



RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

RRPC - RES Engagement Events Reporting

Report Date 11/13/23

Overview / Key Takeaways:

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission held 2 separate PSD outreach events. Both events were held in Rutland City and the RRPC office with one event open to remote participants. We had a total of 7 participants between both events. Through these listening sessions we learned 3 key facts:

1. This topic is perceived as very complex, and participants stated they are too busy trying to make ends meet to concern themselves with electricity regulation. There was the sentiment that participants wanted a beneficial system that did not require average Vermonter to need in-depth knowledge of the regulations.
2. Paradoxically, participants expressed Education about the system as a primary barrier to achieving RES goals.
3. Ultimately, participants stated that they are very concerned with having an affordable, reliable, and sustainable system. However, many felt intimidated by the regulatory process.

Approach to the Events:

RRPC held 2 events. Both events used the PPT presentation template with some minor modifications; primarily simplification of the slides with less text and more pictures (attached). We used the exact wording of the core question template to create MS forms for participants to complete.

The first event was open to the public and was held at the RRPC office with remote access through MS Teams. This event was from 12-2pm on Saturday Sept. 30th. At this event we provide lunch, which we sourced from local businesses at the farmer's market. This event was advertised through emails sent to energy committees and municipal offices. In addition, we posted event details on the RRPC facebook page and events page of our website. Finally, we printed fliers and hung them in prominent locations in Rutland City as well as sending fliers to town clerks to hang in all the towns in our region.

The second event was BIPOC focused, and by invitation only. We made this event in-person and invitation only to provide a safe space where participants could feel comfortable to share, and to avoid "trolling" of the event. This event was held on Wednesday Oct. 4th from 6-8pm at the RRPC office. This event was also formatted using a PPT presentation with MS Forms to collect responses. Paper surveys were provided and RRPC entered these into MS Forms to collate the



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data. We provided dinner from a local BIPOC owned restaurant and provided a \$100 stipend to all participants. This event was co-sponsored by the Rutland Area NAACP. To advertise the event and recruit participants, the NAACP posted information on their facebook page and emailed their membership at large. Executive officers of the NAACP personally contacted members whom they thought might want to participate.

Event Attendance

We had 5 participants at the public event and 2 participants at the BIPOC event. Due to the limited number of participants not everyone felt comfortable filling out the demographic information, so we have limited demographic information. Key demographics include:

- Most participants were over 45.
- Many had graduate courses.
- Almost no one wanted to share income level.
- A majority of participants were women.**
- Most participants owned their home.**

****Note**** Not all of this information is available through the completed demographic surveys. Home ownership and gender are gathered from observation and conversation between RRPC staff and participants as well as the demographic survey.

Reporting

As stated earlier, we collected survey information through MS Form (attached). Below are the core questions followed by the participant rankings:

1. How important should each of the following be when considering how Vermont gets its electricity? Please click to note how important you think each issue is:
 - a. Reliability was of primary importance to participants, followed by affordability, renewability, and emissions reduction.
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?
 - a. The majority of participants prioritized a net-metering scheme for receiving energy.
3. In 2021, 72% of Vermont's electricity was renewable (resources including hydropower, solar, and others) and 90% was carbon-free (the renewable electricity plus electricity coming from nuclear).
 - a. Participants were evenly split between liking the current mix and wanting to see more renewable energy.
4. Going forward, how much would you support or oppose Vermont getting its electricity from the following sources?



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- a. Most participants were opposed to all types of biomass generation. The majority had a preference for solar and wind.
5. Hydropower uses the energy in flowing water to turn a turbine and generate electricity. Please rank the following types of hydropower, where first is the one you would most like Vermont to use, and third would be the item you would least like Vermont to use.
 - a. Smaller
 - b. Hydro in Northeast
 - c. Large-scale
6. Solar power uses special panels to convert light from the sun into electricity. Please rank the following types of solar power, where first is the one you would most like Vermont to use, and fourth would be the item you would least like Vermont to use.
 - a. Medium commercial
 - b. Small
 - c. Large
 - d. Extra large

At each event the primary comments related to the complexity of the information. It was stated by all participants that there was too much information and that the regulatory process was intimidating to approach. This was coupled with the idea that most participants believed that Vermonters have their plates too full to engage in the energy regulatory apparatus. I would like to stress that all participants want a reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy system, and feel there is no collective bandwidth to add this to their struggle to survive.

There were some questions asked about the regulatory process and energy programs of the RES, but very little interest in that part of the process. As in many energy event, I find that people want to ask about new technologies. While discussing the RES many people wanted to lead the conversation to questions about adopting EVs, heat pumps, and residential solar. This indicates that there is a bandwidth and interest in implementing these technologies. I believe these technologies feel approachable and understandable as compared to the RES Tier system. It should be stressed that this is the window for everyday Vermonters to participate in electricity regulation. The ultimate lesson from participants is that further development of Tiers 3 and additional programs to make these technologies available to low-income and marginalized communities should be of paramount importance to achieving the RES goals.

We had 5 of 7 participants complete the feedback form. Below is a summary of the results:

1. 100% of participants were happy with the amount of information presented.
2. Easy to understand and accessible:
 - a. 60% of participants found the information accessible.
 - b. 40% of participants were neutral.
3. We had roughly the same breakdown with increased knowledge:
 - a. 60% of participants increased their knowledge.
 - b. 40% of participants were neutral in their knowledge.



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4. Opportunity and space to ask questions and participate.
 - a. 80% of participants had opportunity and space.
 - b. 20% of participants were neutral.
5. Event met expectations.
 - a. 60% of participants strongly agree.
 - b. 40% of participants were neutral.

Core Takeaways:

- **Participants want an affordable, reliable, and sustainable electric system.**
- **People are overwhelmed and intimidated by the scope of the regulatory process.**
- **Participants do not want to have to concern themselves with regulation of the electric sector.**
- **Participants want the system to function equitably.**
- **Participants want access to renewable technologies without having access to the capital needed for long term investments.**
- **Participants specifically do not support any type of biomass.**
- **Wind and solar are preferred renewables.**

Reflections on the Process

This process provided the opportunity to engage the public on a topic that has been historically very inaccessible. While there was not wide interest in participating in the Rutland Region, this was an important step in opening the process to more authentic public participation. RRPC believes that we had low participation in part due to an excessively short window for conducting this project. For a topic that participants expressed as very challenging to engage people with, we feel that more time was needed to attract participants. That said, working with all the RPC planners and the PSD made this possible and successful with a short turnaround time. It was immensely helpful to have the PSD coordinate this effort and have RPC working groups create the materials needed. Ultimately, there was a high level of support and coordination that made this effort very manageable.

Based on feedback from participants, there seemed to be too much high-level detail for the one-off event time frame. With a system as complex as utility regulation it may have been more effective to host workshops on smaller more concentrated aspects of the overall system.

Attachments:

- Event Survey Results (excel sheet combines results from both events)
- Demographic Survey Results



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Feedback Survey Results