RPC - RES Engagement Events Reporting
Windham Regional Commission
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Overview

Windham Regional Commission held two Engagement Sessions. One was held in-person in Rockingham and the other in Wilmington. Both in-person programs were held during the early evening hours.

Approach to the Events

The Rockingham and Wilmington Engagement Sessions were both stand alone events using the standard event template as a base. The template slide presentation (with some modifications to presentation order) were used for the overview of the concepts. The three prepared handouts from the Department of Public Service were distributed to each person who attended the event.

The in-person activities for each session included:

- "Let's Get to Know Each Other!" survey
- Question 1: Dot Activity based on personal opinion. Then small group discussion with a report out to the whole group at the end.
- Question 2: Small group discussion with a report out to the whole group at the end.
- Question 3: Individuals filled out the "What Would You Like Vermont's Energy Mix Look Like in the Future" Pie Chart/Percentage paper. Then, in small groups they discussed their ideas.
- Question 4: Whole group discussion
- "How did we do?" survey.

Reflections on the Process

If we had more time for the planning of the actual events, WRC would have liked to have partnered with community social service agencies to try to reach a population that was more income diverse. With the schedule as it unfolded, there wasn't enough time for WRC to accomplish the partnerships.

The overall process was very inclusive of RPC Energy Planner input. This development process had both its positive and hindering aspects. WRC would have appreciated a bit more guidance in the direction of the events (what were the essential questions and what was the PSD hoping to get from the sessions) at the initial outset. The RPC Energy group is very creative and enthusiastic, and, it felt a bit like the RPC group was branching too far outside of the initial scope of the grant. This led to longer discussions that could have been used for planning of the actual events. On the other hand, the end products that were created by the PSD/RPC collaboration were really good and it was great to have all of the RPCs doing similar activities so that results could be more easily evaluated and be useful to the PSD.

Key Takeaways

- The distinction between "renewable" and "no carbon emissions" seemed to be based on the perspective that the participant was representing. Commonalities were that overall most people felt like solar and wind generation should increase. There was much less interest in fossil fuel and biomass based electrical generation. Hydro generation was either stay the same or to decrease it.
- Where electricity was generated didn't seem to be as important to the group as how it was produced. The only exception to this would be community-based projects that were built and used locally.
- The expectations of the Renewable Energy Standard - Tier 1 should require higher amounts of retired energy credits (since in 2022 72% has already been achieved and the highest cap is 75%) and should encourage the retirement of more solar and wind power generation.
- Renewable energy credits to date rely mostly on hydro, which most people want to see decreased with more emphasis in the future placed on solar and wind credits.

Attachments (located at end of report):

1. **Summery Sheet of "Let's Get to Know Each Other!" (Rockingham)**
2. **Pictures of Dot Activity Charts (Rockingham)**
3. **"What would you like Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?" template**
4. **Summary sheet of "How did we do?" survey (Rockingham)**
5. **Post Event Evaluation & Comments Submission from Rockingham Resident**

In-Person Listening Session in Rockingham

Tuesday, September 26 from 5:00-6:45pm
Rockingham Free Public Library, 65 Westminster Street, Bellows Falls, VT

Partnered with: Rockingham Free Public Library (RFPL)
Targeted Audience: None Specified
Compensation: Door Prize Drawn at end of Evening: $25 gift certificate to local hardware store, Refreshments available
Attendance: 10 people
Advertising:

- Rockingham Free Public Library:
    - advertised with posters at Library
    - press release in the Brattleboro Reformer
- WRC: Advertised via email to the following groups
    - Windham Region Town Energy Committees & Organizations
    - Windham Region Conservation Commissions & Conservation Organizations
    - WRC Commissioners
    - Individual outreach to Commissioners from Rockingham
    - WRC Energy Committee Members
    - Rockingham Energy Committee
        - Rockingham Conservation Commission Facebook page
        - Saxtons River Facebook page
        - Bellows Falls Facebook page
- WRC: Advertised on the following Social Media Sites
    - WRC Facebook page
    - Saxtons River Facebook Page
    - Bellows Falls Facebook Page
    - Rockingham Front Porch Forum

Event Attendance

Attendee Information

- Town
    - Putney: 1
    - Rockingham: 7
    - Grafton: 1
    - Newfane: 1
- Race
    - White: 10
- Gender
    - Woman: 5
    - Man: 5
- Age Range
    - 30-44: 1

