



# Public Service Department Regional Listening Sessions Final Report

LAMOILLE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
OCTOBER 2023



## **Overview**

Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) conducted two hybrid listening sessions. One was hosted during the Lamoille County Regional Plan and Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC), and the second session was in collaboration with the Town of Stowe Energy Committee. Twenty-six people attended both the hybrid events, and seven responded to the online survey created for folks who could not attend an event. The following list includes key takeaways from the events and surveys.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- ◆ Affordability of electricity and renewable energy is a common theme and concern. This includes the ability to pay electric bills and structural upgrades to residential infrastructure needed to accommodate technology advancements (e.g., upgrading electrical panels).
- ◆ Grid capacity is also a common concern. The ability for Vermont's electric grid to accommodate increased generation and electrification of thermal and transportation technologies needs to be addressed.
- ◆ Conversations about generation should be paired with energy efficiency, conservation, and battery storage to help offset loads on the grid.
- ◆ Carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions should be factored in when considering where Vermont gets its electricity.
- ◆ A mix of small-scale generation sources should be included in Vermont's electricity generation profile. Primary sources should be solar, rooftop solar, and micro-hydro. Consideration should be given to new small-scale nuclear technology (e.g., sand technology).
- ◆ Educational opportunities are important to help increase understanding and awareness.

## **Approach to the Events**

Two hybrid events were hosted in the Lamoille County Region. Each event was advertised on the LCPC website, Front Porch Forum, and in direct emails. Lamoille County municipal officials, planning commissions, conservation commissions, and energy committees were contacted directly via email. Direct outreach was conducted to local utilities as well. Outreach included the digital event flyer and educational materials developed by the Public Service Department.

The first event was incorporated into a Lamoille Regional Plan/Clean Water Advisory Committee meeting on September 13, 2023, offered in-person at the LCPC Office in Morrisville, and via Zoom. The second event was a standalone event in partnership with the Town of Stowe Energy Committee on September 28 at the Stowe Town Office, with a Zoom option too. Refreshments were provided at both events.

## **Event Attendance**

Twenty-six people attended both hybrid events, and seven responded to the online survey. Municipalities, local utilities, energy committees, and other members of the public interested in Vermont's energy policies and programs were represented. More specific demographic data was not shared during in-person/online events. The demographics survey and feedback survey were provided at both in-person events, but no attendees filled out the surveys. Their focus was on providing feedback on the core listening session questions.

Survey responses collected some anonymous demographic data. For those that answered demographic questions, two individuals described themselves as a woman, and three as a man. Three people were over the age of 60, one was between 45-99, one between 30-44, and one between 18-29. For those that elected to answer, total family income was \$150,000 or more. Only one renter responded, all others owned their home.

## **Reporting**

At the September 13<sup>th</sup> event, a brief PowerPoint presentation provided an overview of Vermont's electricity policies and programs, which included the definition of "renewable" energy, current state policies and programs, and tradeoffs to consider when thinking about where electricity should come from. The first session lasted about one hour. All the core questions were incorporated into the presentation, accompanied by flyers/handouts to provide similar background information. Responses were gathered for all core questions at each listening session, and in surveys. Top priorities expressed by the group were affordability, incentives, natural resource impacts, pollution beyond just carbon, and concerns around the definition of renewable (specifically biomass). Affordability was discussed as a large barrier, as well as the political nature of discussions and who is influencing decision making. In terms of how folks personally get renewable or clean electricity, folks were interested in generating their own solar with the right incentives in place. Policies incentivizing solar generation in Massachusetts were discussed. Opportunities for battery storage were also discussed. As a state, Vermont's electricity mix should promote low-emissions electricity sources, with consideration for other emissions besides carbon. Micro-hydro was discussed multiple times, but nuclear was not popular in this session. Less nuclear should be in the mix, or not at all.

