

1 CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
2 ENERGY SUB-COMMITTEE - MINUTES
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4 DATE: Monday, March 20, 2023
5 TIME: 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
6 PLACE: Virtual Meeting via Zoom with link as published on the agenda
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Members Present:

Keith Epstein, South Burlington
Henry Bonges, Milton
Daniel Parkins, Essex
Kevin Thorley, Williston
Jim Donovan, Charlotte

Staff:

Ann Janda, Senior Energy Project Manager
Melanie Needle, Senior Planner
Taylor Newton, Planning Program Manager
Darren Schibler, Senior Planner
Charlie Baker, Executive Director

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9 M. Needle called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

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11 **1. Welcome and Introductions**

12 Staff and board members introduced themselves and offered energy “fun facts.”

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- 14 • Melanie Needle has had an EV for several years.
- 15 • Darren Schibler’s house had no insulation when they moved in, but it does now!
- 16 • Ann Janda just had a heat pump installed in her house.
- 17 • Taylor Newton just had his heat pump cleaned.
- 18 • Keith Epstein shared an [article he wrote for The Other Paper](#) about his journey to net zero.
- 19 • Daniel attended a recent webinar and learned that every dollar installed in geothermal heat saves \$3 in
- 20 electricity infrastructure.
- 21 • Jim Donovan designed his current house with passive solar and wood heat.
- 22 • Henry Bonges is happy to report he has had no car maintenance costs on his electric vehicle in several years.
- 23 • Kevin Thorley’s home energy is now fully electrified.
- 24 • Charlie Baker got an e-bike for Christmas and is excited to try it out.

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26 **2. Overview of Chittenden County ECOS Plan with a focus on energy sections**

27 M. Needle reviewed the schedule for preparation and adoption of the energy element of the ECOS Plan (Chittenden
28 County’s regional plan), including review of data and text in April and May, finalizing content in June, and
29 approving a draft in July for review by the Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC). A draft ECOS plan is
30 scheduled for November, and adoption is scheduled for June 2024 after the public review process.

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32 M. Needle noted that statewide Low Emission Analysis Platform (LEAP) data release has been delayed from the
33 Public Service Department but should be out soon. K. Epstein asked whether data will show differences and
34 additional generation from the last time the plan was adopted. M. Needle responded that it will be shown in the data.

35
36 M. Needle then reviewed Vermont’s standards for regional plans and specifically enhanced energy plans (EEPs),
37 which are required to obtain “substantial deference” for use policies conservation measures from the Public Utilities
38 Commission in their review of development of renewable energy generation projects. The goals and standards for
39 EEPs were laid out in Act 174 and are consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan.

40
41 K. Epstein asked about the difference in obtaining substantial deference for regions as opposed to municipalities. T.
42 Newton responded that the process is very similar for regions, whose EEPs are reviewed and approved by the
43 Vermont Department of Public Service (PSD); regional planning commissions then review and approve municipal
44 plans. The authority / legal rights granted by substantial deference are the same for regions and municipalities, but
45 apply specifically to each of their plans. However, since municipal plan policies must be consistent with regional
46 plans, a regional plan with substantial deference provides similar protections as the municipal plan (though a
47 municipal plan may get more specific within their jurisdiction).

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2 T. Newton also clarified the meaning of substantial deference, which means that the PUC must follow a higher legal
3 standard and more directly follow guidance for placement of renewable facilities in local and regional plans rather
4 than simply giving plans “due consideration.” In response to K. Thorley’s question, Newton further clarified that it’s
5 unclear how this process plays out in regulatory proceedings since there isn’t much case law. C. Baker provided
6 some history about the origins of the law, which came about after controversies about siting of wind turbines. He said
7 that the intent is more to specify where renewable generation should NOT be sited and has reduced the amount of
8 debate about the location of renewables.
9