    - 45-59: 5
    - 60+: 4
- Income Level
    - Below $25,000: 1
    - $25,000 - $49,999: 3
    - $50,000 - $74,999: 1
    - $75.000 - $99,999: 1
    - $100,000-$149,999: 1
    - $150,000+: 1
    - Wish not to disclose: 2
- Housing Status
    - Own: 8
    - Rent: 2
- Education Level
    - High School Grad: 1
    - Associate Degree: 1
    - Advanced Degree: 4
    - Graduate Courses: 4
- How did you hear about the event?
    - Windham Regional: 5
    - Front Porch Forum: 1
    - Newspaper: 2
    - Third Act Vermont (through local representative): 2
- Identified Organizational Association
    - Rockingham Conservation Commission
    - Windham Regional Senior Planner (not familiar with topic and wanted to learn more)
    - Third Act Vermont

    Non-Identified Affiliations, but from conversations or knowledge of participants
    - 2 Rockingham Energy Committee
    - 4 Third Act Members
    - 1 Fuel Oil Dealer Owner

Reporting

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

- Dot Activity Results

Priorities	**# Votes**
Affordability for Consumers	6
Reliability of Electric Service	5
Whether the Resource is Renewable	5

Impacts on Natural Resources	4
Reducing Carbon Emissions	4
Supporting local jobs and economic development	2
Giving everyone the opportunity to generate their own electricity	0
Location of the Resource In Vermont Outside of Vermont Ok	 0 0
Other • Will it reduce climate change (global heating or at least not make it worse • Community Democratically run, locally generated electricity • Reduce Consumption • Efficiency Conservation	

- Small Group Discussion: Notes Table 1

  Environmentally sensitive group. Hard to know if the affordability is personal for people or a concern statewide.

  Group concerned about affordability and its impacts on the low- and med-income populations. None appear to be in that category. One renter in group.

  Local control of the energy source or production. South Royalton coop.? Peacham is a town that has an energy coop in it???

  Some in the group would like to see more wind options. Offshore wind utilizing a consortium.

  More support for rooftop solar. Plenty of rooftops here in town. This would stop prime housing sites from being used for solar fields. Maybe.

  School buildings and other mill buildings have great potential for solar

  When renovating buildings thought should be taken to integrating solar on the roof.

  Air conditioning is becoming a major power drain on the grid. Peak time GMP battery program should be enhanced.

  No mention of green roofs and their use in lowering heat load. All new state roofs should be green.

  No real mention of just simply using less power. Energy efficiency standards etc.

  In regards to one of the possible priorities listed as an option on the wall charts/voting activity "Giving everyone the opportunity to generate their own electricity," this was not a clear priority

point. If you have the means then you can generate your own power, period. If you don't have the means, how can you invest in generating your own electricity?

- Small Group Discussion: Notes Table 2

  All of the categories from the poll are important, but we didn't have enough dots to cover them all and had to choose.

  Reliability and affordability are important, but it doesn't say where we are currently at with that

  I didn't choose carbon reduction and instead choose renewable sources because it encompasses it (although includes a few more items).

  Biomass puts carbon into the air – so climate change as a category covers issues like that.

  I am concerned about other countries polluting so much. Vermont seems to be doing ok.

  Currently, when people are thinking about the affordability of renewable resources, they are looking at older studies and technologies and basing their opinions that renewables are not affordable on that. When in reality, renewables have caught up to traditional sources in affordability.

  There has to be an investment in our electrical infrastructure. Even if the source is renewable, electricity to homes and businesses in rural areas needs to be reliable.

Question 2: In thinking about the priorities we just discussed, what is important to you about how you (personally) get renewable or clean electricity?

- Small Group Discussion: Notes from Table 1

  Would like to see more community-based systems. Coops etc?

  The answers could be different depending on where you are in your life.

  Batteries are a must!

  Most energy policy in the state are geared towards homeowners or property owners.

- Small Group Discussion: Notes from Table 2

  In a net metering system, it is good to have the grid there for times when solar is not producing (night, cloudy days, etc). It is important to have both personal generation and the utilities.

  Battery storage is now an important aspect to the mix. More people might be able to get away from the grid if they were able to adequate storage. As the technology changes, personal generation may become more likely in the average household.

For older and lower income people, it is hard to afford and have the ability to generate all of their own electricity.

The up-front initial cost of setting up your own electricity generation system is prohibitive for a lot of people.

There are technologies that we haven't really explored yet, or are coming, that will change the way people access electricity. In the meantime, it is important to have energy efficient appliances to help reduce the use of electricity.

