



HOME IMPROVEMENT

INSIDE

- Volunteer coaches help homeowners save energy
- Learn how to build biodiversity
- Showing good stewardship of local lands
- Dos and Don'ts of bathroom renovations
- Tips for taking care of a wood floor



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MARCH 26, 2026



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KARNATZ WORKS WITH LANDOWNERS TO PROTECT FARMLAND

By MARIN HOWELL

ADDISON COUNTY — A big part of home ownership and stewardship is the land around your structure.

Asked to picture a place in Addison County, many of our minds wander to the familiar barns and pastures of farms in the region.

Al Karnatz has spent the past 32 years helping conserve such spaces and protect the state's farmland and the vision of Home we have here in Vermont. The New Haven resident is a project director with Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and has worked with Champlain Valley farmers to conserve 400 farms in the region.

VLT states on its website that through conservation, land is "permanently protected in exchange for the sale (or donation) of development rights and other environmental protections."

Karnatz helps farmers determine if conservation with VLT is the right fit for their properties.

"Really what inspires me are the farmers themselves," he said during a recent interview.

"We have the funding, which is amazing, in Vermont ... and that's obviously very important, but if you don't have the farmer interest, if you don't have the landowners interested in protecting their land for the future, it's not going to happen either."

Karnatz's role focuses on farmland conservation work in the Champlain Valley — from the Canadian border down to Rutland County. He said farm conservation projects sometimes include forestland or sugar bushes but are primarily geared toward open, tillable farmland that's part of a farm operation.

Karnatz works with farmers throughout the conservation process. The VLT website states

its team helps farmers apply for funds, along with related work like determining the size and value of their conservation easement, "(managing) the legal process, and (writing) any management plans needed for funding."

Vermont Farm to Plate explains that farmland is conserved with a legal document known as a conservation easement, which is often held by a land trust like VLT. The easement "permanently limits development, restricts subdivision, and protects natural resources." This is also known as "sale of development rights," as landowners are usually compensated for the loss of the potential income from development (though some donate or partially donate this value)," Vermont Farm to Plate states.

Farms can receive funding and/or tax benefits for conserving their land, the VLT website notes. Part of Karnatz's role includes working with funding agencies like the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, the USDA and local municipalities.

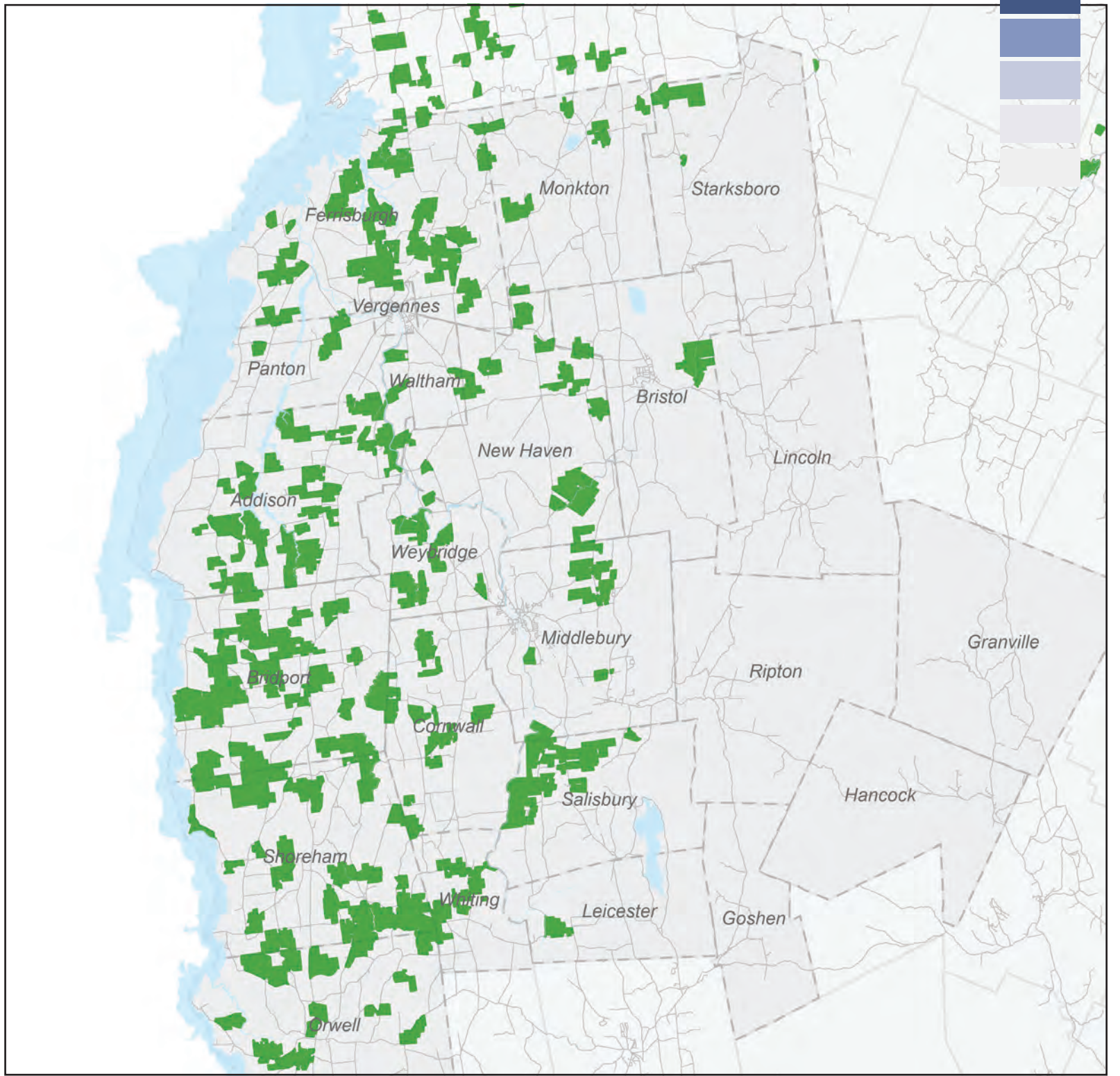
"My job is to bring all of those pieces together," he said.

The property also needs to be analyzed by an independent appraiser as part of the process, something the landowner pays for a portion of.

Karnatz explained that the main thing a landowner gives up through the process is the right to subdivide the property.

