.

It is also the time for electricity providers to consider Realtors® as "trade allies". These professionals are already helping consumers navigate the home-buying process, providing information, advice and referrals along the way. Realtors® are not energy professionals, and they might offer incomplete, out-of-date or general information, leading to unexpected costs and missed opportunities for consumers. Electricity providers are already extremely well-positioned to answer questions on this topic and equip Realtors® and consumers with the information they need. In fact, for many providers, existing consumer-facing materials will suffice – simply getting these tools into the hands of Realtors® and consumers considering a purchase will meet the need. Specifically, providers can:

- **Maintain a periodically updated list of links to electricity provider programs** available through the provider's website.
- **Create a Realtor® homepage**, including links to consumer-facing home-efficiency fact sheets, program descriptions, an energy efficiency welcome kit and FAQs.
- **Sponsor energy efficiency program advertisements** on real estate websites and apps (MLS, Zillow, etc.).
- **Conduct seminars for Realtors®** where they can learn about energy-saving technologies and the provider's energy efficiency programs. As an alternative to creating stand-alone courses, consider underwriting high-quality Continuing Education courses specifically designed for real estate professionals[16].
- **Develop and offer estimation tools** that can calculate a likely range of bill savings and carbon emissions for upgrades and replacement of HVAC systems and appliances.
- **Explore the possibility of bill estimation for homes on the market.** If customization is the goal, this would require specific information about appliance and systems' age, number of occupants and lifestyle of the prospective buyer or perhaps a historical snapshot of the last 12 months of electricity usage – redacted of any personal information about the current resident.

> **Electricity providers are already extremely well-positioned to answer questions on home energy efficiency and equip Realtors® and consumers with the information they need.**

[16] Continuing education requirements are different for each state, but there is one similarity: to obtain and maintain a real estate license, real estate professionals must take a minimum number of continuing education hours, typically on a two-year cycle. Work with real estate educators that offer classes related to high-performing homes (e.g., building trends, sustainability, building science, or green data fields in the MLS). Talk to them about building in additional related content that could help agents understand high-performing homes and local program options.

If all involved parties step up, the purchase of a new home can be the perfect win-win-win situation for electricity providers, Realtors® and consumers. Collaboration allows consumers to access reliable information as they evaluate their new home choices and consider long-term efficiency and sustainability in their purchase.

For Realtors®, they can answer the questions on consumers' minds and grow their relationships with clients during the home-buying process. For electricity providers, partnering with Realtors® expands the opportunities to promote efficiency and sustainability at the critical time when buyers are making decisions about how and where they will live. Providers can also begin building a relationship with a new customer (or enhance their relationship with an existing one as they move from one home to another). All stakeholders in this home-buying process have something to gain. Don't leave the opportunities on the table.