STATE OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE

VERMONT COMPREHENSIVE ENERGY PLAN

October 26, 2015
7:16 p.m.
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Bellows Falls High School
Bellows Falls, Vermont

Public Hearing held before the Vermont Department of Public Service, at the Bellows Falls Union High School Auditorium, Bellows Falls, Vermont, on October 26, 2015, beginning at 7:16 p.m.

PRESENT

DPS Staff: Asa Hopkins, Director of Planning and Energy Resources

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DR. HOPKINS: Mr. Whitman?

MR. WHITMAN: Hi. I'm John Whitman. I'm a Commissioner from the Town of Readsboro to the Windham Regional Commission. I sit on the Energy Committee there, but I'm speaking as an individual. I'm not representing a position of any of those people.

DR. HOPKINS: Get closer to the mic so that --

MR. WHITMAN: Is that better? Oh, I can hear it's better now. Since, oh, I was going to just congratulate Asa, because I think it's a good document, but, unfortunately, I also have two criticisms that I've chosen to talk about tonight. So sorry, Asa, but I do have two things, and these are the two things that I like least about the plan, and I forgot to spell my name. It's W-H-I-T-M-A-N.

Okay. Now, you've all heard the statutory -- oh, there's the boss again. Good. You've heard the statutory requirements. Asa presented them, and you know the words. I'll just give you the words. The words are, "Adequate, reliable, secure, sustainable, assuring affordability, encouraging the State's economic vitality, efficient use of energy resources, cost effective demand-side management, and environmental soundness". Those have been part of the
statute that guides the energy system in Vermont and
guides the Department of Public Service for many years.

There's a pair of newer goals that were
established, and those are the ones that can be
paraphrased as, 90 percent renewable by 2050 and a
reduced, substantially reduced emission of greenhouse
gases. Those are newer rules or goals that have been
imposed, but I want to make the point, and I think it's
important, that they don't replace or obsolete the
other goals. The other goals or statutory
requirements, I should say, remain in place.

And one of my concerns is I don't think that the
current draft of the Energy Plan gives sufficient
attention to some of those prior goals. Because
there's a whole lot of attention now on the
renewability and greenhouse gas emission goals,
understandably so. They've caught the eye of the
legislature, and they've caught the eye of the public,
and they're important, but, nonetheless, there are
other things that are still important, and so I'd like
to speak to those.

Before I jump into that, and I, basically, it's an
issue of balance that I want to point out. I think
we've lost balance. Let me read a part of the, the
statutory requirements that Asa didn't write, didn't
present, though they are present in the plan itself.
"To give effect to the policies of Section 202(a) of this title, to provide reliable and affordable energy, and to assure the State's economic vitality, it is critical to retain and recruit manufacturing and other businesses and to consider the impact on manufacturing and other businesses when issuing orders, adopting rules, and making other decisions affecting the cost and reliability of electricity and other fuels."

"Implementation of the State's energy policy should, number one, encourage recruitment and retention of employers providing high-quality jobs and related economic investment, support the State's economic welfare, and, number two, appropriately balance the objectives of this section with the other policy goals and criteria established in the title", the title being Title 30 of the State statutes.

So, basically, as I said, the new goals on renewability and greenhouse gas reduction don't obsolete any of the old ones, and I particularly feel that the attributes of adequacy, reliability, security, and affordability are not given appropriate attention in the current draft, and I'll give a couple of examples as to why I say that, and I'm going to start with the adequacy and affordability part.
Reduced total energy consumption per capita by 15 percent by 25 and more than a third by 2050 is one of the goals established in the plan. Where did that basis for that goal is given by the work done by the total energy study revealed that total primary energy consumption will have to decrease by one-third more by 2050 in order to bring the 90 percent renewable goal into reach.

In other words, it's there because of the renewable goal being there, but imagine that there's a -- litigate the rates and compare us with New Hampshire, and we've held very well, but if you compare us with the US, that same chart you showed showed that our electric rates are 40 percent higher than the rest of the US. There's a reason for that as he pointed out, but, nonetheless, we're competing with businesses in the rest of the US and in the rest of the world. Our energy costs are very high, and that's a problem for the State. I don't think that's addressed sufficiently in the plan. My ten-second card just went up, so I'm going to have to stop. If we run out of people, I'll come back again. Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: If you have, if you have something written --

MR. WHITMAN: I do. I'll live with it.
DR. HOPKINS: -- we can get that into the
rest of the record as though you had continued to
speak. So next is Michael Bosworth and then Walter
Gustafson.