"We try to pay the landowner accordingly, we try to pay them what that value is based on the appraisal," Karnatz said.

He noted that funding, may only reflect a portion of the total value, "but it's great leverage for the whole project. So a landowner, maybe they get a few hundred thousand dollars for



NEW HAVEN RESIDENT Al Karnatz, a project director with Vermont Land Trust, was recently recognized for completing his 400th farm conservation project. This map highlights in green the Addison County parcels Karnatz has helped conserve over the years.

Map provided by Chris Moore of VLT

"That's probably the thing that's also changed over the years, is that we're doing more ecological protections on these properties than we had early on. We're becoming more sophisticated about setbacks from rivers, protecting wetlands."

— Al Karnatz

their restrictions."

Along with limits on development, those restrictions can also include setbacks from rivers to improve water quality, for example.

"That's probably the thing that's also changed over the years, is that we're doing more ecological protections on these properties than we had early on," he said. "We're becoming more

sophisticated about setbacks from rivers, protecting wetlands."

Karnatz said farm conservation projects often take at least two years.

"The process is long, but it's not

necessarily a bad thing because I don't think this is anything that a landowner should rush into," he said. "It's a big decision, so you want to think about it for a long time." (See Karnatz, Page 7C)



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NAVIGATORS HELP GET THE CARBON OUT OF YOUR HOME

ADDISON COUNTY — For going on two years, the Climate Economy Action Center, or CEAC, has run a free program aimed at helping Addison County residents decarbonize their homes. The program is known as Addison County Energy Navigators.

Through the program, homeowners receive free one-on-one support in identifying ways to reduce their homes' carbon footprint and utility bills.

CEAC recently introduced Addison County to two of its Volunteer Energy Coaches: Alice White and Don Monroe.

"Don and I were looking for a way to use our new-found knowledge about energy efficient building practices and technologies to help others in our community who have fewer resources. Volunteering with Energy Navigators is a perfect fit," White said.

White and Monroe are volunteers with Energy Navigators.

Their energy efficiency education

started a few years back, when they had their own home built after renovation proved impractical, and today they are sharing their knowledge with community members as energy coaches. We caught up with Alice and asked her a few questions about volunteering with Energy Navigators. Here is what she said:

Why did you volunteer for Energy Navigators?

Alice: My husband and I recently retired to Middlebury and had the opportunity to build an energy efficient home. We were lucky to have a knowledgeable architect (Elizabeth Hermann) and contractor (Smith & McClain) and were fascinated by the choices that went into the design and construction. Now that we have moved in, we agree that it is the most comfortable space we have ever lived in. More importantly, the combination of ground source heat pumps and solar panels (on the roof) mean that our monthly energy costs are very low. With the help of our contractor, we were able to take advantage of incentives

to offset the initial cost of the systems, but it could easily have become overwhelming. That's why we signed on to Energy Navigators, to help Vermonters struggling with heating costs to get onto a lower cost path. If that path includes a lower carbon footprint, then that makes progress on another front that is important to us—climate change mitigation.

What is your experience with Energy Navigators?

Alice: The first thing we did as Navigators-in-Training was to enroll in the online Rewiring America course, which was facilitated by the Energy Navigator team. This gave us a comprehensive technical background in relevant HVAC and building technologies as well as coaching advice for analyzing different situations and providing feedback. The Energy Navigator team has provided additional coaching, including shadowing opportunities, and a suite of templates, modeling software and links to important information. We find that we encounter many challenging situations, so we've convened a cohort of Navigators who meet once a month to share and discuss these cases. In this time of great uncertainty, it is very rewarding to be able to give a homeowner a set of concrete next steps to get them on the path to lowering their heating/cooling costs and, in the process, reducing their energy footprint.

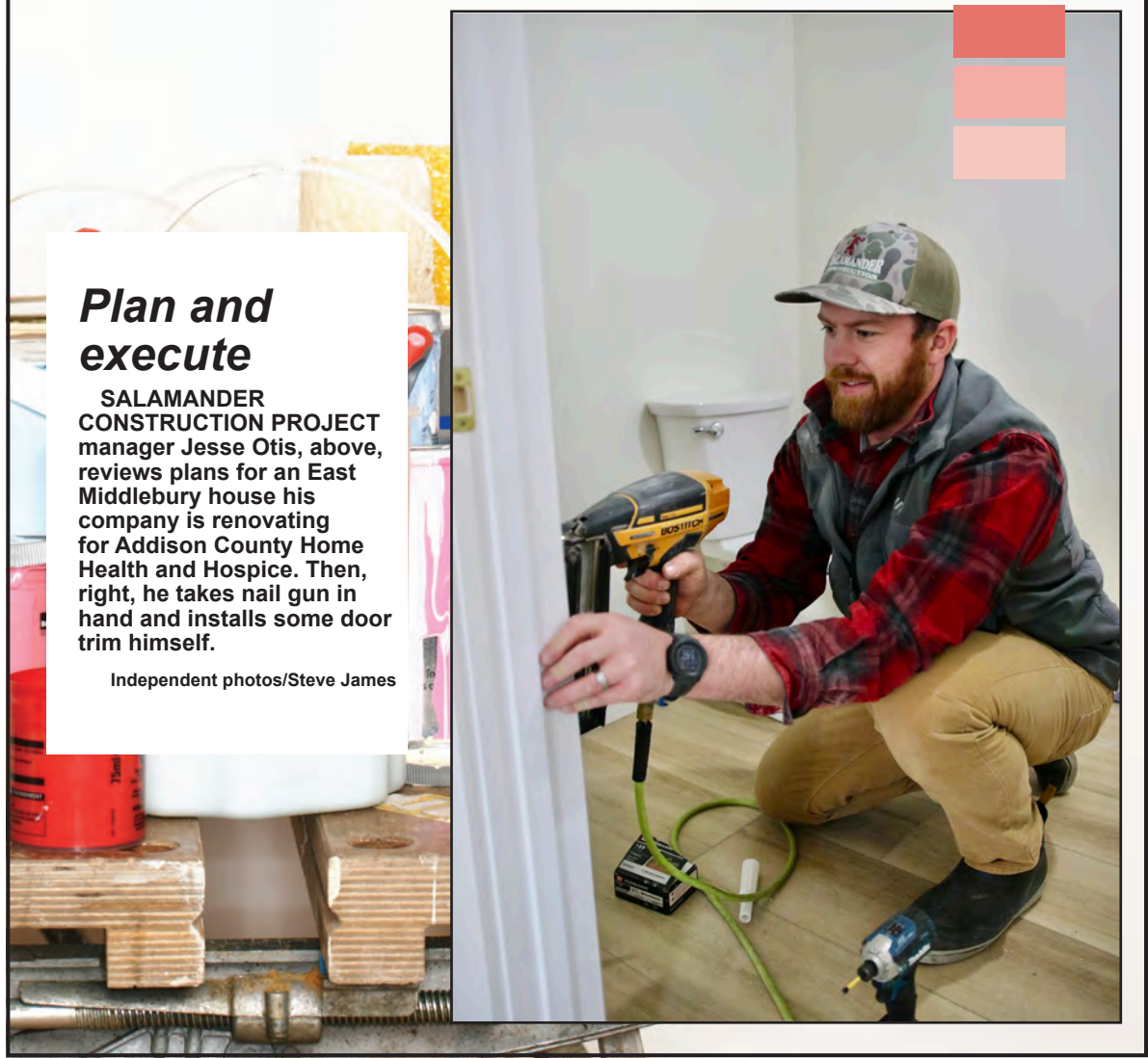
Thank you to Alice, Don and our first Volunteer Energy Coaching cohort for helping others take steps toward reducing their energy burden, increasing their comfort, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If you would like to volunteer with Energy Navigators, fill out the form online at tinyurl.com/EnergyNav. No previous experience is necessary.

