

Maine's Fastest-Growing City Is Catching Up: Westbrook's Blueprint for Clean Energy in a Renter-Dense Market

Building a Clean Energy Investment Pipeline in Westbrook, Maine

AT A GLANCE

Investment Priorities

Clean Energy Housing, Zero-Emissions Transportation, Building Decarbonization, and Distributed Energy Generation and Storage

Pipeline Value

\$105,555,000 across 19 projects

Key Partners

City of Westbrook, Maine Labor Climate Council, Efficiency Maine, Quaker Lane Associates, Maine Housing, Domus LLC, Avesta Housing, Rock Row Development, Central Maine Power, and local Community Development Financial Institutions

Community Impacts

- Potential to advance clean energy upgrades across 1,287+ housing units, including affordable, workforce, and manufactured housing
- Potential to reduce upfront retrofit costs for 288 mobile home households through layered state rebates, targeting net project costs below \$5M on a \$10M plan
- Potential to support 75+ permanent operational jobs through Passive House mixed-use development
- Potential to connect Westbrook and Windham via a 5.02-mile multi-use transportation corridor, completing a continuous off-road trail from Standish to Westbrook
- Engaged 162+ residents through community energy education and weatherization kit distribution through the MIF process

The Path Forward

The coalition enters its next phase with a completed Public-Private Partnership Plan, 19 projects identified across five priority areas, and structured financing pathways for the five most investment-ready opportunities. The near-term activation point is closing the first transactions: a manufactured housing decarbonization plan structured around Maine state rebate stacking, a Passive House mixed-use development with term sheets already issued by regional lenders, and a multi-use transportation corridor with preliminary engineering funded. Capital providers can step in now through structured debt, credit enhancement, or co-investment roles. Each project is already mapped to Maine's Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing programs and positioned for a layered financing structure.

THE BIG PICTURE

Westbrook is the fastest-growing city in Maine, a dense suburban community of 20,775 residents in Cumberland County that added 2,900 new residents between 2014 and 2024, with nearly 39% of households renting compared to 26% statewide. Multifamily housing makes up 44.4% of the city's housing stock, more than 16 percentage points above the county average, and the city issued 655 building permits between 2020 and 2024, signaling a construction market still in motion. That growth profile creates a structural tension: the rapid housing development underway in Westbrook is concentrated in a renter-heavy, multifamily-dense stock that has historically fallen outside the project structures that private capital and state clean energy programs were designed to serve. Maine's policy framework, including Efficiency Maine rebate programs, Maine Housing financing tools, and the state's commitment to a 45% reduction in emissions below 1990 levels by 2030, creates real leverage for communities that can connect those programs to a finance-ready pipeline. Through the Municipal Investment Fund (MIF), the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) positioned Westbrook to close that gap, assembling a regional coalition, applying Maine's clean energy financing infrastructure to the city's specific development pipeline, and producing the city's first investor-ready public-private partnership plan.

The Challenge: Westbrook's rapid growth has generated significant housing and infrastructure development, but the city's renter-heavy, multifamily-dense market sits outside the traditional project structures that private capital and state rebate programs were designed to serve, leaving clean energy investment largely unrealized.

The Solution: GPCOG and Westbrook worked to build a public-private partnership plan around the city's actual market, anchoring the pipeline in a manufactured housing decarbonization model that stacks Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing rebates to reduce net upfront costs by more than half, alongside a Passive House mixed-use development with term sheets already issued by four regional lenders. By pairing direct community engagement with structured project finance analysis, GPCOG demonstrated that building resident trust and building a bankable pipeline can advance on the same timeline.



"One of the most valuable parts of this work was the opportunity to hear directly from such a wide range of stakeholders. Bringing together developers, financial institutions, utilities, and community partners helped us better understand what's possible and where challenges exist. Just as important, it helped build relationships that will carry forward as these projects continue to take shape."

**– Monique Cornett, Westbrook Deputy Director of
Economic & Community Development**

CREATING THE FOUNDATION: A COALITION, A FRAMEWORK, AND A FINANCE-READY PLAN

GPCOG used its MIF grant to build Westbrook's first clean energy investment infrastructure, assembling a 17-stakeholder coalition, developing a project scoring and prioritization framework aligned to National Clean Investment Fund (NCIF) eligibility criteria, and producing a completed Public-Private Partnership (P3) Plan that could advance 19 projects across five priority investment areas.

The coalition brought together stakeholders from affordable housing development, transportation planning, regional utilities, lending institutions, and state housing and energy agencies. GPCOG designed a four-part scoring framework to evaluate and prioritize projects: alignment with NCIF eligibility requirements, fit with GPCOG and City objectives, responsiveness to community needs, and viability for private capital deployment, including transaction size, bundlability, credit profile, and technology maturity.

