

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Public Service Department Renewable Energy Standard Outreach Session 1

Overview

On September 11, 2023, at 6pm, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) held the first of two hybrid (in person and virtual) listening sessions on statewide energy policies for the Public Service Department (PSD) at CCRPC offices at 110 W. Canal Street in Winooski. Twenty-three participants attended the event.

Most participants were strong proponents of incentivizing large solar and wind projects and more net metering. The group was almost unanimous against burning wood as a source of electricity, and many did not think Hydro Quebec should be considered renewable. There was a lot of concern about the requirement to meet the renewable energy standard in a least cost way. This event was part of the broader effort that the Vermont Public Service Department is conducting to do a comprehensive review of Vermont's renewable and clean electricity policies and programs.

Approach to the Event

For this session, CCRPC invited Chittenden County municipal energy committee members and their contacts to "a forum that would provide a space to hear from Vermonters about what they value about renewable electricity and what they would like to see from renewable and clean electricity policies and programs in Vermont".

The following materials developed by PSD were made available prior to the event:

<u>Event Materials</u> | <u>Renewable Electricity Policies & Programs in Vermont »</u> | <u>Where Does Vermont's Electricity</u> <u>Come From? »</u> | <u>Trade-offs »</u>

During the event, CCRPC presented the slides provided by the Public Service Department, asked a series of questions using the Slido dynamic polling app, and asked participants to complete a demographic survey and a feedback questionnaire.

Partners

In addition to local energy committee members, CCRPC attempted to reach underrepresented groups by contacting the following organizations to see if they would be interested in recruiting participants or being participants in this or a future session: Vermont Environmental Justic Network, Rights and Democracy Vermont, and Vermont Student Climate Coalition. However, we did not receive responses from those organizations. The second listening session we hosted on September 19 was done in partnership with Third Act Vermont.

How this was advertised

This event was advertised via email and on Front Porch Forum. Dinner from Sarom's Café in Winooski was provided.

Who Attended

This session was led by Melanie Needle, Senior Energy Planner at CCRPC with support from Anne Nelson Stoner, CCRPC Equity Manager, and Ann Janda, CCRPC Senior Energy Project Manager. Adam Jacobs, Utilities Economic Analyst from the Vermont Department of Public Service attended to help answer technical questions.

Although 27 people registered for the event, there were 23 actual participants with 11 attending inperson and 12 attending online via Zoom. The group trended older, male, and very knowledgeable about energy policy and renewable energy credits.

Participant demographic responses:

Genders: 14 men, 5 women, 1 gender fluid, not every participant completed this question

<u>Age:</u> Most participants reported that they were over 60 (12), with the remainder 45-59 (5), and 30-44 (3). 3 Participants did not answer this question.

<u>Income</u>: Six participants reported earning over \$100,000 last year, four reported earning \$75,000-\$99,999 last year, two reported earning \$50,000-\$74,999, one reported earning \$25-49,999, and one reported earning under \$25,000. The remaining participants did not answer the question.

Home ownership: All but one participant reported owning their home.

What we heard

CCRPC used Slido to make the meeting interactive, obtain feedback from the participants and to inspire group discussion regarding the answers. The following questions were asked. After each question was completed, the meeting participants discussed the answers. Their comments regarding each question are captured after the discussion of each question below.

- 1. How important should each of the following be when considering how Vermont gets its electricity?
- 2. Of the electric system characteristics you just considered, which do you think should be the single most important factor in how Vermont gets its electricity?
- In thinking about the issues you just ranked in Question 1, what is important to you about how you (personally) get renewable or low carbon electricity? Please check the option below that most applies to you.
- 4. In the future, what would you like this mix to look like? Check all that apply.
- 5. Going forward, how much would you support or oppose Vermont getting its electricity from the following sources?

1. How important should each of the following be when considering how Vermont gets its electricity?

Question 1 was asked earlier on in the meeting after the Tell Us About Yourself Slide. Question 1 utilized a ranking poll to rank the options presented in order of preference on how Vermont gets its electricity. Question 1 received 19 votes and 19 participants answered the question.

The participants were asked to drag their highest preference to the top of the list. Through the ordering of the list of preferences, the participants are essentially giving points to each option. The order of the ranking aligns with the points assigned to each option and each question is assigned a ranking score. Once the voting is over, the points for each option are summarized and then divided by the number of people who participated in the ranking poll. This provides an average ranked score for each option and the option with the highest score is the most preferred one.