MR. BOSWORTH: Yeah, Michael Bosworth from
Brattleboro. I am on the Brattleboro Energy Committee,
but I'm just speaking from my own thoughts right now,
and this sort of continues something I brought up, at
-- there was a climate change forum only a few weeks
ago in Brattleboro. It has to do with customer
barriers for thermal energy efficiency, and I noticed
in reading back both in the 2011 plan and the current
draft, that the wording was almost exactly the same.

It's basically, despite significant cost-effective
energy efficiency opportunities, consumers regularly
underinvest or don't invest at all in energy
efficiency, and this is a big issue today, because we
have so many homes that could be tightened that aren't
being weatherized, you know, effectively yet, and it's
a big market as well. It can be a real economic
driver. If we had a lot more homes being brought up to
a much higher level of weatherization tightness and
energy efficiency, we'd be create -- there would be a
lot of work that would go into doing that, so it would
be very much of an energy driver.
But, over the last four years, we haven't solved that issue yet. We haven't solved the issue of how to get people to do it, and it is partly a financing challenge. There are now some more financing tools than there used to be. I think the PACE system, for example, is one of them. We brought up earlier that we talked, we were talking about the Heat Saver Loans. So that addresses part of the gap, but I think part of the gap really is getting people to, for you to understand that they can do it. I think people just feel overwhelmed.

Some people, a lot of homeowners feel just overwhelmed by thinking, All right, this is going to be far too expensive for me. There's too much. I just can't understand everything involved, which also gets back to the, the whole building approach. It's not just energy efficiency, but can you use some renewables while you're doing this? So there's so many pieces that it gets to be sort of overwhelming for somebody to think about doing it for their own home.

So how to make progress on this? I think that, in small instances, there is some progress being made. I think the Green Mountain Power in Rutland and the, over the last year or two, has worked with about fifteen homeowners. Maybe it's more now. I don't know. And
these are homeowners without a lot of means, but they
found these homeowners, they worked with them, and they
greatly improved the energy efficiency of their homes
and, at the same time, included renewables in that mix,
but I do bet that Green Mountain Power spent a lot of
money and their own resources to make that happen.

So I think it is a resource-intensive thing that
we need to take on in the sense of people being energy
advocates is what we have a business, small business
here that does some of that themselves or just some
other ways of hand-holding is another way to view it,
but just, just some way to, to find a means to do that
is really an important part of the whole challenge.

I am personally a supporter of a tax on carbon
pollution. I don't know that that's the only solution
to this. There could be other sources of money. I
think there are other benefits to that taxed approach
on carbon pollution, but one of the uses for the money
that would come from that would be to put it towards
programs like this, but whatever. It doesn't have to
be that in my mind. We just have, we have to find
somewhere for these resources if we hope to make any
substantial improvement, unlike the almost virtual, or
we made only a little bit of improvement over the last
four years, and the next time we take an accounting of
this, hopefully, that, we've made a lot more progress and, in doing that, increased this section of our economy at the same time, so --

DR. HOPKINS: Walter Gustafson, and then Tad Montgomery.

MR. GUSTAFSON: Hello. My name is Walter Gustafson, G-U-S-T-A-F-S-O-N. I also work for an advocacy group, but I'm speaking just as a citizen here tonight on my own behalf. I know that there has been some views expressed at these hearings about siting. I grew up in Lincoln, Vermont, directly under one of our great Green Mountains, Mount Abraham, and would just happily put a large, massive windmill on top of that mountain in order to take responsibility for my energy needs.

