

## Cash for Caulkers

On the way in this morning, I was listening to NPR and they had a story on the "Cash for Caulkers" (aka HomeStar) proposal that has been proposed as an economic stimulus by way of improving the energy consumption of homes.

My initial reaction is "Absolutely - bring it on!". We would love if there was a big push toward weatherization. When we go out to look at an older home that the owner is thinking of renovating, we usually marvel at the lack insulation. In fact, the home we tore down and replaced with The Incredibly Green Home was just that - a brick and block shell with zero insulation.

But what to do on a limited budget with a home built 80 years ago in "brick over block" fashion? Lets take one of the older homes built in the late '30s here on Fairglen as an example. The exterior of the homes are brick and the interior is plaster over lathe with no insulation. You've only got a 3/4" gap, so there is no room to get insulation into that cavity. So you start by tearing off plaster, reframing it over the block, then you have to completely rewire the home to current electrical standards, and oh yeah tear out all the plumbing and yes you are gonna need a whole new hvac system with new duct work and the list goes on and on. So what started as a little job to caulk the house turns into an estimate for \$200,000+ worth of work.

Without a hugely desctructive and expensive gut-rehab process, the most likely improvements are filling accessible cracks, replacing old windows, and improving the insulation in the attic, maybe by spraying the underside of the roof with open cell foam. That's about it folks, and that is unfortunate for the owners of that type of home, especially going forward when energy costs really start going up.

And its all the more reason that if you are one of the fortunate people who can afford to build a new home, that you make sure your envelope is a primary concern. Build it right!