If energy coaching is not appealing, CEAC has opportunities including outreach, administrative, and website curating roles for volunteers.

Editor's note: This story was provided by the Climate Economy Action Center.



Alice White and Don Monroe help homeowners reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.



Plan and execute

SALAMANDER CONSTRUCTION PROJECT manager Jesse Otis, above, reviews plans for an East Middlebury house his company is renovating for Addison County Home Health and Hospice. Then, right, he takes nail gun in hand and installs some door trim himself.

Independent photos/Steve James



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DUSTIN WHITCOMB OF Champlain Valley Plumbing and Heating uses an Allen wrench for the fiddly part of attaching a new shower tap in an East Middlebury home undergoing renovation.

Independent photo/Steve James

DO'S AND DON'TS OF BATHROOM RENOVATIONS

Bathroom renovations are significant undertakings that cost homeowners sizable amounts of money. According to *Remodeling* magazine's "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," the average cost of a mid-range bathroom remodel across the United States in 2024 was around \$25,000, and it is surely considerably more now. Homeowners who wanted an upscale remodel could expect to spend around \$80,000 in 2024.

Such a large financial commitment underscores the significance that homeowners get their bathroom remodels right. Mistakes will only increase the already substantial financial commitment homeowners must make, so it can help to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

DO work with a certified, reliable contractor. YouTube tutorials can give a false impression of renovation

projects in relation to their degree of difficulty. Renovations as significant as bathroom remodeling projects require the skills and experience of professionals.

DON'T ignore return on investment (ROI). There's no denying certain projects provide a better return on investment than others. The upscale bathroom remodel with a nearly \$80,000 price tag noted above may prove awe-inspiring, but homeowners looking to get as much of their money back at resale should know that such a renovation recovers 45 percent of homeowners' initial investment. By contrast, the mid-range bathroom remodel yields a 74 percent return according to *Remodeling* magazine. Though ROI may not be the deciding factor for every homeowner, it definitely merits consideration when planning

a project.

DO pay attention to the details. Planning a bathroom renovation can be overwhelming, as homeowners have many decisions to make before the project even begins. For example, homeowners will have to choose a vanity, fixtures for the vanity, light fixtures, toilet, showerhead, and an assortment of additional features when planning the project. Contractors work with clients to show them all of their options, and some will offer advice on products or materials if asked. But homeowners are ultimately the ones who will have to live with the choices they make during the planning process, so these details

(See Do's, Page 9C)



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2026 REBATES HELP VERMONTERS ACHIEVE THEIR HOME ENERGY GOALS

WEATHERIZATION, HEATING SYSTEMS AND APPLIANCE REBATES CAN HELP HOUSEHOLDS SAVE MONEY

WINOOSKI — Vermonters can save energy with 2026 rebates and financial support from Efficiency Vermont and partners across the state— including weatherization incentives while funding lasts.

“Improving your home’s energy efficiency in 2026 is an investment that will pay off for years to come,” said Peter Walke, Efficiency Vermont’s managing director. “It’ll pay off — literally — with lower energy bills. With improved comfort. With lower emissions thanks to more deliberate energy use. And by lowering demand, it supports a more affordable electricity system for everyone connected to our shared grid.”

When is the perfect time to plan a home energy project?
Now.
Find a contractor in the Efficiency

Excellence Network near you to start your project or begin planning for spring.

Heat pump heating system rebates are available through a joint program offered by Efficiency Vermont and your electric utility. Efficiency Vermont’s website — efficiencyvermont.com — also has information on additional incentives that may be available from your utility.

Weatherization rebates offering up to 90% cash back are also available from Efficiency Vermont — with limited-time funding from the Vermont Department of Public Service supporting increased incentives for low- and moderate-income households. Free weatherization services for low-income households are also available through the state’s Weatherization Assistance Programs.

Incentives and solutions that can help Vermonters embrace energy savings in 2026 include:

• **Free resources to prioritize energy investments in the new year.**

Understand current offers or diagnose high bills by calling Efficiency Vermont’s Energy Advisors. You can also schedule a free Virtual Home Energy Visit with an Efficiency Vermont energy expert to get personalized advice and a list of next steps toward your goals.

• **Up to 90% cash back on weatherization projects.**

Air sealing and insulating your home lowers energy bills, makes a home more comfortable year-round, and improves indoor air quality. Weatherization also makes it easier to embrace clean technologies like heat pumps. *Increased weatherization incentives are only available through the end of 2026 — or while funding lasts.*

• **Rebates for heating**

systems that work for your household.

Save up to \$475 on a ductless “mini split” heat pump, or save up to \$2,200 on a ducted heat pump. Or opt for advanced wood heating with a wood or pellet stove (and a \$400 rebate), or get \$6,000 off central wood heating systems.

• **Save up to \$1,000 on water heaters that use heat pump technology.**

Get a \$600 discount when you upgrade to a heat pump water heater, bringing the efficiency and savings of a heat pump to the hot water needed in your kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room. Income-eligible households can get an additional \$400 back.