It is nice to have a solar system installed on your house, but you can't rely completely on that due to times that it is not generating. In a net metering system, if the grid is down, you still can not access the power being generated by the solar power because the system relies on power. It would be nice to have a way to disconnect from the gird when there is widespread outages so a homeowner could still operate under the power being generated from their solar panel.

The grid has been built with the idea of power moving one way. The new challenge is how to adapt the grid to allow for power to move both ways. Lots of work is currently being done on this topic, but we are still having to learn, do research and adapt the old system to meet new needs.

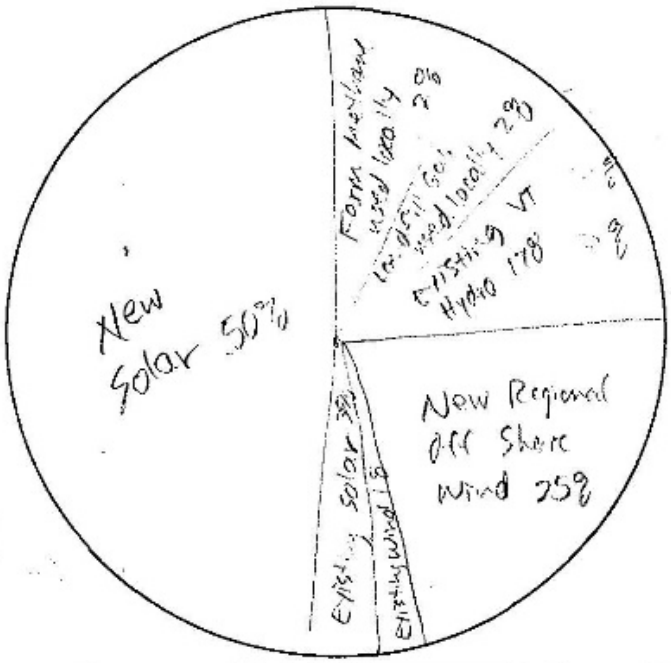
Question 3: Seeing where our electricity currently comes from, what would you like this [*i.e. compare to the visual of our current mix*] to look like in the future?

- Ideas from Paper Pie Chart activity
    - General Comment: Need to know what "unknown" is. Fossil fuels and gas are listed, so what is unknown? There needs to be truth in advertising.

- Percent of Renewable Energy Mix in the Future:
    - Grouping 1: 4 surveys with similar ideas
        - Removing all Nuclear, Biomass, Natural Gas
        - Increasing Solar, Hydro and Wind. Farm Methane and Landfill Gas to be used locally.
        - Example survey from Grouping 1

REDUCED ELECTRIC CONSUMPTION NEEDS TO MAKE THE WHOLE "PIE" SMALLER.

What would you like to see Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?



Percent of Mix (should add up to 100%)