Comments:

- Everything on the list seems to be a priority... It's hard to rank them
- It's hard to rank them when they all need to be prioritized

• They all need to happen in tandem, they are entangled issues

Need to reduce carbon emissions now because:

- Existential crisis
- Faced with this right now.
- Have to solve it now.
- Reducing co2 isn't that the whole point of renewable energy?
- People agreed the overarching priority is reducing carbon emissions. That is clear.

Renewables:

- Some renewables emit carbon like crazy.
- Doesn't include nuclear, but views haven't changed about nuclear and it is wicked expensive to build new facilities

Impacts on natural resources:

- One participant thinks this is the most important.
- If too focused on emissions, we will not slow down development.
- If you do everything to stop emissions, you must also save natural resources.
- This can be used against any renewable energy developer because you might cut down a few trees.

Affordability and Jobs:

- I am sad that affordability and local jobs ranked so low in our poll. Must find ways to support jobs and economic in the state.
- Without jobs there is no priority
- I too prioritized in-state and economic development
- These are good values, but I think it goes hand in hand with other high priorities

Other:

• Health impacts on elderly folks, children also disproportionately suffer harmful effects of diesel fuel combustion.

When we reviewed the **Renewable Energy Standard (RES) Tier 1 and Teir 2 slide**, we received the following comments.

- When the RES was established, it did not consider nuclear. Also, Wood and biomass is very inefficient. These all must be a lower priority than wind and solar.
- The graphics (pie charts) presented are not transparent. It is unclear how many of these RECs came with power that we used versus decoupled RECs that we just bought. [Adam noted that dark blue areas all came with power, the New York Power Authority all came with power and 2/3rds or 3/4s of the Hydro Quebec all comes with power through Highgate at the Canadian Border. There is some portion of that in there and we do have that figure for 2021 and will have it for 2022 soon.]
- Other states don't consider Hydro Quebec renewable. [Adam noted that other states do consider Hydro Quebec to be clean. For example, The Massachusetts Clean Energy Standard does allow Hydro Quebec.]
- Need to consider why some places don't consider our RECs valuable. Maybe we need to talk about that.

- We can't develop wind because of noise ordinances. I find the five-megawatt cap frustrating. [Adam noted that most wind projects are not small, distributed generation <5MW (Tier II), and large wind RECs are more expensive than alternatives for Tier I like large hydro. Currently, there is no natural home in VT's RES for new renewables >5MW.
- . Currently there is an obligation for least cost solutions.]
- Gotta raise these limits
- Why still five-megawatt cap? There is no incentive for rooftop solar. We can only reach our goals if utilities build large-scale projects.
- Utilities pay higher rates for net-metering. Our goals are too low. Should be above where we are. I know we are probably going to increase Tier 2. Really need to jump these percentages way up.
- Can't keep preventing large solar projects. We need large solar projects.
- 2. Of the electric system characteristics, you just considered, which do you think should be the single most important factor in how Vermont gets its electricity?

Question 2 was asked after the slides covering material on the RES Tier 1/Tier 2 and net metering. Question 2 received 10 votes from 10 participants. Question 2 was a multiple-choice poll. The participants unanimously selected "reducing carbon emissions that cause climate change".

Reducing carbon emissions that cause climate change - 10 votes	
	100%

3. What is important to you about how you (personally) get renewable or low carbon electricity? Please check the option below that most applies to you.

Question 3 was a multiple-choice poll which received 14 votes and 14 participants. This question was asked after the slide on source electricity tradeoffs The majority of the group responded that they would prefer some combination of getting it from "my utility and myself."

I would prefer to get it from my utility on my behalf - 0 votes	
•	0%
I would prefer to get it entirely from my own on-site system (e.g "off grid") - 4 votes	
	29%
I would prefer some combination of getting it from my utility and myself (e.g net-metering votes	g) - 10
	71%
l'm not sure - 0 votes	
•	0%

Comments:

- For large projects, net-metering is not feasible, and utilities won't buy from larger projects. There is no market for big projects.
- That's why we shouldn't be buying from Hydro Quebec. We have RECs that Walmart won't even buy.
- The PUC's top priority is keeping costs down, so almost required to discourage net-metering.