• **Create a healthy home with appliance rebates.**

Control your home’s temperature and save on energy bills with up to \$100 cash back on a smart thermostat. Or manage moisture in your home with up to \$90 off a

dehumidifier. You can also get up to \$400 off a heat pump clothes dryer or washer/heat pump dryer combo unit. If you’re already planning for summer, get up to \$150 off a window AC unit.

• **Businesses can save on energy investments, too.**

Businesses can get up to \$25,000 in additional funding for custom projects or take advantage of increased incentives for pre-approved LED lighting projects. *These incentives are only available for projects completed by November 2026.*

Low-income households may qualify for additional support, including a voucher for up to \$1,200 for replacing one eligible household appliance (like a refrigerator, freezer, or clothes washer). Additional offers include free weatherization through the state’s Weatherization Assistance Programs, and free efficient products like LED light bulbs and water-saving devices. Contact

Efficiency Vermont for details.

Vermont lenders can also help you achieve your New Year’s energy goals with financing that removes up-front costs for home energy projects. Low-interest Home Energy Loans offer up to \$25,000 for home energy upgrades, with 0% interest for income-qualified borrowers. Or you can pay off a project on your utility bill using the Weatherization Repayment Assistance Program. Contact Efficiency Vermont for qualifying information.

Additional rebates may also be available from your electric or gas utility. Contact Efficiency Vermont’s Energy Advisors to learn about all available offers at www.efficiencyvermont.com/contact.

Efficiency Vermont is the nation’s first Energy Efficiency Utility. It works with partners to help our state transition to more affordable, low-carbon energy use through education, incentives, and support for our clean energy workforce.



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TRAVIS SNYDER OF Cedar Ridge Sprinkler Corp. of Essex Junction drills into the ceiling of a house in East Middlebury undergoing renovation to install a sprinkler system.

Independent photo/Steve James

Year-Round Hazardous Waste Collection

The HazWaste Center at the District Transfer Station in Middlebury is open to residents from any of the District’s member towns.

Most items are accepted from residents free of charge.

Businesses must pay for disposal and must call 388-2333 for an appointment.

Common items include:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Acetone | Drainer opener/cleaner | Mercury thermometers | Primers or shellacs |
| Acids | Driveway sealer | Mercury thermostats | Rechargeable batteries |
| Adhesives | Dry cleaning solvents | Mineral spirits | Roach traps/poison |
| Algaecides | Flea & tick killer | Mothballs | Rug/upholstery cleaner |
| Aerosols | Fluorescent bulbs* | Motor oil | Solvent-based |
| Antifreeze | Fly killer | Mouse/rat poison | Glues |
| Ant killer | Formaldehyde | Nail polish | Stains |
| Ammonia | Fuel additives | Nail polish remover | Stump remover |
| Auto body filler | Fungicides | Naphtha | Tars or resins |
| Automotive fluids | Furniture polish | Oil-based paint | Transmission fluid |
| Chlorine bleach | Gasoline | Oily waste | Tub & tile cleaner |
| Brake fluid | Hair dyes | Oven cleaner | Varnish |
| Bug spray | Kerosene | Paint thinner/turpentine | Weed killer/fertilizer |
| Button cell batteries | Latex paint | Parts cleaner | Wood preservative |
| Contact cement | Lead paint chips | Pesticides/herbicides | |
| Deck sealer | Lead-acid batteries | Photographic chemicals | |
| Diesel fuel | Lime/rust remover | Pool chemicals | |



Household hazardous waste includes any unused product that is poisonous, reactive, corrosive, or flammable.

You can easily identify hazardous products by reading packaging labels. Look for key words such as **Warning!** **Danger!** **Poison!** **Caution!**

Improper disposal of these products poses a risk to human health and the environment.

*All compact fluorescents (CFLs) are accepted at no cost; other types of general purpose fluorescent bulbs are free to recycle in quantities of 10 or fewer per day. A per-bulb nominal fee applies for more than 10.

Not accepted: laboratory chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fireworks, flares, explosives, smoke detectors, ammunition, and radioactive waste.

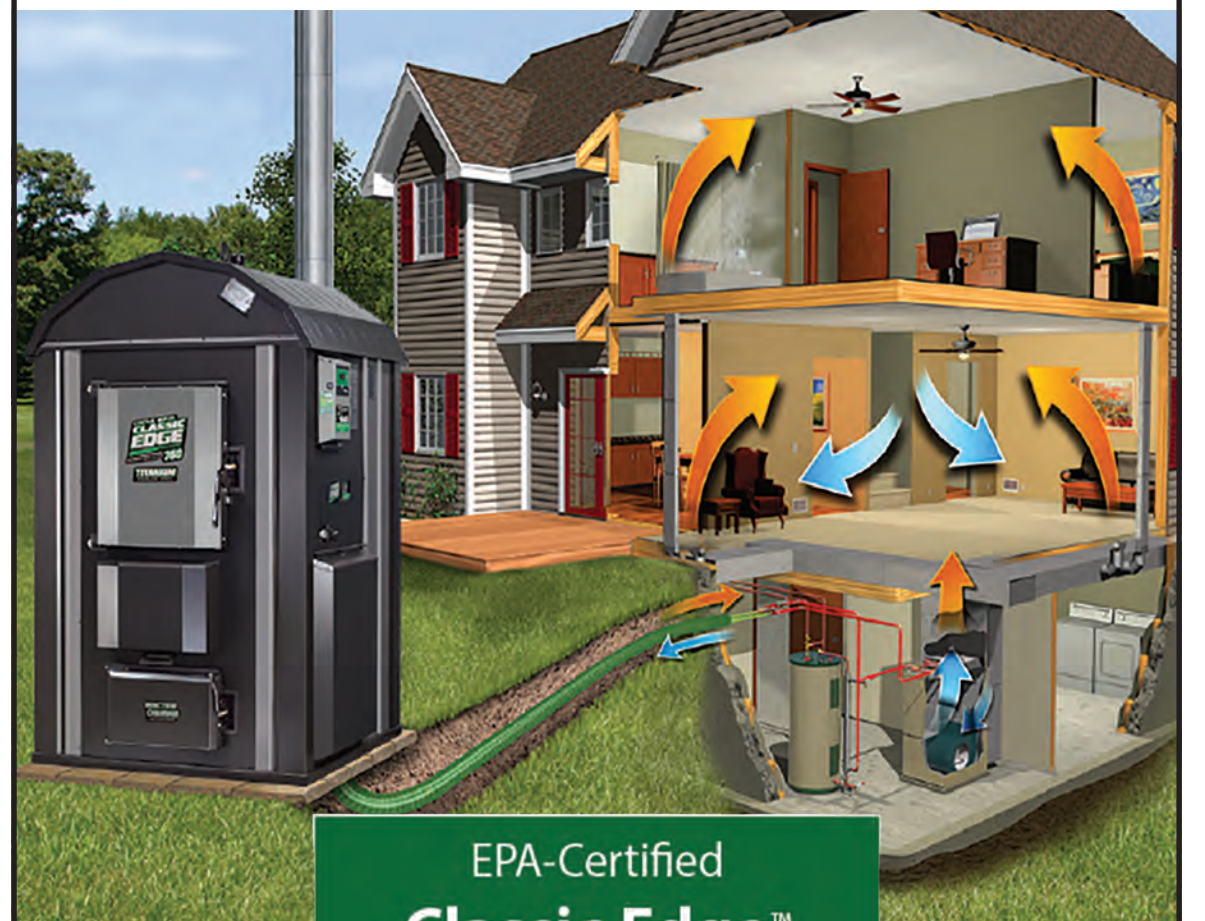
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Karnatz