You know, my generation has really taken the issue of climate change on their shoulders, and to see that the fact is right now one of our biggest obstacles is, you know, people's visual aesthetics is really disheartening to me to have that be something that is stopping us from tackling climate change. You know, I don't -- what if we took this into consideration when we were planning for how to get our food or where to get our education? If we took into visual aesthetics, we just wouldn't be moving very, very quickly on any of
I think that energy is a public good and should be treated so. I also don't necessarily feel that siting of land use falls into the statutes that we're on the side of the beginning of this. In terms of how we get to 90 percent renewable energy by 2050, I don't think where that energy is siting, sited has to do with us getting there. That's another conversation. I think it's a valuable conversation, but I don't think it's necessarily one for this recommendation.

Secondly, I just, when I look at this plan and I look at other economists or business leaders or energy planners around the country and around the world, the number-one thing that they have in their plan is putting a price on carbon pollution. It's not the only thing. It's not a silver bullet, but it is the first thing that they will put in their plan. So it definitely concerns me a little bit that this plan doesn't focus as much on that, especially when compared to other plans of similar reference. Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: Tad Montgomery and then Tori Parker.

MR. MONTGOMERY: T-A-D M-O-N-T-G-O-M-E-R-Y. Tad with one D. I have a number of different points. I'll try to rattle them off all quickly within my
five-minute allotted time. I haven't read through the whole CEP yet, but I hope that there is substantial attention paid to, in the biomass section, the health of our forests and, in particular, the health of our soils, and I hope that, as this moves ahead and we get more and more of our heating energy needs from forests, that that is taken into account as some statutory program put in place to ensure that our soils are, if not staying as healthy, to improve the soil health in our forests.

Second, we have a residential PACE program at present. I would strongly urge that the Public Service Department and the legislature work to implement a commercial PACE program. This, I think, would be much more successful much quicker than the residential program for a bunch of different reasons that I will outline in written testimony.

Third, with regard to wind power, large-scale wind power, I would recommend that a commission be established to research the mechanisms for allowing communities greater ownership of these wind projects. So a group consisting of, for example, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development as well as the PSD trade groups like Renewable Energy Vermont, Division of Financial Regulation, Vermont Economic
Development Authority, and the Vermont Treasurer's Office all come together and think through what the obstacles are, how to overcome them to allow towns and neighbors ownership stakes in wind projects.

I, one of my roles as a home energy improvement advisor, and I'd like to point out a problem that I see consistently which is the lack of consistency in the incentives that are offered to homeowners for undertaking substantial energy improvements. It seems often the case that people now assume that there will be incentives and, when the incentives disappear, lose interest in undertaking major energy improvements. I don't have a solution to that, but I see it as a consistent problem.

I have worked in the field of biofuels for 15 years now, actually, almost 20 years, and I am somewhat shocked to see ethanol considered a renewable fuel. My understanding is that it takes almost as much petroleum to create ethanol as the energy you get out of it, a term called the energy return on energy investment, and that doesn't even take into account the devastation that happens as we increase corn agriculture in the Midwestern US and the destruction to our waterways and our soil in those agricultural communities. So I would strongly question that assumption that ethanol-based
fuel is renewable.

Lastly, two quick points. I have heard a lot of opposition to what's termed industrial wind and solar, and the people that I talked to, especially young generation Vermonters, see it as progress. I understand that there are aesthetic concerns among some people, but what I hear is this, moving away from fossil fuels and towards these big renewables is, it's progress, and, for myself, I would say I am proud to live in a state that has set goals of 90 percent renewable energy in the foreseeable future. Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: Tori Parker and then Sam Cowles.

MR. COWLES: We're going to go together.

MS. PARKER: I'm Tori Parker, and I'm 17, P-A-R-K-E-R.

MR. COWLES: I'm Sam Cowles, and I'm 15, C-O-W-L-E-S, and Tori and I both go to Burr and Burton's Mountain Campus, which is a separate campus from BBA, that focuses on environmental and sustainable living, and we just entered into a unit of sustainable energy and, like, all about the different energy sources that we have to use like solar, wind, hydro, etc.

MS. PARKER: Throughout our time at Mountain
Campus, we've been grappling with how we, as students and as a community, can strive to become truly sustainable. Recently, we visited a handful of businesses and organizations that have inspired us to make efforts and changes in our own lives. As students growing up facing the issues of whether or not being sustainable is in reach, this plan seems like quite a task. In order to fulfill the goals set forth, participation from all is going to be necessary.