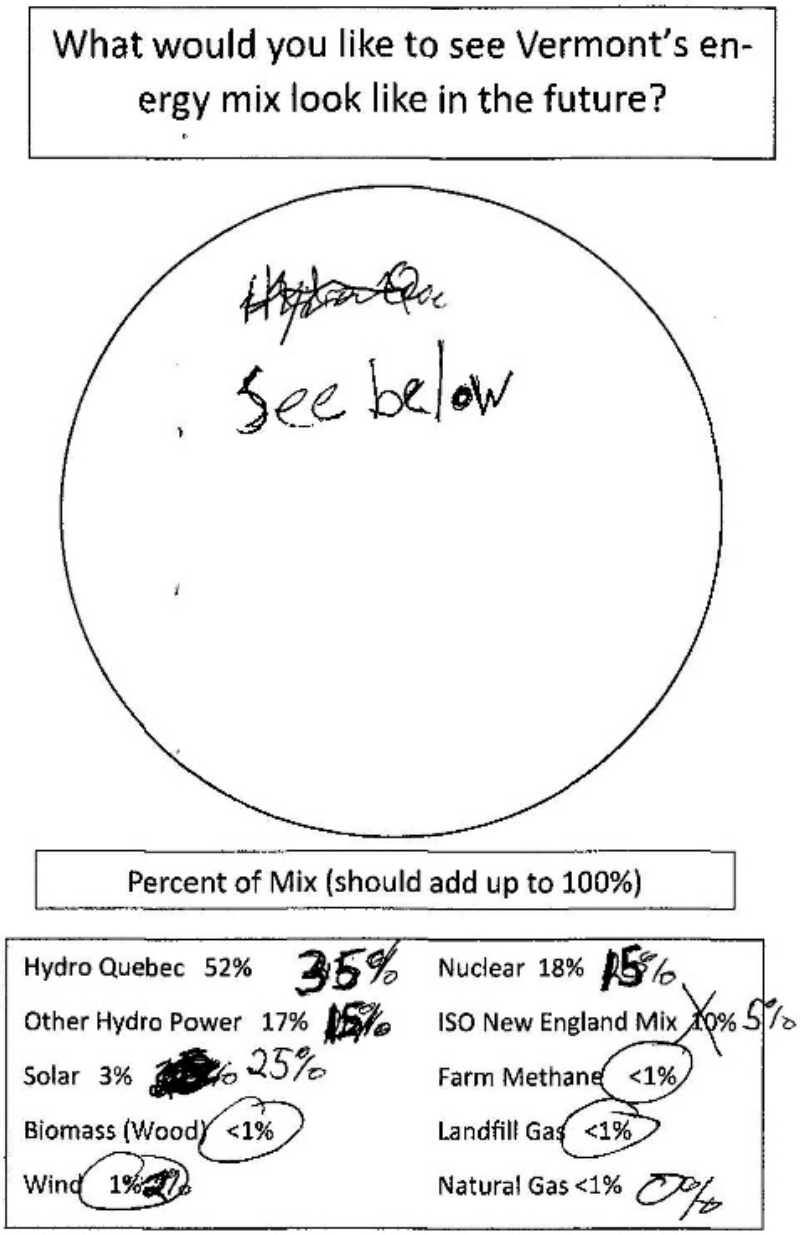
~~Hydro Quebec~~ 52% NO	~~Nuclear 18%~~ NO
Other Hydro Power 17% Existing	~~ISO New England Mix~~ 10% NO
Solar 3% Existing 3% New Solar 50%	Farm Methane <1% 2% USED Locally
~~Biomass (Wood) <1%~~ NO	Landfill Gas <1% 2% Used Locally
Wind 1% existing 1% New Off-shore wind 25%	~~Natural Gas <1%~~ NO

New England

66

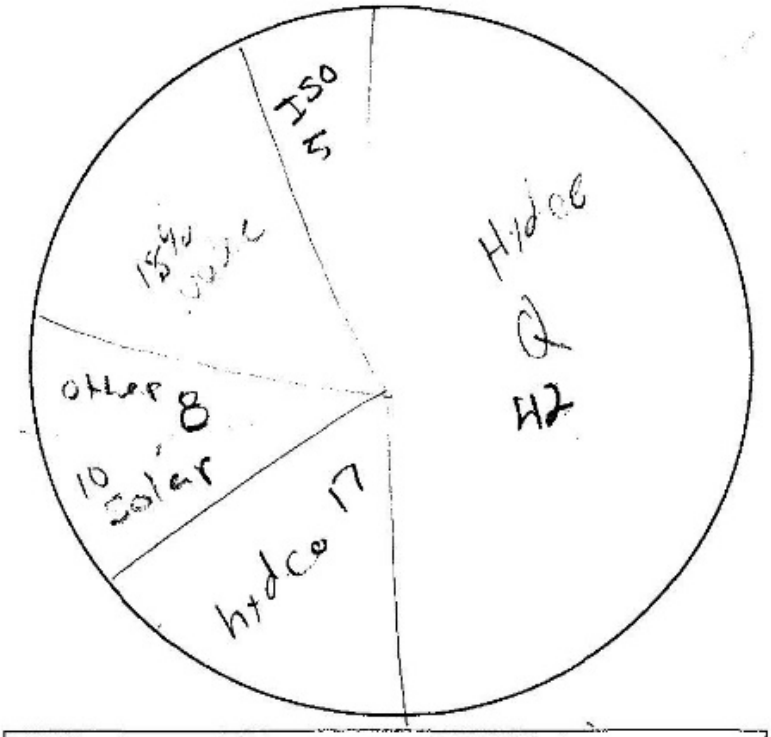
4

- Grouping 2: 3 surveys surveys with similar ideas
    - Reducing Hyrdro Quebec as well as reducing other hydro power. Removing or reducing Natural gas, Biomass, ISO New England Mix
    - Increase the mix of solar and wind.
    - Example survey from Grouping 2



- Grouping 3: 1 survey with similar ideas
    - Keeping the mix pretty much the same
    - Example survey from Grouping 3

What would you like to see Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?