10 M. Needle discussed the process for analyzing the region’s energy data and establishing targets for the electric,
11 heating, and transportation sectors. She also discussed the process of disaggregating regional demand and generation
12 data to municipalities for use in their EEP process. One new element is a tool provided by the Public Service
13 Department (PSD) to allow targets for renewable energy generation to be adjusted by factoring in constraints on the
14 electric grid.
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16 K. Epstein wondered how targets that are included in plans get used by people who read the plan. M. Needle
17 responded that the targets are meant to be check points and milestones for reaching the state’s CEP goals by 2050.
18 The targets also support development of public policies and support applications for grants; for example CCRPC is
19 currently applying for a federal grant to build more electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. D. Parkins asked whether
20 Act 174 and substantial deference affects grant opportunities; T. Newton clarified that substantial deference only
21 comes into play within the regulatory development review process.
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23 M. Needle discussed the pathways section, which detail how regions and municipalities will achieve their energy
24 targets and include some specific elements required by Act 174. These include:
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- 26 • Energy conservation and efficient use of energy in buildings
- 27 • Reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use, encourage use of renewable/lower
28 emission energy sources
- 29 • Patterns and densities of land use that results in conservation of energy and climate resilience
 - 30 ○ Note that the ECOS plan primarily achieves this by allocating 80% of our new development (now
31 proposed for 90%) in 15% of our land area.
- 32 • Development and siting of renewable energy, storage, and transmission/distribution resources
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34 K. Epstein noted that in the future he would like to discuss the fact that the current sound impact rules around wind
35 turbines seem to make it impossible to build wind facilities anywhere in Chittenden County (and Vermont). M.
36 Needle agreed and said one option could be to include a policy statement asking the state to reconsider the sound
37 rules, or else whether regions and municipalities should be required to plan for wind energy development. T. Newton
38 asked Epstein for suggestions about how to approach the conversation about sound and wind generation. Epstein
39 would want to invite a wind developer to discuss the requirements and technology to see if it is feasible to actually
40 develop under the current rules, and then whether the policy could be changed. H. Bonges noted that the technology
41 for small-scale wind turbines has improved substantially, and it might be more worthwhile to support those rather
42 than large-scale wind given the technology available at this time. D. Parkins is concerned that waiting for technology
43 to meet certain outcomes will undermine our ability to achieve our renewable energy goals. T. Newton also noted
44 that it would be worth updating the committee on changes in offshore wind development which could be factored
45 into meeting the goals.
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47 M. Needle noted that there is a new standard requiring plans to assess equity impacts of energy planning. She noted
48 that CCRPC is already doing internal work on equity with a new Equity Manager staff person. The energy equity
49 assessment includes consideration of what communities will:
50

- 51 • Be most impacted by the policies,
- 52 • Distribution of benefits and burdens of specific actions,
- 53 • Whether actions will address inequities

- Consultation with communities in the development of actions.

M. Needle envisioned that for CCRPC, this will involve reviewing policies in the current ECOS plan to see whether disadvantaged communities need to be given priority in taking action, and to invite more of their input to the policies.

Finally, new mapping data is available that updates resource areas, including potential for rooftop solar. M. Needle noted that resource areas for solar and wind are broken down into prime areas (good resource availability without development constraints) and base areas (good resource availability with possible development restraints). Development constraints themselves are broken up into state vs. local “known constraints” (areas where no development is allowed) as well as “possible constraints” (areas which need to be avoided or impacts mitigated). The mapping exercise also includes creating a map of preferred sites for renewable energy development.

H. Bonges noted that Milton is pursuing development of some large solar sites on brownfields, but has come up against a rule that prevents development of more than 500 kilowatts on a single parcel unless there is a contract with a public utility. H. Bonges and J. Donovan asked whether this rule could be changed. M. Needle and T. Newton said this is part of the net-metering rules (which were just recently amended), and this could be explored by the committee as part of the planning process.

J. Donovan expressed concern about whether the list of state constraints were appropriate and asked whether these standards could be changed. M. Needle said it is unlikely since the standards were also recently changed and are updated on a regular schedule, but this could be included for consideration as a policy in the ECOS Plan for when the standards are updated in the future.

M. Needle reviewed the maps for solar and wind generation potential in the current ECOS plan. K. Epstein asked whether the color scheme on the maps could be changed so that the prime areas are not shown in red, which generally denotes “bad” areas. M. Needle agreed that this could be done.

Review of 2018 ECOS Plan Energy Elements

M. Needle reviewed the current ECOS plan’s energy elements, which are located in several places throughout the various documents.

K. Epstein asked if there has been progress in getting non-electricity, non-natural gas data (unregulated delivered fuel data) – in other words, how much delivered fuel (propane and fuel oil) is used in the state. M. Needle noted that a provision to track this data is included in the Affordable Heating Act currently being debated by the Legislature, but it will not be settled and data will not be available before the ECOS plan needs to be finalized.

D. Parkins asked whether CCRPC’s standards account for the increased amount of in-state generation that could be required under the draft renewable energy standard. M. Needle stated that the current plan accounts for Chittenden County generating 50% of renewable electricity in-state. T. Newton noted that the renewable energy standard only applies to utilities, whose service territories go beyond Chittenden County’s boundaries and aren’t considered so directly in the plan. D. Parkins agreed and noted that this can still have a policy impact on the development of renewable energy.