(Continued from Page 3C)
time.”

He noted that the amount of interest in such projects has changed throughout the years, as awareness of Vermont Land Trust and its farmland conservation program has grown.

“Over the years, it hasn’t been me looking for properties to conserve; we’ve got more properties coming in that want to be conserved,” he explained. “There’s a long waiting list and has been for quite a while.”

IMPROVING SOIL HEALTH

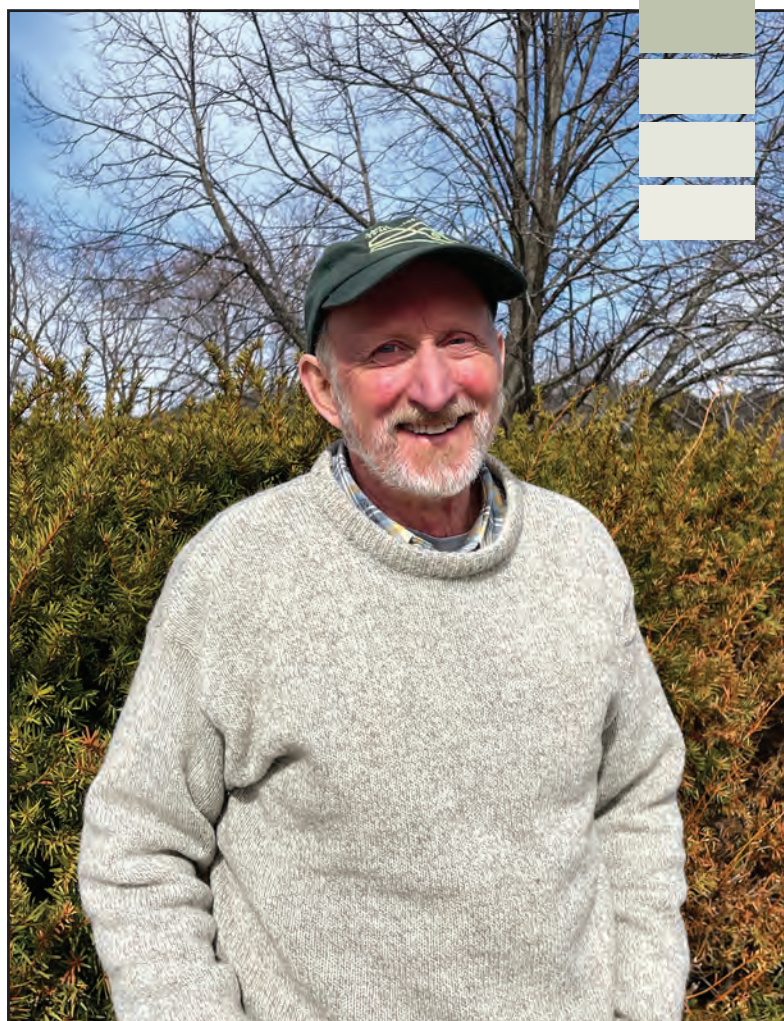
Along with helping protect farmland, VLT also works to help farmers with things like improving water and soil health and buying farmland. Conservation can help make farmland more affordable, as Karnatz explained the sale of development rights can reduce the overall price tag for a property.

He pointed to examples of projects that have helped farmers buy farmland, such as a group of farmers that purchased and conserved land in Jericho to grow produce.

“Helping young farmers find land and locate pieces that we can conserve is one of our other priorities,” he said. “We call it farmland access, getting people access to farmland. It’s a big barrier because land is expensive.”

Many of the projects Karnatz has worked on over the years have involved farms in Addison County. In the town of Addison, dairy farmers Melanie and Pat Harrison of Harrison’s Homegrown have conserved over 400 acres with VLT.

The land trust also helped Abby and Trent Roleau get their



THROUGH HIS WORK as a project director at Vermont Land Trust, Al Karnatz has worked with Champlain Valley farmers to conserve 400 farms in the region over the past 32 years. Such projects can help farmers protect their farmland, purchase land, and improve soil and water health on their property.

Independent photo/Marin Howell

diversified farm started on over 300 conserved acres in Bristol and Jon Lucas purchase and conserve land for his dairy operation, Lucas Dairy Farm, in Orwell.

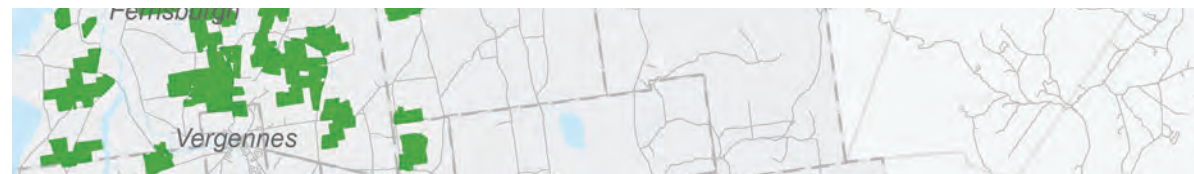
What has Karnatz enjoyed most about working with farmers on these projects over the years?