MR. COWLES: For example, as teens, Tori and I are really interested in electric cars, especially what benefits will be provided for us if we decide to make the switch. So we're wondering what the benefits will be and also, How are you guys going to make the, make the, have people make the switch from gasoline-powered cars to electric cars, and will people that decide not to make the switch put a damper on the renewable energy goal? And, also, do you have plans to get people involved in making the switch?

MS. PARKER: Along with plans to introduce the benefits of electric cars, do you have plans to extend education of topics such as these to schools and students like us? And, if so, how do you plan on involving schools in the process of working towards becoming a sustainable state? Thank you.
DR. HOPKINS: Because they went together, there's no -- I didn't get to as far as saying that George Harvey is next and then Kathleen Hacker.

MR. HARVEY: I'm George Harvey. I come from Brattleboro, H-A-R-V-E-Y, and I'm on the Brattleboro Energy Committee. I'm not speaking as a member of the committee. I keep a blog. I go through probably three or four hundred news articles every day. I get up -- this is dairyman's hours. I take, you know, I'm up at 3:30 in the morning looking at the news, and when I'm, when I find an article that I think is interesting, I get a synopsis of it, about 50 words, and put it up on my blog with a link, and I put up 10 or 15 of these every day. The blog is geoharvey.wordpress.com, and I also write for "The Green Energy Times", and my life is all about energy and climate change.

And I think I have a very short message here, and that is that there's one thing that I'd like to see done in Vermont and, actually, everywhere, but in Vermont the mechanism would be in the town, in the town meetings. I think that it would be good if the State required every town at every town meeting to pass an item on the agenda that was, expressed some, expressed what their posture would be on resilience and sustainability, and that item could simply be to report
to the State, We're not doing anything, but it would
mean that everybody in every town meeting would be
engaged in the debate, and it's something that wouldn't
cost anything particularly, and it would give some
towns the ability to move in ways that they otherwise
would not.

DR. HOPKINS: Kathleen Hacker and then Morgan
Casella.

MS. HACKER: Kathleen Hacker, H-A-C-K-E-R. My name is Kathleen Hacker. I live in Bellows Falls,
and, as a very concerned mother, grandmother, and human
being, I think we need to be doing an awful lot about
climate change and that this particular plan would be
enhanced by including a carbon pollution tax, which I
think is an important part of an overall effort to make
our societies reduce their uses of fossil fuel. Thank
you.

DR. HOPKINS: Morgan Casella and then Jill
and Joyce.

MR. CASELLA: Morgan Casella, Putney,
Vermont, C-A-S-E-L-L-A. I think you guys did a great
job with this. I like being from a state that says
former things, the obvious things. In relation to what
I said earlier in the question section, I just think
that, in the January publication you put out, you might
think about having specific funding language towards piloting for some of these Tier 3 measures, because the ambiguity of what that evaluation looks like, I mean, immediately there between 2018 and creating those markets is going to need some sort of additional impetus to kind of help out there.

So towards any of those, Tier 3 in general, I think it's a great -- it's always good to kick the can forward to figure out how to get there as well as needs to be done, but to figure out how to get load shifting permanently on and demand response and these other measures, I think you guys could clearly define a little bit further what funding might be available for pilot projects. Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: Jill and Joyce, and that's the end of the folks who had said yes. There was at least one gentleman who wanted to add on, and you'll be next and then we'll --

MS. JOYCE: So I'm Jillian Joyce, J-O-Y-C-E.

DR. HOPKINS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. JOYCE: That's okay. So I teach at the Mountain Campus and have, for the last four years, committed my professional life and, you know, many years before that to educating students for sustainability, and in our program it has really helped
us realize what it is that students want to learn and want to know and want to see in the future, and so we're really lucky to be able to continue to tailor that education towards what they're demanding, and so, in that respect, the Comprehensive Energy Plan has been part of our curriculum for a few years now, which has been great, and we've actually found that some of our senators and representatives have much less of an understanding of it than our students do. So, hopefully, they'll be along the line in coming to help work with you soon.

In terms of the realities, I mean, our students and myself and a lot of people in our community realize that there has to be some major shift in energy policy, and they welcome and recognize that but that there's a major disconnect between what our ambition might be and then what the population is willing to accept. So we've seen, you know, statistics that 1 percent of solar power in Vermont, and yet there are lawsuits and multiple concerns about siting, you know, and you look at the terawatts of energy that need to be produced by solar to meet these goals.