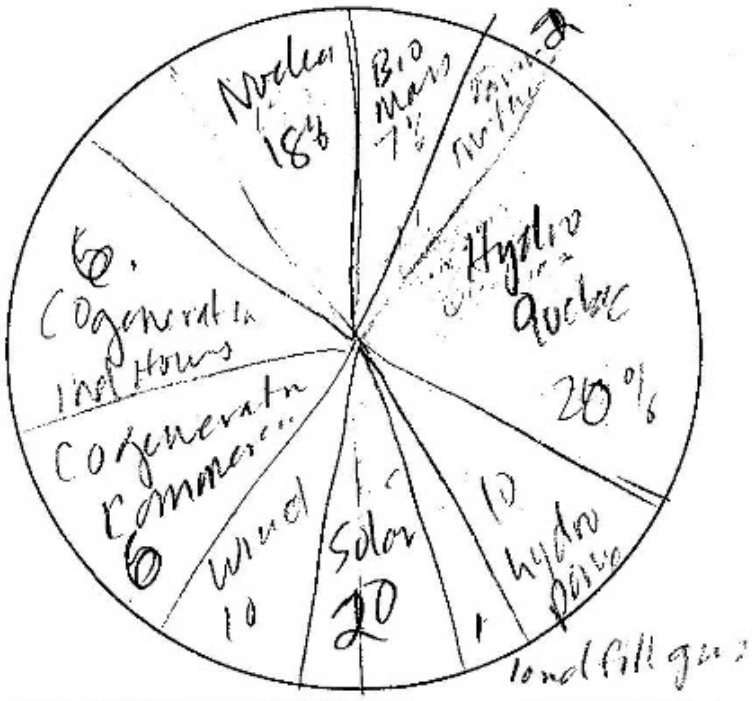


Percent of Mix (should add up to 100%)

Hydro Quebec 52%	Nuclear 18%
Other Hydro Power 17%	ISO New England Mix 10%
Solar 3%	Farm Methane <1%
Biomass (Wood) <1%	Landfill Gas <1%
Wind 1%	Natural Gas <1%

- Grouping 4: 1 survey with similar ideas
    - Reducing hydro, increasing biomass, solar, wind, farm methane, land fill gas. Include co-generation (1 survey)
    - Example survey from Grouping 4

What would you like to see Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?



Percent of Mix (should add up to 100%)

Hydro Quebec ~~52%~~ 45	Nuclear 18%
Other Hydro Power 17% 17	ISO New England Mix 10%
Solar 3% 10	Farm Methane <1%
Biomass (Wood) <1% 1%	Landfill Gas <1%
Wind 1%	Natural Gas <1%

Question 4: *[referencing the outcomes from discussing questions 1 and 3]* What are the barriers you see to achieving these outcomes with our programs and policies?

Part 1: How can our policies and programs better support those priorities?

- Whole Group Notes

  Generators of electricity should have more of a say in where the generated electricity goes. Right now it goes to the overall grid, but it would be nice if the energy could be targeted in its distribution. To whom does it go? An organization. Their neighbors. (This participant is a big proponent of locally generated, community controlled solar generation. Local energy generation should support local organizations and households verses big generation facilities that provide power to far away and unknown places.)

  The ability of residents and communities to create micro grids would be great.

  Tie other types of developer assistance to renewable generation or efficiency standards.

  Renters especially elderly benefit more so from living in town and community-based systems might be a good option for renters. Organization and logistics could be(is) problematic.

Part 2: Barriers

- Whole Group Notes

  Lack of workforce and materials!

  Personal property rights.

  No mandates on individuals

  Enough people who are interested in net metering to reach goals?

  Competing natural resource uses?

  NIMBY

  Current tech

  Increasing population and increase use of electricity.

  Can the infrastructure (grid) handle the new increased load.

Core Takeaways from Rockingham Session:

- Community energy generation (both building and partaking in the electricity production) should be encouraged and promoted.
- Invest in better electricity infrastructure to accommodate a growing load. Also invest in battery storage options so that electricity can be used by consumers when they most need it (during outages, etc.)

- Being able to invest in renewable energy at a residential level is mostly for people who have greater financial means and own their own homes. Even if installing a residential system will save you money in the long run, you still have to have enough money to cover the installation, which is often prohibitive. A creative model for allowing landlords to work with electric utilities to sell renewable energy to renters was mentioned as a fairly "easy" way to get renters involved in renewable energy consumption.
- The distinction between "renewable" and "no carbon emissions" seemed to be based on the perspective that the participant was representing. Commonalities were that overall most people felt like solar and wind generation should increase. There was much less interest in fossil fuel and biomass based electrical generation. Hydro generation was either stay the same or decrease.
- Reliability and affordability were very important to the group but almost taken for granted. While ranking these attributes the highest, most seemed to think that we were mostly meeting those needs. The next highest concerns were for protecting natural resources and low-carbon emissions. There was concern for the future about the ability of the electrical grid being able to handle an increase in solar and wind generation and consumption.
- Where electricity was generated didn't seem to be as important to the group as how it was produced. The only exception to this would be community-based projects that were built and used locally.