“The outcome,” he said. “I’ve

enjoyed the outcome of knowing that really some of the best farmland in Vermont and in New England will be protected for future generations.”

He added that the inspiration farmers give him has pushed him along in his work.

“It’s not easy to try to make a living running a farm,” he said. “It’s constantly changing, it will continue to change, but what won’t change...is this land will be available for farming.”



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AMP UP BIODIVERSITY IN YOUR YARD

VERGENNES — This spring, Bixby Library kicked off a hands-on series designed to demonstrate how to bring native plants into outdoor spaces and turn your lawn into a living habitat. Native plants boost biodiversity, support pollinators and birds, and reduce maintenance, fertilizer use, and runoff. Learn why native plants matter, how to assess and prepare your site, choose the

right plants, convert your lawn step-by-step, and maintain long-term success.

Participants need not take part in all three sessions in order to follow the growing season. Presenters are Lisa Sausville of the Vergennes organization Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, and Ashley Robinson of the Vermont Landscape and Nursery Association for Biodiversity Builders.

The first session, called "Understanding Your Site," was held this past Saturday, March 21. The second session is scheduled for Saturday, June 27, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., "Creating and Implementing Your Plan." Then on Saturday, Sept. 26, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. is the third session, titled, "Taking Stock and Determining What's Next." All will be held at Bixby Memorial Library, 258 Main St., in downtown Vergennes.

For more information email to Ashley at arobinsonld@gmail.com Registration link: tinyurl.com/BuildyBioAtBixby.



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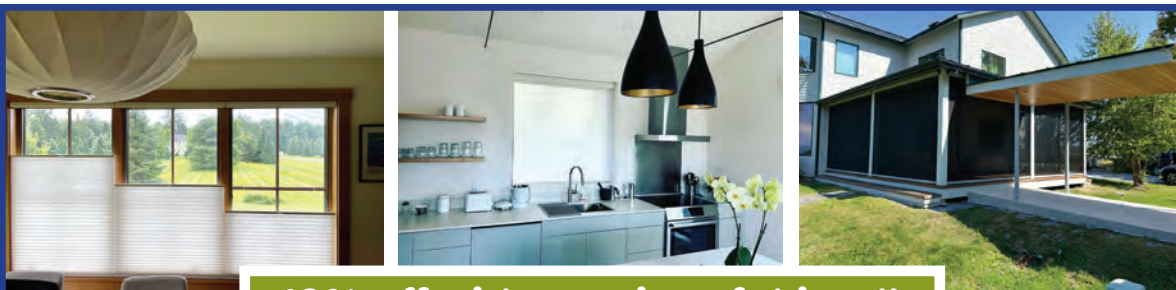
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Do's

(Continued from Page 5C)
 merit ample consideration and should not be treated as trivial.

DON'T emphasize cost over quality. Homeowners should do their best to establish a renovation budget and stay within that budget, but quality materials should take precedence over cost. Many budget-friendly furnishings and accessories are durable and aesthetically appealing, so homeowners need not enter a bathroom renovation thinking high-end products are their only options. But it's important that homeowners recognize the conventional wisdom that buyers get what they pay for when it comes to home renovations. If homeowners try to cut costs on materials, they may need to update or redo the bathroom much sooner than they would if they invest in quality furnishings and accessories the first time around.

Bathroom renovations can be costly. Remembering some simple dos and don'ts can give homeowners the peace of mind that their renovation investment will result in an impressive, durable space.

— Metro Creative

JOE DESABRAIS OF Desabrais Glass, top, in Middlebury, puts the finishing touches to a shower door he just installed. **Dustin Whitcomb** of Champlain Valley Plumbing and Heating, bottom, drills into the wall of a shower to install a new valve.

Independent photos/Steve James



Give 'em a hand

A WHOLE BUNCH of doorknobs sit ready for the various doors that come and go through a theater prop shop at Middlebury College's Wright Theater.

Independent photo/John S. McCright



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THE TWO PIPE wrenches on the right seem to dwarf the little crescent wrench on the left. The big, iron teeth on the pipe wrenches can get a grip on any round surface, and the adjustable crescent can fit snugly on smaller bolts or nuts.

Independent photo/Steve James

KITCHEN FLOORING OPTIONS CAN BOOST YOUR HOME VALUE

It's well-documented that kitchens are popular gathering spaces in homes. Perhaps that's one reason why homeowners looking to sell their homes direct so much attention to the kitchen before listing their properties. The real estate experts at Trulia note that emphasis is well worth it, as buyers inspect kitchens and primary bathrooms more than any other spaces in a home.

Cabinets and countertops garner considerable attention when pondering kitchen renovations, but it's equally important that homeowners pay attention to flooring when planning a remodel. The following are some notable flooring materials homeowners may want to consider as they plan to remodel their kitchens.

• **Ceramic tile:** Ceramic tile is a popular kitchen flooring material. The flooring experts at Avalon Flooring note that ceramic tile boasts an elegant and clean feel. Ceramic tile also is durable and easy to maintain. That simple maintenance includes ease of

cleaning, as ceramic tile can be quickly cleared of spills and dirt tracked into a kitchen from outside. Ceramic tile also comes in a wide variety of colors, a versatility that undoubtedly adds to its popularity.

• **Porcelain tile:** Porcelain tile is another versatile option that can add instant aesthetic appeal to a kitchen. Porcelain tile is waterproof, which appeals to many homeowners looking to renovate their kitchens. Porcelain also is easily cleaned and durable, as flooring experts estimate that porcelain tiles can last anywhere from 15 to 50 years. Porcelain tile also requires minimal maintenance, which appeals to busy homeowners.

• **Engineered hardwood:** Engineered hardwood is a popular choice that many homeowners appreciate due to its strength and aesthetic appeal. This flooring material is made with real wood that's reinforced to make it even more durable and water-resistant. The result is an easily maintained product that also can last as

long as solid wood flooring so long as it's well-maintained. Various shades, designs and textures are available, which makes this a versatile option.

• **Laminate flooring:** Laminate flooring is a budget-friendly option that's available in a wide range of styles, colors and patterns. The smooth surface of laminate flooring makes it easy to clean, and it's resistance to water is another characteristic that appeals to homeowners. But spills on laminate floors are best cleaned up quickly, and the material is vulnerable to warping and staining if exposed to moisture for extended periods of time.