K. Thurley asked whether the narrative that locally-developed renewable energy (specifically renewable energy credits) is exported out of state plays into this plan. M. Needle stated that the targets and mapping exercise simply account for the location of renewable sites, even if a utility that developed them sells the renewable energy credits elsewhere. K. Epstein noted that this goes both ways, and that a region / municipality cannot reach its targets by purchasing RECs from elsewhere.

M. Needle quickly reviewed the siting policies contained in the plan, which can be discussed in more detail at a future meeting.

At K. Epstein’s question, M. Needle said that committee members can provide feedback on the plan verbally at the next meeting or by sending them in writing to Melanie to be distributed at the next meeting (in keeping with Vermont Open Meeting Law).

3. EECBG Program Formula Grant

A. Janda presented a proposal for use of some federal grant funding (the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant or EECBG Program) that was allocated to Chittenden County. We will receive \$76,390 through a non-competitive process to spend on certain eligible activities.

Janda noted that in keeping with the Biden Administration's Justice40 initiative, the goal is for 40% of certain types of federal funding to be allocated to disadvantaged communities. Janda noted that the amount of money CCRPC received isn't substantial, so staff developed a set of options for use of the money, including:

1. **Option 1:** Assisting with the purchase of 2 electric vehicles for the staff Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's Low Income Weatherization Program.
 - a. H. Bonges noted that EVs may not be the best option for CVOEO's program if they are driving the vehicles all day and for construction purposes. K. Epstein stated that he has no concerns with this if the program director, Dwight Decoster, says the vehicles will work.
2. **Option 2:** Contribute matching funds to Vermont Gas (VGS) for Burlington International Airport's sound insulation project for Winooski homes which are in the airport's noise exposure area. Insulation will not only reduce sound impacts but also reduce thermal energy use. VGS can supply 4.5% of the local 10% match under a Federal Aviation Grant, but VGS needs more assistance for the remainder. CCRPC's EECBG funding could cover the local match for 12 out of the 25 eligible homes in Winooski.
 - a. H. Bonges noted that it appeared the Winooski homes were not in the airport's most sound impacted area and asked for clarification. He also felt that the Winooski homes were less impacted than South Burlington and advocated for funds to go to those that were most impacted. Staff clarified that staff selected Winooski partly because it is a disadvantaged community and because they didn't receive their own EECBG funding allocation.
3. **Option 3:** Distribute funding to municipalities who didn't receive EECBG funding for installation of heat pumps or renewable energy generation at municipal buildings.
 - a. K. Thorley suggested that this could also include installation of electric vehicle charging equipment so that individuals who can't afford to install chargers at home can charge in public locations. T. Newton noted that CCRPC is already pursuing a grant for substantially more EV charging than this grant could fund.

D. Parkins wondered if the money could be better used as a "force multiplier" to move larger issues forward, such as filling data gaps for development of renewable energy like geothermal. T. Newton said that approach could work, but more details would be needed; in addition, the focus would need to be on benefiting low and moderate income areas / households. Newton noted that VGS is the current leader in geothermal and staff could ask whether more funding would be helpful to obtain data or generally support initiatives to implement geothermal. A. Janda noted that consultant services are an allowed use of the EECBG funds. Also, VGS is trying to work with affordable housing developers in their geothermal initiatives, which could be a way to achieve the Justice40 goals for use of the funds.

M. Needle and A. Janda noted that staff are not looking for a vote from the Energy Subcommittee, just to solicit additional ideas. Janda noted that we are still awaiting input from the Vermont Environmental Justice Steering Committee before action by the CCRPC Board. The deadline spending funds is fairly far off and flexible.

K. Epstein spoke in support of option 1 (funding CVOEO's EV purchase) because of the opportunity to increase exposure to EVs for communities that wouldn't normally see them, including both clients and employees of CVOEO. K. Thorley spoke in favor of option 3 and option 1 in that order.

4. Next Steps

M. Needle asked the committee members to fill out a Doodle poll for the next meeting in April, at which we hope to be able to review the LEAP data. In the meantime, committee members can review the current plan and send comments to Melanie. D. Parkins noted that the Essex Energy Committee is looking to do a Button Up event at the Champlain Valley Fair and invites other energy committees to join as well.

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- 2 The meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.

DRAFT