In-Person Listening Session in Wilmington:

Joint collaboration between Bennington County Regional Commission & Windham Regional Commission

Wednesday, September 27 at 5:00PM

Wilmington Town Office, 2 East Main Street, Wilmington, VT

Notes and Takeaways from this Listening Session were combined and included in the Bennington County Regional Commission Final Report.

Appendix

1. **Summery Sheet of "Let's Get to Know Each Other!" (Rockingham)**
2. **Pictures of Dot Activity Charts (Rockingham)**
3. **"What would you like Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?" template**
4. **Summary sheet of "How did we do?" survey (Rockingham)**

1. Summery Sheet of "Let's Get to Know Each Other!" (Rockingham)

Compilation
Rockingham
10 Surveys

Let's get to know each other!

Thank you for taking the time to attend this event. 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 with our events. 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 town in Vermont do you live in (or, if you are representing an organization, what town is your organization based in)?

Putney 1
Rockingham 7
Grafton 1
New Fane 1

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

Rockingham Conservation Commission
WRC
Third act VT

3. 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
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Another race or ethnicity not listed above or prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer
- Asian or Asian American
- Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish Origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- White 10

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

- Woman 5
- Man 5
- Non-binary
- Agender
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Gender fluid
- Gender queer
- I'd prefer not to answer

5. How old are you?

- 18-29
- 30-44 1
- 45-59 5
- 60+ 4
- I would prefer not to answer

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

- Below 25,000 dollars 1
- Between $25,000 and $49,999 3
- Between $50,000 and $74,999 1
- Between $75,000 and $99,999 1
- Between $100,000 and $149,999 1
- $150,000 or more 1
- I would prefer not to answer 2

7. Do you own or rent your home?

- Own 8
- Rent 2
- Some other arrangement (live with family, etc)
- I would prefer not to answer

8. How would you describe your education level?

- 11th grade or less
- High school graduate 1
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree 1
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate courses 4
- Advanced degree 4
- I would prefer not to answer

9. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about yourself and/or the perspective you're bringing to today's event?

- It seems all the programs for EV's + home energy savings are geared toward home owners - which I am not.
- some environmental Science Background (Interested/Concerned citizen)
- supporter of green renewable power
- I am concerned about the ~~environmental~~ climate emergency and that affects my views on energy
- I am interested in the plan and how it best suits the citizens in VT
- I am concerned ~~na~~ about the non practicality of EV's. I don't charge my vehicle in Brattleboro during the winter/summer with my young grandchildren for 2-3 hours

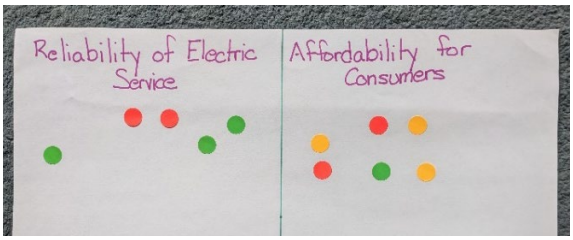
Last line that is cut off reads "with my young grandchildren for 2-3 hours"

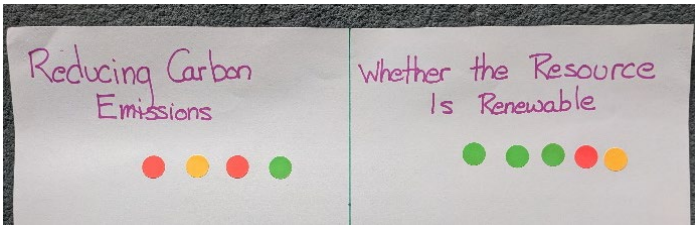
10. How did you hear about this event?