At the September 28<sup>th</sup> event, the PowerPoint presentation was referenced again but could not be shared due to technical difficulties. Slides were described and accompanied by flyers/handouts to provide background information and inform responses to core questions. The second session lasted about one- and one-half hours. Online participants were directed to download the slides shared on LCPC's energy page. Top priorities expressed by this group included carbon emissions and pollution reduction (considering the full life cycle of generation technologies), energy efficiency and conservation, and technology

advancements (e.g., battery storage). Affordability was also discussed as a large barrier, specifically around the topic of structural limitations of buildings (ex: having to upgrade electrical panels, installing drains for air-source heat pump hot water heaters, structural roof loading limitations etc.), and the ability to upgrade systems for household technology use. Vermont's aging housing stock and the cost burden associated with making necessary structural upgrades was discussed at length. If not for these considerations, folks would be interested in generating electricity at home/for themselves, with an option for battery storage to help with reliability. Participants were also interested in personally getting electricity from captured methane, community solar projects, or micro-grids. As a state, Vermont should get electricity from a mix of sources, including solar, micro-hydro, and methane recovery. Small-scale nuclear should be explored but is not a priority at this time.

Feedback during and after the first session revolved around the clarity of the presentation slides. There was some criticism of the "natural resource impacts," and confusion around the breakdown of where Vermont's electricity comes from. Minor adjustments to the slides were made between the first and second sessions to improve overall clarity throughout the presentation. No one responded to the online feedback survey.

Responses in the surveys were similar to the feedback provided in person. Reducing carbon emissions was the most common priority that should be considered when thinking about where Vermont's electricity comes from. The next common priority expressed was affordability, followed by the capacity of electric utilities to "handle" generation, and reliability. In terms of how people personally get renewable electricity, it is important for folks to have a choice: to be able to get electric from utilities, and generate for themselves. The ability of utilities to access and participate in net-metering with their customers is important. If utilities do not have the capacity, folks who are interested in generating can't pursue the projects they are interested in and increase local generation from renewable sources. Barriers expressed in surveys included affordability, utilities not being able to accept renewable electricity generated by customers, and perceptions around risks of generating with nuclear power. The future electric mix in Vermont should include rooftop solar, micro-hydro, as well as nuclear and wind where appropriate. Petroleum sources were also mentioned.

## **Core Takeaways**

### **♦ Policy/program recommendations:**

- Consult other state's policies and programs regarding renewable energy incentives (specifically Massachusetts).
- Revise current net-metering program to allow for the following –

- Customers allowed to source electricity from more than one net-metering site.
- Allow customers to install systems greater than 500 kilowatts under the net metering program.
- Allow customers to carry over Renewable Energy Credits beyond one year.

♦ **Core Priorities to consider where electricity comes from:**

- A mix of sources – primarily solar and micro-hydro. Explore methane recovery, and small-scale “sand technology” nuclear.
- Emissions reduction – including both carbon and other greenhouse gases.
- Energy efficiency and conservation, not just generation/consumption. To offset load on the grid.
- Natural resource impacts (e.g., mining, deforestation). Consider externalities in producing generation technologies (where equipment/materials come from).
- Grid capacity constraints.

♦ **Common themes across events:**

- Affordability – the cost of electricity; supporting low-income folks; the cost of needed upgrades and burdens on utility customers.
- Grid capacity concerns – needed infrastructure upgrades, advancement in battery storage technology.

♦ **Usefulness of Educational Tools:**

- PowerPoint Presentation helped guide talking points but needed to be refined and clarified. Specifically:
  - The Natural Resource Impacts chart was questioned in terms of how it is communicating “impact.” According to the chart, fossil fuels have the least amount of impact. Since this metric is in terms of amount of land needed, it would be beneficial to explore a more holistic discussion (i.e., lifecycle acres).
  - On the graphic accompanying the slide about “what electricity do Vermont utilities generate or buy,” the “unspecified” wedge was not clear to folks. It needed to be clarified that this portion represents energy purchases made

by utilities, not associated with a specific source – but generally assumed to be from fossil fuels.

- Support/participation from PSD staff was helpful to advance discussion around electricity policies and programs.

### **Reflections on the Process**

What worked: PSD staff presence at the second event supported a meaningful discussion on existing policies and programs.

What could be improved: More time to conduct outreach, engage stakeholders, and prepare for events may have improved participation. Different outreach tactics such as tabling at partner events could have diversified outreach and targeted more underrepresented stakeholders. The time crunch was limiting.

### **Attachments**

- Outreach flyers
- Front Porch Forum post.
- Survey for folks who could not attend in person events.