And, you know, my concern, and I'd love to see the plan in the commission, is, How do you address that disconnect between what citizens want and then the
reality of putting it on the ground? Seeing solar
that's something that's beautiful and taking
responsibility, seeing it as just one more piece of
meeting the future needs of our state and our citizens
and our students, that, really, that's a concern, that
there are so many opportunities to be able to do that.
So, you know, as our students ask, How do you start to
educate students? How do you start to educate
communities, make towns make those individual efforts,
instead of resisting that change, to really see that as
something to embrace? So changing our definitions of
what is aesthetically pleasing and what it means to be
a responsible citizen in Vermont can go a long way.
Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: Is there anyone else who had
previously -- Guy? Well, no, you're next. And then
we'll do Guy. Was there anybody else who had not said
yes on the sheet but wants to make any comments here?
Otherwise, we'll end with those two. All right.
Thanks.

MR. THURRELL: Hi. I'm Pete Thurrell,
T-H-U-R-R-E-L-L. I own and run Soveren Solar, which is
the leading community solar provider in Southern
Vermont, so I'm speaking both for myself and my company
and my employees. There are a lot of things that I'd
like to say. One of them is that, if we're going to be here on a habitable planet in 2050, we have to reduce. It's not like a good idea to become sustainable. It's like our lives depend on it, and the lives of lots of other creatures depend on it too. So plans are a great idea, but, as our last speaker mentioned, there are lots of things that get in the way of the plan, and I would like to see the plan address that more directly and to see our culture address it more directly.

Germany leads the world in per capita solar and wind installation. Germany has 30 percent less sunlight than Vermont. Why does it work in Germany? Because it works economically. The government set up economic policies that make it possible for people to invest in solar.

Two years ago, year-and-a-half ago, the Vermont legislature raised the cap on net metering from 4 percent of each utility's total load to 15 percent of that total load. No one, at that time, imagined that that cap would get met before the end of 2016, which is when that cap was meant to be reviewed, and now nearly every major utility in Vermont is pushing up against that cap. This is a horrible consequence for us and for you who want to see solar installed.

The reason that solar has jumped from 4 percent to
15 percent in a year-and-a-half is largely because of a federal tax credit of 30 percent that exists on solar products. That tax credit is going to expire at the end of 2016, but, as things stand now, net metering is going to run out in Vermont early in 2015, and the last year of the federal tax credit is going to go to waste because we haven't pushed enough legislative agenda to get net metering raised and carried forward until the end of the tax credit. This is just a horrible thing to have happen if we want to try to meet any kind of the goals we have here.

Another thing, this last year the Agency of Natural Resources independent administrative group decided that no solar project could be sited in any river valley in Vermont. No legislature stepped behind it. No public opinion was ever sought on this decision. They just allowed the agency to say, No, if there's a river corridor and a river might ever go there, you can't put solar there. So we've got a state that, on the one hand, is making a lot of plans for growth and, on the other hand, has policy being established by state agencies that completely get in the way of that growth.

We have policies to cut the subsidies for solar, policies to lower the bonus factor for solar, policies
to eliminate net metering, and policies that, from our
point of view, are even maybe more devastating.
They're ones that will establish an economic reality in
Vermont where only large-scale projects will get built.
The projects we build are all 150 kilowatts or below,
and they're owned by citizens in Vermont. They're not
owned by out-of-state wealthy investors. The benefits
go to the citizens. The tax credits go to the
citizens.

The way we're moving, we're moving towards
large-scale projects, and the only people who are going
to be building them are going to be the SunEdisons and
the SolarCities who are bringing in out-of-state
corporations who come in with wealthy investors to
build these large projects. I would really like to see
the Comprehensive Plan also try to build the employment
base in Vermont by facilitating structures that allow
small Vermont companies to compete in a marketplace
with these large companies.

One of the things that did that over this last
period of time was a 500-kilowatt cap on net metered
projects. Turned out the 500 kilowatts was small
enough that the big companies didn't want to come into
Vermont and compete, but now we're down with the end of
net metering, and they're talking about doing all this
solar on this large scale. I can promise you that the companies that are going to be building those large scales won't be from Vermont.