Of the 19 projects identified and screened, five were advanced to investment-ready status with predevelopment narratives and structured financing strategies. Alongside that analytical work, GPCOG built community trust through direct engagement: 162 residents were reached at public events including Westbrook's annual Winterfest, 120 weatherization kits were distributed to provide immediate household energy savings, and a suite of energy efficiency and weatherization resources was developed for broader community distribution.



FEEDING THE PIPELINE: TWO TRACKS, ONE INVESTMENT

THESIS

GPCOG sourced projects through a structured screening process that prioritized NCIF eligibility, transaction scalability, and alignment with Maine's state rebate and financing programs, then advanced the strongest concepts through direct coordination with developers, regional lenders, utilities, and state agencies. The pipeline takes shape across two tracks: a Clean Energy Housing Portfolio targeting Westbrook's growing multifamily and workforce housing stock, and a transportation investment that builds the physical connective tissue for the city's rapidly expanding population.

Clean Energy Housing Portfolio. GPCOG consolidated Westbrook's housing development pipeline around a single investment thesis: buildings that meet net-zero or near-zero performance standards, financed through a combination of private lending, state rebates, and structured public support. The portfolio spans manufactured housing rehabilitation, Passive House new construction, and affordable and workforce housing development, with projects at various stages of feasibility advanced by partners including Domus LLC, Avesta Housing, Quaker Lane Associates, and the Maine Labor Climate Council. By framing these projects as a portfolio rather than isolated transactions, GPCOG created a structure that allows capital providers to engage at scale and replicate the model across the Greater Portland region's housing supply.

Low-Cost Weatherization Loan Program. Alongside the development pipeline, GPCOG developed a portfolio-scale residential retrofit program in partnership with local Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and regional banks. The program stacks Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing rebates, reducing upfront costs for participating households to near zero and enabling residential retrofits that would otherwise remain out of reach for renters and moderate-income homeowners. At \$20M in total portfolio scope, the program represents a replicable model for residential clean energy delivery across Cumberland County.

Zero-Emissions Transportation. The pipeline includes a 5.02-mile multi-use trail extension connecting Westbrook to Windham along the existing Mountain Division Railroad corridor. When complete, the project extends the existing Mountain Division Trail to create approximately 10 miles of continuous off-road bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, reducing car dependence for a city whose workforce largely commutes to and from Portland. Preliminary engineering is funded through a partnership with the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), positioning the project for construction capital.



IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

Through its MIF grant, GPCOG built the institutional foundation Westbrook lacked: a completed P3 Plan, a vetted pipeline of 19 projects, and a structured coalition of partners across housing, transportation, utilities, and lending. Five projects have been advanced to investment-ready status, predevelopment narratives and financing pathways are in place, and the regional relationships needed to close transactions are established. The work now shifts from planning to capital deployment.

The Last Mile: The coalition has structured \$26,215,000 in financing requests across five priority projects. The most immediate opportunities are Hamlet Park, a 288-unit manufactured housing community where a \$10M decarbonization plan covering one megawatt of ground-mount solar, one megawatt of battery storage, heat pumps, and weatherization is positioned for a \$5.1M structured debt instrument. The Dana Street (Quaker Lane) Passive House mixed-use development, a \$48,355,000 project targeting Passive House certification, 54% utility savings equal to 621,000 kilowatt-hours per year, and 75 operational jobs, needs \$2.5M in equity investment or credit enhancement to activate a capital stack that already includes term sheets from four regional lenders. The Mountain Division Trail adds \$14,250,000 in transportation financing to the queue, with preliminary engineering already completed and funded.

The Multiplier Effect: The Low-Cost Weatherization Loan Program is designed to mobilize Westbrook's \$20M residential retrofit portfolio through a \$2.4M CDFI-backed loan structure. By stacking Efficiency Maine and Maine Housing rebates, the program reduces participating household upfront costs to near zero while enabling portfolio-scale deployment across the city's housing supply, creating a replicable model for residential clean energy delivery that can be activated with a single structured loan commitment.

A National Model: GPCOG's framework for advancing clean energy investment in a high-growth, renter-dense suburban municipality provides a repeatable roadmap for communities across the ICLEI USA network facing similar market conditions. The combination of a multifamily housing portfolio, a manufactured housing decarbonization model, and a residential weatherization loan program offers a scalable blueprint for markets where traditional single-family owner-occupied financing tools fall short.

Systemic Transformation: Beyond the five priority projects, GPCOG's P3 Plan has established a living pipeline infrastructure, including scoring criteria, predevelopment narratives, stakeholder relationships, and a portfolio of emerging opportunities in distributed energy storage, networked geothermal, and multifamily housing development. This infrastructure positions Westbrook to source and advance clean energy investments well beyond the MIF grant period, ensuring that the investment activity catalyzed by MIF grows rather than ends at closeout.

This case study was funded through the Municipal Investment Fund, a partnership between ICLEI USA and CGC to support local governments, tribes, and their partner not-for-profit organizations develop public-private partnership plans that can accelerate the deployment of capital to clean energy projects.