# SAY WATT?

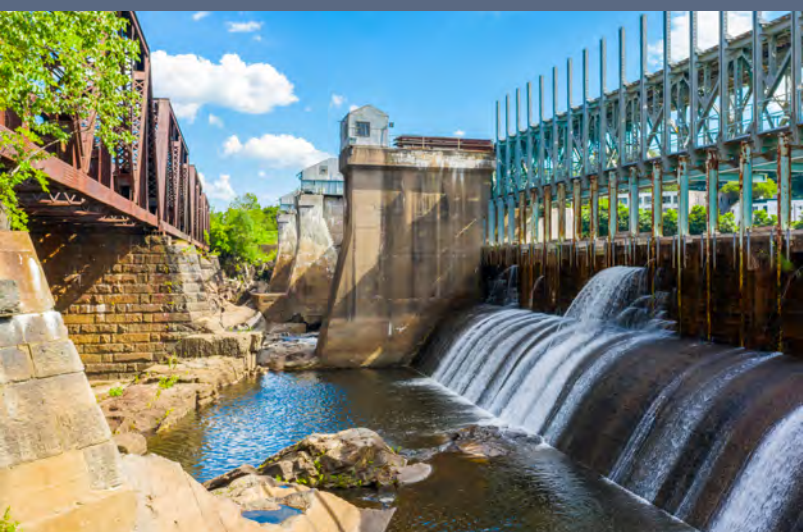
LET'S TALK ABOUT WHERE VERMONT'S ELECTRICITY COMES FROM



The Public Service Department and Lamoille County Planning Commission have teamed up to ensure your voice is heard as critical energy policies are updated.



Help us determine the future of electricity in Vermont!



We are asking Vermonters:

1. What are your priorities when thinking about where our electricity comes from?
2. How can our policies and programs better support those priorities?



**September 13 – 5:00PM**

**In Person:** 52 Portland Street, Morrisville VT  
Second Floor, or

**On Zoom:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85619571735?pwd=Y1pBSnFFLlBKWHE4cklveEJ5cFA4UT09>  
Meeting ID: 856 1957 1735 Passcode: 399277

For More Information, Visit: [www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning](http://www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning)



# SAY WATT?

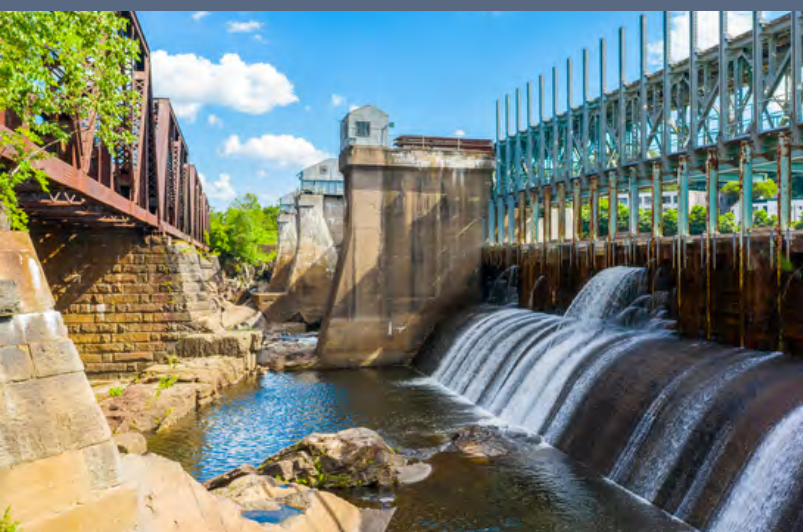
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**September 28 at 5:30PM**

**In Person:** Stowe Town Office, Memorial Room, 67 Main St., Stowe VT 05672, or

**On Zoom:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86150836555?pwd=WXM2dXdNb0FUMGptbU56Rl9wTFJqUT09>

**Meeting ID:** 861 5083 6555 **Passcode:** 771114

**Call In:** 646 876 9923

For More Information, Visit: [www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning](http://www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning)





### **Say WATT? Help Shape the Future of Electricity for Vermont**

The Public Service Department and Lamoille County Planning Commission have teamed up to ensure your voice is heard as critical energy policies are updated. Events across the state will provide space for Vermonters to discuss what they value about renewable electricity and what they would like to see from renewable and clean energy policies and programs in the future.

