



Conserving Our Built Environment: Working With Embodied Energy

Three ways to maintain what's working and not waste it



- Refurbish old buildings rather than tearing them down and building new ones
- Support jobs programs that offer training in weatherization, restoration, and other strategies for making buildings more energy-efficient
- Enlist your local historical society in climate action

Rhode Island is thickly settled and full of old buildings. If you want to build a new building, you have to tear something else down—either woodlands and meadowlands that help absorb our carbon emissions, or an existing building. Our historic buildings are a useful tool in fighting climate change, because maintaining them causes significantly fewer greenhouse gas emissions than building them from scratch. The Energize RI bill, described in the [“Carbon Pricing” section](#), includes a provision for

creating jobs in construction and weatherization.

Household action: Maintain your house and/or the houses you own. In addition to the actions in the “Sealing and Insulating Your Indoor Space” section, keeping the building(s) you own in good repair means that you’re conserving the resources that it took to build them—their “embodied energy”—and avoiding the need for fossil-fuel-intensive new construction.

Climate change threatens the 18th century system of port towns and villages around Narragansett Bay. Failure to act sets up the flooding of Newport, Bristol, Warren, and Wickford, all of which have low-lying historic waterfronts, and multigenerational beach communities like Roy Carpenter’s Beach. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and slowing climate change is well within the mission of Rhode Island’s historical societies and preservation organizations.

Community action: Enlist your local historical society and its members to put pressure on state agencies and legislators when questions of emissions reduction are at stake—as well as using their revolving fund (if they have one) or other resources to help improve the energy efficiency and livability of historical buildings.