These are some of the options homeowners can consider as they ponder which material to install on their kitchen floors as they remodel these popular rooms.

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- Geoff Conrad and Tim Hollander

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PUT SOME SPRING IN YOUR CLEANING STEP

Spring is the season of nature's rebirth. Trees and flowers begin to bloom anew each spring, and young animals can be seen frolicking with their parents. During a time when it seems like the entire planet gets a refresh, many homeowners turn their thoughts to refreshing their homes as well. As the days lengthen and the weather warms, spring cleaning takes center stage. Spring cleaning is more extensive than simply washing away grime, as cleaning a home often offers a psychological reset for the coming months. A clear strategy can make the task of spring cleaning feel less daunting, and these tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen after months spent indoors.

Declutter before cleaning

The rule of thumb when starting on spring cleaning is to combat clutter before cleaning. Trying to clean around clutter is inefficient and may result in throwing in the towel prematurely. It is important to remove as much as possible from each room before you begin cleaning. As homeowners move through each room, they can assess whether they've used items in the last year or whether they serve any functional or aesthetic purposes. If not, they can be trashed or donated.

Move top to bottom
It's important to follow the rules of science when spring cleaning. That means that dust and debris will be affected by gravity. Engaging in a top-down approach will help make cleaning more efficient. Beginning at the ceiling and working down towards the floors will help people avoid having to clean the same surface twice.

Using a duster or a microfibre cloth, individuals can clear

cobwebs from corners and dust from crown molding. Fingerprints will accumulate near light switches and door handles, so those areas should be wiped down, too.

Homeowners can conduct a thorough cleaning of heating and cooling output and intake vents as they likely have gathered dust over the winter. A down of floor moldings can get to any area near the floor or under furniture that doesn't get frequent cleaning.

Do a kitchen reset
Focusing attention on the kitchen, which tends to be the busiest room in the house, is a wise idea for spring cleaning plans. This is the time for individuals to pull everything out of the refrigerator and pantry and check for expiration dates. Wiping down the shelves means cleaning away any accumulated food drips or spills. Additional areas to consider include behind the refrigerator, inside the dishwasher filter and inside the

microwave.

Focus on air quality

It's key to replace the HVAC system filters come springtime, as well as any air purifiers in the home. This will help reduce allergens and ensure that the cooling system will run efficiently when it's time to turn it on.

Spring cleaning takes place each year. Prioritizing decluttering and following a systematic path through the home helps people eliminate stress and mess at the same time.

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HOW TO MAKE A LAUNDRY ROOM A MORE FUNCTIONAL SPACE

Functionality is important when designing the interior spaces in a home. Homeowners who redesign their interior spaces can emphasize functionality to help reduce clutter and create a more efficient and even calming space.

Laundry rooms may not be the most glamorous rooms in a home, but they do get lots of usage, particularly in homes with children. Because laundry rooms tend to be well trafficked areas, it makes sense for homeowners to make them as functional and

user-friendly as possible. With that in mind, homeowners can consider these tips to make laundry rooms more functional spaces.

- Install a freestanding laundry sink. A laundry sink also adds function to a laundry room by enabling

homeowners to hand wash certain clothes and apply stain removal products in the same space where the rest of their clothes are being cleaned. Installing a laundry sink is a relatively inexpensive job, but the cost may go up if new plumbing, venting or electrical work is necessary.

- Add a countertop work space. If you already have ample storage and won't be placing the washer or dryer atop a laundry pedestal, then installing some countertop above the appliances can add function and aesthetic appeal. A countertop workspace above a dryer provides an accessible space to fold laundry the moment it dries, reducing the likelihood that clothes will become wrinkled and ensuring you won't put off folding.

- Install floating shelves. Floating shelves won't cost a lot of money, but they can be ideal in cramped laundry rooms. Shelves provide a space to store detergent and other items that may not fit inside laundry pedestals, including baskets.

- Add hanging storage. Some articles of clothing should not be dried in a dryer for fear of shrinking the fabric or destroying the item. In such instances, some readily accessible hanging storage capacity can make the laundry room more functional. Items can be hung on hangers or over a hanging rack suspended from the ceiling if space is minimal.

- Purchase laundry pedestals with storage capacity. Laundry pedestals make useful additions to a laundry room. Many homeowners place their washing machines and dryers on top of pedestals with storage drawers, which can be used to store everything from dryer sheets to clothes irons to stain removal kits. Pedestals can be particularly useful in cramped laundry rooms where the only means to adding storage is to go up and not out.

Laundry rooms are heavily used spaces in a home, so it makes sense to take steps to make these areas as functional as possible.

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REDEFINE A LIVING ROOM

Spring is widely cherished as a season of rejuvenation. As winter winds down, many people embrace the arrival of spring blooms and the regrowth

of grass on the ground and leaves on the trees, which can breathe new life into landscapes that might have grown a bit stale in previous months.

That same staleness can affect a home's interior as well. Home interiors can benefit from periodic updates in much the same way a landscape benefits when spring blooms return. As homeowners seek to refresh their living spaces, they can consider these features to redefine their living rooms.

• **Fireplace:** A wood-burning fireplace is undeniably a game changer when looking to redefine a living space. But such a project could be a significant undertaking in a home that does not already feature a wood-burning fireplace. Homeowners who want to add a wood-burning fireplace can

reinvest a living room, but they will likely need to adhere to building codes, secure permits and even consult with an engineer to ensure such an addition does not affect the structural integrity of the home. A gas-powered fireplace is a less demanding project, but will also require some extra work if homeowners need to connect a gas line where no such line currently exists. A plug-in electric fireplace can create a new ambiance and will not require as much time, effort and money as the alternatives.

• **Coffered ceiling:** A coffered ceiling can immediately redefine the impression people get of a living space. Coffered ceilings feature a series of rectangular, square or octagonal grids that are typically accentuated by molding. Coffered ceilings provide a luxurious and even historic aesthetic, making them an ideal addition for homeowners looking to redefine an existing space.

• **Windows:** New windows are another option when homeowners are hoping to redefine a living room. Modern windows are energy-efficient, so replacing

aging windows may help homeowners combat rising energy costs. If a yard is a notable feature of a home's exterior, new windows that accentuate the view from a living space can quickly redefine how residents and guests see the room. Permits may be necessary if you're expanding existing windows, but that can be worth it if you're able to design the space around the view. All that extra natural light also may reinvent the feeling people get upon entering the space.