We want to hear from Vermonters about:

- What are your priorities when thinking about where Vermont's communities get their electricity?
- How can our policies and programs better support those priorities?

In Lamoille County, the first opportunity to participate is coming up on **September 13 at 5:00, at LCPC Office, 52 Portland Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Morrisville VT or on Zoom.**

#### **Zoom Meeting Information:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85619571735?pwd=Y1pBSnFFL1BKWHE4ckIveEJ5cFA4UT09>

Meeting ID: 856 1957 1735

Passcode: 399277

Phone Number: +1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

**For more information,** please visit [www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning](http://www.lcpcvt.org/energyplanning) or contact [victoria@lcpcvt.org](mailto:victoria@lcpcvt.org) or [meghan@lcpcvt.org](mailto:meghan@lcpcvt.org).

# Tell us WATT is on your mind - Vermont's Electricity Policies & Programs

Thank you for your interest in providing input on Vermont's Electricity Policies and Programs.

This set of questions will help us learn a little about you, so that we have a sense of the people and communities we've been able to engage with throughout this process and the perspectives you're bringing to these conversations.

One of the goals the Public Service Department and Regional Planning Commissions have for these events, and the larger process to review our renewable electricity programs and policies in Vermont, is to engage with a broader array of Vermonters than we have historically reached in these kinds of conversations. The information you provide here will be used to help us inform our outreach efforts moving forward and in any reports on this process, to be transparent about who we did (and didn't) hear from. This will help offer context for any recommendations developed as a result of these and related events.

**Please note! All responses will be kept anonymous and answering these questions is voluntary! Please answer as many or as few as you feel comfortable.**

1. What do you think should be prioritized when thinking about where Vermont's electricity comes from?

For example: Reliability of electric service, affordability for consumers, natural resource impacts, reducing carbon emissions, whether the resource is renewable, etc.

Enter your answer

2. In thinking about these priorities and the policies Vermont currently has, what is important to you about how you (personally) get renewable or low carbon

electricity?

For example: from my utility on my behalf, entirely from my own on-site system (off-grid), shared between myself and my utility (e.g., net metering), etc.

Enter your answer

3. Considering what you'd like to see in the future and these priorities, what are the barriers you see to achieving these outcomes with Vermont's programs and policies?

Would you like to see more electricity coming from renewable sources? From low or no-emissions resources? What trade-offs between resources do you think are most important to think about as we consider where our electricity comes from?

Enter your answer

4. Considering where our electricity currently comes from and considering some of the trade-offs between different resources, what would you like our electricity mix to look like in the future?

Enter your answer

5. What town in Vermont do you live in (or, if you are representing an organization, what town is your organization based in)?

Enter your answer



6. Is there anything specific you'd like us to know about yourself and/or the perspective you're bringing?

Enter your answer

7. Which of the following best describes you? (Listed in alphabetical order; select all that apply.)

- ☐ African American, Black, or African
- ☐ American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish Origin
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Another race or ethnicity not listed above or prefer to self describe
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

8. If you selected "Another race or ethnicity not listed above or prefer to self describe" above, please describe

Enter your answer

9. Which of the following best describes you? (Select one answer):

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Gender fluid
- ☐ Gender queer
- ☐ I'd prefer not to answer
- ☐ Prefer to self describe

10. If you selected "Prefer to self describe above", please describe here.

Enter your answer

11. How old are you?

- ☐ 18-29
- ☐ 30-44
- ☐ 45-99
- ☐ 60+
- ☐ I would prefer not to answer

12. Last year, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

- ☐ Below \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 or more
- ☐ I would prefer not to answer

13. Do you own or rent your home?

- ☐ Own
- ☐ Rent
- ☐ Some other arrangement (ex. live with family, etc)
- ☐ I would prefer not to answer

14. Are you representing a specific organization today? If so, how would you identify your organization (ex. local government, town energy committee, non-profit, community-based organization)

Enter your answer

15. How did you hear about this event?



Enter your answer

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