So my major comment is, Look at the road blocks in developing it, and the one thing I'd really like to see, I think we're going to meet 90 percent renewable way before 2050. Let's try for 2035. I mean, isn't the Pope Catholic? Thanks.

DR. HOPKINS: Guy? Last comment.

MR. PAYNE: My name is Guy Payne. I live in Saxtons River. I'm also the director of the Sustainable Energy Outreach Network, but, like many of us who have spoken before, I'm speaking for my own self. I was surprised in looking at -- well, let me back up and say, You did a great job. So my comments are more, How do we take it forward, and not where the deficits are. I was surprised to look at the state government and notice that the Department of Education is not part of it, and what worries me as one of the challenges as we move forward is, Where's the work force going to come from to handle all of this?

Some of the examples that highlight this is, in your building trades and the tech centers, they are hampered to move forward with advanced, high-performance builders, because there's a state
curriculum that keeps things minimal. So all the
effort that is needed in terms of understanding what
building science is is not even in the same curriculum.
So that's how air, heat, and moisture move through a
building.

So here we are talking about energy efficiency,
and at the lower level, you know, the younger level of
our education, we don't even have the curriculum that
can bring people along, and these are what
high-performance builders are looking for. They are
looking for people who, at least at very minimum, have
an understanding of building science, maybe not the
ability to do it, but an awareness of it.

And, as we go forward with the buildings in terms
of your enclosures, buildings now are becoming much
more technology driven. It's the integration of
efficiency and the renewables, and what worries me is
that we don't have the work force ready to handle that
level of technology, whether it's controls, whether
it's the heat recovery systems, whether it is the
monitoring systems that, if you look around, I think
Green Mountain Tech Center up in Hyde Park is the only
one that has an HVAC program.

So, from a work-force-development perspective, I
think we're really missing the opportunity to bring
younger groups along. If we look at the adult population, there are very few opportunities for adults to learn some of the technologies and the trades that are needed. We need to engage Vermont HITEC, who is involved with manufacturing.

I just came back from Linz, Austria, as part of a biomass seminar, and they have an incredible adult education program with a hotel that's connected to it so that people can come from various parts of upper Austria and take advantage of the training that is there. So here we have -- and I'm not just talking training. I'm talking about learning experiences where people can ongoing develop and learn and apply and be coached and be mentored as they continue on. So I think, from an adult perspective, we do need to have registered apprenticeship programs, whether it's in the building science or whether it's in any of the technologies that are being required. That's from the work-force-development perspective.

From the Vermont Energy Code, the building code, there's the carrot, there's the stick, and there's the tambourine. We have two of three. We don't have the stick. You know, so we have these codes -- got it. We have the codes, but, for example, a year ago in Rockingham, there was not one Certificate of Compliance
that was listed with the Town Clerk's office, because there's no enforcement, and I realize that's money. I also realize that, from a contractor's point of view, they don't want to be hampered, the creative ones, by too much regulation. They need that time to experiment. So we need to have the conversation, because we need to have the enforcement, as far as I'm concerned and as far as many of the contractors are concerned, to uphold the standards that we've leaned in. Thank you.

DR. HOPKINS: Thank you all very much for a slew of great comments. One of the impressive things about taking this road show around the state is the impressive depth and breadth of the comments that we hear everywhere we go, and this place is no exception. So I thank you very much, and go forth and do good work.

(Whereupon the proceeding was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.)
CERTIFICATE

I, Sunnie Donath, do hereby certify that I recorded by stenographic means the Public Hearing Re: Comprehensive Energy Plan at the Bellows Falls Union High School Auditorium, Bellows Falls, Vermont, on October 26, 2015, beginning at 7:16 p.m.

I further certify that the foregoing testimony was taken by me stenographically and thereafter reduced to typewriting and the foregoing 28 pages are a transcript of the stenographic notes taken by me of the evidence and the proceedings to the best of my ability.

I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties thereto or their counsel, and I am in no way interested in the outcome of said cause.

Dated at Westminster, Vermont, this 4th day of November, 2015.

// Sunnie Donath