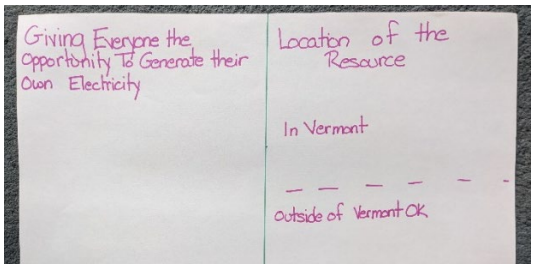
Third Act Email: 2	WRC 5
Newspaper 2	FPF 1

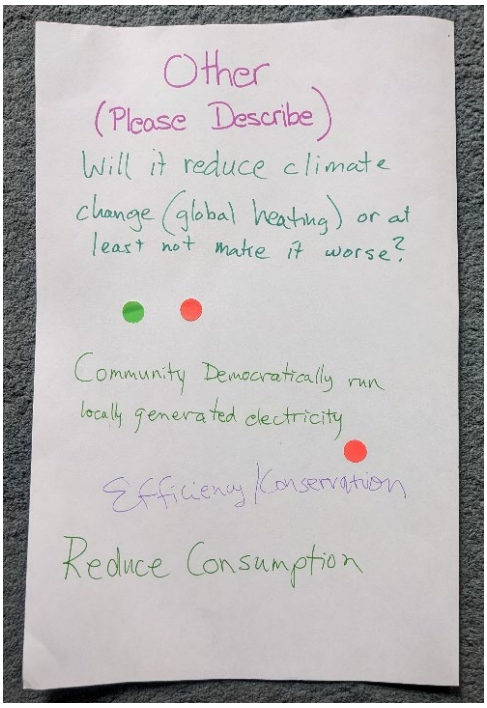
2. **Pictures of Dot Activity Charts (Rockingham)**

Participants were asked to put a dot next to their top three priorities when they think about what is important to them when considering where electricity generation is coming from. The colors were random and not assigned any meanings. Limiting the number of dots a participant could place on the charts made them prioritize their choices. Several participants said they whished they had more dots because all of the priorities were important (hence why they were limited to 3).



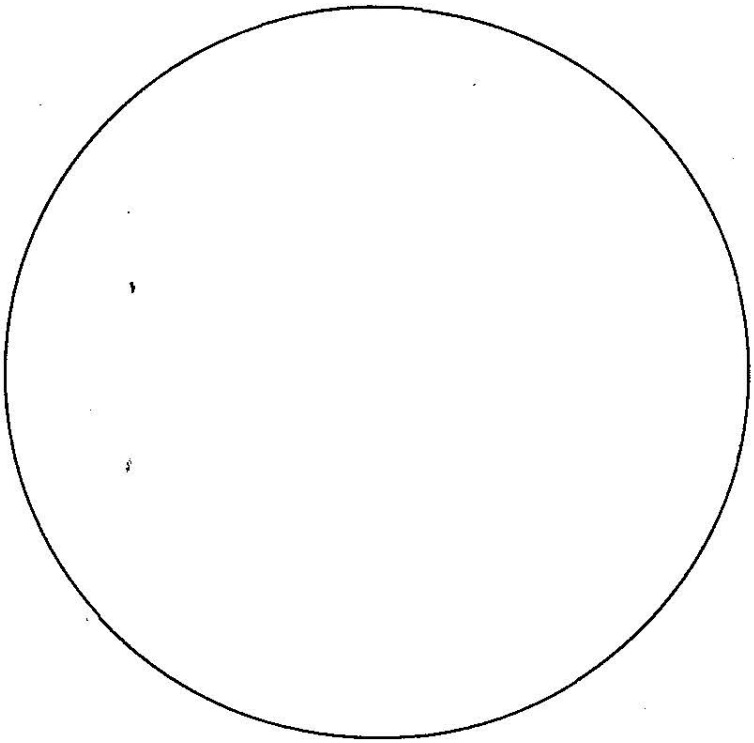






3. **"What would you like Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?" template**

What would you like to see Vermont's energy mix look like in the future?



Percent of Mix (should add up to 100%)

Hydro Quebec 52%	Nuclear 18%
Other Hydro Power 17%	ISO New England Mix 10%
Solar 3%	Farm Methane <1%
Biomass (Wood) <1%	Landfill Gas <1%
Wind 1%	Natural Gas <1%

4. Summary sheet of "How did we do?" survey (Rockingham)

Compilation
Rockingham
8 Surveys

How did we do?

Thank you for attending Help Shape VT's Electricity Future: Listening Sessions. We appreciate you taking the time to participate in this event and share your thoughts about the future of electricity in Vermont.

We're interested in your feedback! To help us improve future public engagement opportunities, we put together a five-question survey to collect feedback from event participants on your experience. We would be grateful for any information you would be willing to share. All responses will be anonymous and we expect the survey should take not more than 5 minutes to complete.