- We can regulate what a good credit is. Many of our cheap RECs don't qualify by global standards.
- Utilities want power, they just don't want to pay for it. [Adam noted that state law requires utilities to meet the standard in the least cost way. This is not an internal policy, it is state law.]
- Is it possible to meet Vermont's needs just through net-metering
- Not in off season
- Size is also issue
- Batteries can make a difference
- Would need massive amount of development and batteries to do via net-metering with solar
- Solar and renewables need to be integrated into everyday life. Boats generating, buses generating when not in use, etc.
- Agree with that statement
- Lack of incentives to install solar
- Goals are too low. Act 174 of 2016 was too timid, not enough geared towards aggressive carbon reduction.
- 4. What would you like this mix to look like? Question 4 was multiple choice poll, that allowed participants to check all that apply. This question had 14 votes and 14 participants.

I like the current mix of electricity and don't see the need for any significant changes - 0 votes			
	0%		
I would like to see more electricity coming from low or no-emissions resources - 13 votes			
	93%		
I would like to see more electricity coming from renewable resources - 8 votes			
	57%		
I'm not sure - 0 votes			
•	0%		

5. In the future, what would you like this mix to look like?

Question 5 was also a multiple-choice poll that received 14 votes from 14 participants. Most of the participants selected that they would like to see more electricity coming from low or no-emissions resources.

In the future, what would you like this mix to look like? Check all that apply. Multiple Choice Poll 2 14 votes 2 14 participants	∱ Share ∨
I like the current mix of electricity and don't see the need for any significant changes \cdot	- 0 votes
•	0%
I would like to see more electricity coming from low or no-emissions resources - 13 vo	93%
I would like to see more electricity coming from renewable resources - 8 votes	
	57%
I'm not sure - 0 votes	
	0%

6. Going forward, how much would you support or oppose Vermont getting its electricity from the following sources?

Question 6 was a ranking poll question that 14 people completed. Solar received the highest-ranking score. See the information from question 1 which explains the scoring.

	0			
↓↑	Going forward, now much would you support or oppose vermont getting its electricity from the following sources?	合 Shar	e v	
	Ranking Poll 7 14 votes 24 14 participants			
	1.	solar		
			5.7	
	2.	wind		
			4.9	
	3.	Hydropower		
			4	
	4.	Nuclear		
			2.4	
	5.	Burning methane gas from landfills or farms (biomass)		
			1.8	
	0	Destingues d		
	ю.	Burning wood		
			1.2	

Comments:

• I would agree on the use of biomass for electricity production. The highest and best use of biomass is for offsetting fossil fuels for heating.

- Outdoor air pollution cancer risk in older Adults.
- UEC does not support biomass electricity as renewable. Any source that needs decades to "renew" & loses 70% +/- to thermodynamics each cycle through hardly truly renewable.
- Also, burning wood adds CO2 to the atmosphere that will not be offset by forest regeneration for decades. We have to focus on reducing GHG emissions regardless of source.
- Vermont should do all it can for individuals to invest/install solar. There are differences between utilities, and PSD could make them uniform.
- Net metering as a program is the most effective program we have to encourage solar projects to be built.
- Other states pay customers who add electricity to the grid.
- NJ pays full value of excess credits, including excess at end of year.
- Nuclear should include small modular.

What the Public Service Department Should know

This group was all white, mostly male, most with high incomes, and mostly older. They were highly educated on the topic, and some may work in the renewable energy generation industry. Although one participant was concerned about affordability, this was not a concern for others in the room. Some participants asked technical questions about where to find the least cost requirement and about the amount of unbundled RECs purchased by VT utilities - distinct from long-term contracts that include both energy and RECs. Adam followed up on these questions via email.

The next day after this event, CCRPC met with 350.org members to connect with them on equity issues related to climate. A person who attended our RES event on 9/11 scheduled and participated in this meeting. While not an official public event on obtaining feedback on the RES, CCRPC staff learned that 350.org is in opposition to expanding McNeil Generating station to provide the University of Vermont and the University of Vermont Medical Center with thermal heating. This sentiment tracks closely with the responses heard regarding the use of biomass for electricity.

Reflections on the Process

Feeback surveys and the online chat reflected very positive experiences with the event and a desire to attend more. CCRPC staff felt that there was a bit too much content given the timeframe and decided to reduce the number of slides and polls in the next event. Staff also felt that the hybrid (in-person and online) format was extremely challenging due to CCRPC's equipment, and the online attendees were at a disadvantage because they couldn't hear all the discussion in the room.