• **Wallpaper:** Interior design specialists note that wallpaper is making a comeback. Wallpaper can be used to draw attention to a wall in much the same way bold colors are chosen for accent walls. Wallpaper on an accent wall can feature a bold pattern or a strong color to add a sense of personality to a room that might be lacking if the walls are currently painted in neutral colors.

Homeowners can consider any number of features when looking to give their living spaces a fresh look.

— Metro Creative



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TAKE CARE OF WOOD FLOORING

Natural wood flooring is a stunning feature of millions of homes. Wood floors are appreciated for their durability and aesthetic appeal, each of which is bolstered when floors are properly maintained.

A host of variables can affect how long wood flooring lasts and how its appearance holds up over time. Wood flooring in homes with pets that roam around the house, such as cats and dogs, may require more frequent maintenance than those without pets. The same goes for homes with children, who may routinely track dirt in from outside or spill food and drinks with greater frequency than adults. But even wood flooring in homes without pets and children requires consistent maintenance. Homeowners who want to protect their wood floors and ensure they maintain their aesthetic appeal for the long haul can consider the following maintenance tips, courtesy of the National Wood Flooring Association.

- Sweep, dust or mop each day. The NWFA recommends daily maintenance to remove dust and dirt that accumulates each day.

Such cleaning can prevent damage that can compromise the aesthetic appeal of the floors and potentially affect their longevity.

- Clean spills immediately. Spills are inevitable, especially in homes where young children live. Though spills might not be preventable, the damage they can cause can be avoided with a prompt response. Cleaning spills immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth can ensure the floors do not soak up the spilled liquids. The NWFA notes that mopping wood floors with a wet mop or steam mop will damage the finish and the wood over long periods of time. If allowed to soak into the floor, spilled liquid can contribute to warping, swelling and staining. Each of those issues can be costly to address, but a quick and immediate cleanup can prevent all three from happening.

- Vacuum once per week on the bare floor setting. Using a vacuum is less taxing on wood floors than sweeping so long as the vacuum is on the bare floor setting. Sweeping is best avoided to prevent small particles from being dragged across the floor, which gradually wears down the finish and ultimately contributes to a dull look. Vacuuming vertically lifts the debris off the floor,

ensuring nothing is dragged along the surface of the floor. If you're using a manual vacuum instead of a robotic vacuum, vacuum with the grain to reduce the risk of damage.

- Apply wood flooring cleaner once per month. If your wood floors are newly installed, ask your installer to recommend a cleaner specifically designed for the finish on your floor. If your floors are not new, contact a flooring professional for a recommendation. Wood flooring cleaners specific to a given floor's finish are important because these products are specialized and formulated with both cleaning and protection of the floor itself in mind. The right wood floor cleaner won't lead to dull-looking floors nor damage the finish.

- Recoat floors if they start to look dull. The NWFA notes that recoating with wood floor finish every three to five years can renew the appearance of natural wood flooring that might be starting to look a little dull.

Well-maintained wood floors add much to a home's interiors. Some simple maintenance can ensure wood floors remain durable and aesthetically appealing for decades.

— Metro Creative

THREE-SEASON ROOMS EXTEND LIVING SPACE

The market research experts at Business Research Insights report that the three-season sunroom market size is projected to nearly double between 2025 and 2035. BRI reports that 65 percent of homeowners prefer cost-effective sunrooms when seeking to extend their living space.

The popularity of sunrooms can be traced to a number of variables, including year-round access to a home's surrounding landscape. That access might be hindered if the only spaces to experience nature is a patio, deck or another traditional type of outdoor living space. But sunrooms, particularly those equipped with heating and cooling, can bring homeowners in touch with nature during times of year when they might otherwise be compelled to steer clear of their outdoor living spaces due to less welcoming weather.

— Metro Creative



WATERFALL EDGE COUNTERTOPS COME INTO THEIR OWN

The waterfall edge style of countertops has evolved from a high-end niche trend into an increasingly popular staple of modern architectural design. Unlike traditional countertops that end at the edge of the cabinet, a waterfall edge makes a 90-degree turn and continues down to the floor, covering a kitchen peninsula or island.

According to Angi, waterfall edge countertops are known for their seamless and continuous appearances that really are show-stopping to see. They tend to make a bigger visual impact compared to traditional horizontal slabs. It's important to note that not every stone fabricator is willing or able to execute the waterfall effect. Installation requires a precise mitered edge, which risks chipping the fine-cut corner.

The added expense also is nothing to take lightly. Waterfall edges also can make cleaning more involved. There is no lip at the end of counters, so it's hard to get a dustpan flush to catch crumbs off the surface. Also, the side panels of stone mean there's extra surfaces to clean and seal.

The uniqueness of waterfall edge countertops merits careful consideration prior to installation.

— Metro Creative

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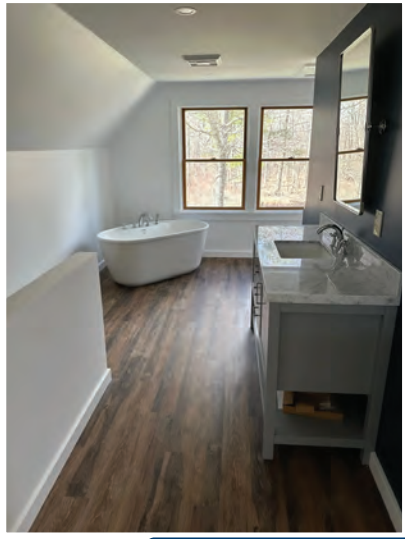
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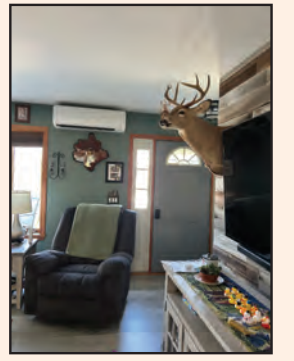
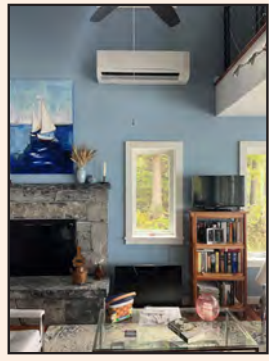
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