1. What event did you attend:

Rockingham Willmington

2. Please rank the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the event:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I'm happy with the amount of information presented during the event				~~IIII~~ I	II
The information presented was easy to understand and accessible			I	~~IIII~~	II
My understanding of electricity in Vermont has increased as a result of attending the event			II	III	III
I had the opportunity and space to ask questions and participate				III	~~IIII~~
The event met my expectations.			I	III	IIII

3. Please provide any context for your answers above or share any additional comments, thoughts, or suggestions for future events:

- too many descriptions can be confusing: renewable, etc.
- I was already well voiced in the topic. I am not sure that the results of this will lead to any meaningful policy development or change the way the PSD will proceed, which will largely be driven by economics, private enterprise + politicians
- Please put #'s on the handouts, in the order they are presented very confusing with 3, 2-sided handouts

4. Have you attended previous events held by Windham Regional Commission and/or the Public Service Department?

Yes |||) No | I'm not sure |

5. Is there anything else you'd like to share with WRC/PSD regarding what should be considered for Vermont's electric policies going into the future?

- Standards for all new multi-family housing and large industrial and government buildings should include solar and green roofs.
- Consistency in descriptions - make it easier for general public to understand
- Land use policies need stronger consideration
- The renewable energy siting law is about a decade old. It's time to review what is working and what isn't.

6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about today's listening session?

Thank you - nice group

Thank you very much!

5. Post Event Evaluation & Comments Submission from Rockingham Resident

A participant in the Rockingham session had a lot of thoughts and comments to share at the end of the session. Instead of filling out a survey that evening, the participant composed the following and submitted it a few days later.

Hi,
Thank you for hosting the recent event at the local library. Here are my comments and evaluation of the event.

Will you please pass this on to the correct folks at the Public Service Department as I wasn't able to find the correct email address.

Thank you,
Rockingham Resident

Help Shape Vermont's Energy Future
Response to event held 9/26/23 in Rockingham

I was unable to fill in the evaluation form at the end of the event. Therefore, I am using this email to respond. I have attended previous events held by Windham Regional Commission and appreciate their efforts in collaboration with the towns in our county.

The overarching questions, from the slide deck, asked, in effect, what are your priorities for Vermont communities to get their electricity? And how can the policies and programs of the Vermont Public Service Department better support these priorities?

I have sought out information, attended trainings and read a lot over the past few years in order to form my thinking about renewable energy in Vermont.

The format of the meeting, the slide deck, and the time frame served to control what responses the participants were able to give.

Here is what I want to share with WRC/PSD that should be considered for Vermont's electric policies going into the future:

- We need to find many ways to educate and encourage people, government and industry to use less electricity. Conservation, well insulated homes (especially those using heat pumps for heating and cooling), energy saving appliances, and so on are all familiar ways that continue to be essential areas of conservation. These efforts need to continue and be expanded.

- We need renewable power that is generated in Vermont. The production and delivery of that power must reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses in the state. Greatly increasing the amount of solar power in Vermont is essential.
- We need to protect ratepayers, especially low income and Vermonters on fixed incomes.
- We need to support locally generated electric power. As Alexandra Ocacio-Cortes recently said in New York City at the March to End Fossil Fuels, "We need new energy that is truly renewable, available as public, democratically controlled goods for our most vulnerable communities. We are not going to go from Oil Barons to Solar Barons. This belongs to the people." I agree.
- One great example is from the Town of Peacham, Vermont. On September 24, 2023 they celebrated the start-up of power generation from their community based solar cooperative.
- We need to accelerate wind generation within the state in optimal locations.
- Since the generation of in-state wind power is limited, we will need to cooperate with nearby states that can produce offshore wind power.
- The Renewable Energy Standard must have an updated definition of what is included as renewable energy. The overall goal of the Vermont Climate Action Plan aims to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The definition of renewable must include that it reduces emissions.
- We need to phase out the existing use of biomass and the use of fossil fuels, including "natural" fossil gas because of their burden of emissions.
- The Renewable Energy Standard must include the use of out-of-state nuclear and hydropower (HydroQuebec) as existing electrical sources. However, the plan for the future must not allow new facilities to be built for these sources.
- Modest increase in Farm Methane and Landfill Methane that is used at the location should be encouraged. Transporting methane from such sources is not acceptable because of leaks.
- The current system of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) has become an accounting sleight of hand that allows companies to meet the requirements on paper without actually reducing polluting emissions in Vermont. This needs to be corrected to achieve actual reduction of greenhouse gas emissions related to electricity used here.