



# Actualizing Equity 2019 : From Principles to Practice

## Renter Power & Environmental Justice

Through the **St. Paul Tenant-Landlord Energy Project**, Fresh Energy and Community Stabilization Project are working to build a network of renters, landlords, and other critical stakeholders to advance policies; provide education on energy-related issues; and support implementation of collaboratively developed solutions. **“Energy efficiency is an environmental justice issue,”** says Janiece Watts, Policy Associate at Fresh Energy. “This program is about renters having access and agency in that conversation, and breaking down the power dynamics and communication barriers between renters and landlords.”

### Community Stabilization Project

believes that building tenant stability will lead to community stability and works to inform, educate, advocate for and organize tenants to preserve and increase the supply of healthy, safe and affordable housing in Saint Paul.



**Fresh Energy** is shaping and driving realistic, visionary energy policies that benefit all. Its *Energy Access and Equity* program is creating and expanding clean energy opportunities for under-resourced households and renters, and integrating equity in Fresh Energy’s work.

“Due to poor weatherization and heating systems, even with plastic on the windows, I have to use a fireplace to heat my home. So I might be paying 30 percent of my income for rent but now my energy bill is \$300.” **Lee Lucas, fixed-income renter and CSP board member**

## BARRIERS

From 2005 to 2016, carbon **emissions** from the residential sector increased 11% statewide<sup>1</sup>. More than half of the 55,000 renter households in St. Paul pay 30% or more of their **income** on housing and utilities<sup>2</sup>.

“So much energy efficiency programming is directed at building owners. With rental, the building owners are the decision-makers with the power to make investments in their buildings.” **Ben Passer, Fresh Energy**

“My middle class, white renters come to me assuming a peer-to-peer relationship and say, “Hey, I’m going to fix this, will you pay for it?” For tenants who are people of color, there is very much a power dynamic going on. They don’t feel they have the right or position to suggest that.” **Jesse Williams, landlord partner with CSP**

“As a renter, it’s difficult to navigate energy efficiency programs. We’re trying to craft a one-stop-shop to learn what programs are out there. But It’s not enough to say here’s the information; how do we form a line of communication between renters and landlords?” **Janiece Watts, Fresh Energy**

“As a policy organization, it’s been really important for us to get outside our usual spaces — the legislature and Public Utilities Commission — and meet renters where they are. We’ve had meetings in Lee’s building several times. He’s invited me to the renter council, and other meetings with CSP’s connections. So we’re figuring out how to center Lee’s building and his neighbors.” **Ben Passer, Fresh Energy**

There's so much substandard housing that's unhealthy and not safe for people. We're trying to break down that barrier between renters and landlords to achieve energy efficiency to lower our carbon footprint and lower energy bills. **Janiece Watts, Fresh Energy**



Energy, health, and community are the three points on the triangle for me. If we bring down energy costs and make it affordable for people on the lower economic rungs we can stabilize the community, have better health and a cleaner environment. **Lee Lucas, CSP**

## BREAKING DOWN SILOS

### St. Paul Tenant Landlord Energy Toolkit

The toolkit aims to be a resource guide that describes the energy efficiency programs available to renters and landlords, and also ensures tenants understand their rights, like the state Cold Weather Rule, which protects low-income renters from having their heat turned off by the utility or their landlord.

[bit.ly/Tenant-Landlord-Energy-Toolkit](http://bit.ly/Tenant-Landlord-Energy-Toolkit)

### Community Stabilization Project / Private Landlord Collaboration

Recognizing that many tenants seeking housing face barriers in the private market, in late 2018 CSP started to partner with a private landlord to hold the lease on units in two properties. This allows CSP to not only place tenants in housing more quickly but cultivate a strong and direct relationship with the property owner to address issues like weatherization and energy efficiency.

### Leveraging MNvest for affordable rental

MNvest is a state law permitting investment crowdfunding. Similar to reward-based crowdfunding sites, MNvest enables Minnesota businesses to legally advertise investment opportunities to all Minnesota residents. Landlord Jesse Williams and CSP are looking to launch a campaign to facilitate the purchase of additional homes that would provide permanently affordable housing for CSP-placed tenants.

[mnvest.org](http://mnvest.org)

### Minnesota Multifamily Affordable Housing Energy Network (MMAHEN)

Facilitated by Fresh Energy, "the MMAHEN network was intended from its inception to break down barriers and silos of individuals and organizations to expand resources in trying to tackle housing and energy issues," Ben Passer of Fresh Energy says. "CSP was a founding member of that work, and early on was really helpful in directly addressing the fact that CSP can't be the only voice for renters and equity at the table."

[fresh-energy.org/multifamily/](http://fresh-energy.org/multifamily/)

### Fresh Energy / Community Stabilization Project Joint Grant Funding

"CSP said early on, 'We bring expertise to this work, we bring experience and background, and we should have funding to do it,'" Ben Passer, of Fresh Energy, says. "And that's exactly right. We got a grant to **joint fund** our work, which was a new endeavor for Fresh Energy."

### St. Paul Tenants Bill of Rights

A tenants bill of rights would articulate basic protections for renters and reduce the mistreatment of tenants by property managers. It would require a poster summarizing the rights be displayed in the lobby of every privately owned residential building with at least three apartments, and that this summary be given to tenants along with their lease.

[bit.ly/STP-Tenant-Bill-of-Rights](http://bit.ly/STP-Tenant-Bill-of-Rights)

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