

NW Regional Energy & Climate Committee

Draft Meeting Minutes

May 17, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Attendance: Kirk Waite (Georgia), Bob Buermann (South Hero), Barclay Morris (Grand Isle), William Irwin (Bakersfield), Peter Zomore (North Hero), Dan Seeley (Richford) and Mathew Lafluer (?).

Marlena began the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Adjustments to Agenda

Kirk began a discussion regarding Vermont's Open Meeting Law. He cautioned everyone about having a committee discussion using email. He added that it's not good practice to "copy all" because there is a chance someone will "copy all" back. It is ok to make comments about a topic that would then get discussed in a meeting.

Bob has privacy concerns using his personal email for committee work and how requests for information would be handled.

Marlena compiled questions and concerns to send to Catherine.

Regional Energy Plan - Review draft Goals and Implementation Steps chapter

Marlena reviewed that the goals and implementation steps from the 2017 Regional Energy Plan. They are based on anticipated data and plan guidance from the Dept of Public Service. The data is referred to as [LEAP](#) data (Low Emissions Analysis Platform). The committee will have to change the goals if it doesn't match the data. The chapter includes implementation steps for consideration at the regional, municipal and individual levels.

Kirk noted there are a lot of prescriptive steps that the small communities don't have the cost-benefit for. He had concerns that the goals can't be achieved if the cost-benefit isn't there. There needs to be some measurement of success. If the goals are not achievable at the regional level, then we fail.

Barclay added that Goal 1 should be expanded to include Vermont Electric Co-op they serve all of Grand Isle County. He also noted use of acronyms is unsettling. The acronyms should be spelled out the first time.

Marlena agreed to add those changes to the draft chapter.

A discussion began on how the chapter is organized, consequences of not achieving the goals, and impacts of implementation steps on the communities. Marlena explained that the implementation steps are not necessarily a "to do" list but are options. Not all options are going to make sense for each municipality. There could be a paragraph inserted at the beginning of the Chapter explaining that these aren't mandates but goals and steps.

Peter noted there aren't significant sanctions by the state in not achieving these goals. This energy plan is in place it gives certain substantive weight to DPS determinations. Many of the goals and steps are aspirational.

Marlena added that there are realistic and unrealistic goals and that is the consideration the committee should be looking for. The committee can add and remove goals that it deems are realistic.

A discussion began on process including costs associated with each category, demand side management, supply distribution and committee members experiences in reducing individual energy burdens. Bill noted that goal 1 "Use demand side management to handle the expected doubling of electric energy demand" is an oxymoron. It essentially states that if you want more electricity, than you will have to use less electricity. Data is needed to measure the goals and implementation steps. The plan's goals and implementation steps need to align with current capacities of municipalities regardless of size and individuals regardless of income. We need to come up with affordable and better distribution of supply for the average citizen.

Marlena noted a lot of these goals are being driven by Act174 requirements and there is concern that that the data isn't going to change the goals. She asked for suggestions for implementation steps that members think are necessary for the region

There was a discussion about assessing the net benefit of these initiatives to determine if they are feasible for municipalities without relying on tax increases. Members emphasized the need to prove the appropriateness of ambitious goals by demonstrating their net benefit. Peter noted that streetlight LED standards and heat pumps have been studied by Efficiency Vermont and DPS and have been found cost-effective over their lifetime. A lot of them are listed here because they are appropriate and efficient and cost-effective overtime. Bill noted that it depends on each situation and that heat pumps are limited under certain subzero conditions.

Barclay noted that items like supporting a loan program for tiny homes, are unrealistic. There needs to be significant changes to local zoning bylaws. Much of the content seems more suitable for Chittenden County rather than Franklin and Grand Isle counties. Marlena acknowledged Barclay's concerns noting that financing loans for tiny homes is a challenge due to lender restrictions. She mentioned she is researching the possibility of creating a revolving loan fund through a grant program to facilitate the purchase of tiny homes. NRPC is working on zoning bylaw updates for some communities to address tiny homes.

The group discussed the overall outline of the plan and concerns about using a boilerplate template.

Matt added that each region and energy committee is unique, and they should not be overshadowed by the focus on Chittenden County. A straightforward summary, written in accessible language, that outlines our present and future energy initiatives and the steps involved. He expresses concerns about the complexity of the language used and the financial limitations faced by some individuals, suggesting the need for assistance in simplifying the process for everyone involved.

Marlena screen shared the meeting schedule and outline that was agreed upon at a previous meeting.

There was a discussion about some information that looked better for Chittenden County and more urban areas. Bill noted that in the NW region, there are only a few of the more populated municipalities in that can actually implement something locally because of capacity.

Bill added that the Committee members should use “track changes” feature in Word, if possible, when submitting comments on the plan. He asked Marlana to let the committee members know that comments/edits should be sent to her about the plan’s chapters.

Kirk noted concerns about large scale renewable energy projects and the need to address transitional costs which will be high. Ultimately, we will get to a point where new power is cheaper than old power, but there is going to be a transitional period that is going to be expensive. He asked what are we going to do to manage that in our region? Also, from a municipal standpoint around equity, most of the funding is going to very few towns where their energy burden is high. Many municipalizes like Georgia, have been shown they don’t qualify for any grant programs. The plan should also focus on areas that need help where funding may not be available.

Peter replied that the state preempts energy planning in the region. The committee can only take what the state gives in terms of leeway. We have an energy chapter in the regional plan. There are regional energy plan goals that mirror what’s in regional plan but are more detailed. The committee needs to understand whether it is worth the regional energy plan update process for a plan that the Public Service would merit as special deference.

Marlena screen shared the Act174 requirements (Determination of Standards) for a regional energy plan. Barclay noted that most of Committee members were not part of the original energy plan creation and aren’t familiar with requirements or the data or the timeline. Peter explained the difference between the Northwest Regional Plan update currently under way and the stand-alone Regional Energy Plan. The Northwest Regional Plan used information contained in the stand-alone Regional Energy Plan. The data has yet to be received and analyzed from the state in time to update the energy section of the Northwest Regional Plan.

Marlena replied that LEAP data from the state generates models of what energy could look like in the region. We have current data on energy generation. The plan requirements and data are coming from and going to the Dept of Public Service. They have not provided a deadline for the plan update but our current plan expires soon and so it won’t be viable any more.

Bill asked if there is a way to extend the old plan. The demand objectives come from our regional plan and were there in 2017 as are Goals 1 – 9. He noted concerns with demand side management noting the need state to fix the distribution system to make it work with renewables.

Marlena added that a reason a lot of our goals are the same is because they are required. Equity and adaptation were added. She stated her concerns about the committee’s ideas to do something different than the Act174 requirements. She noted that a lot of the goals are prescriptive steps NRPC is currently assisting communities with and they have been shown as a way to reduce emissions. She requested more tangible input from the committee and asked what the committee would want to start with if not the goals and implementation steps.

Barclay replied that the committee is ready to address the goals but not the actions. If it was just goals then it would have been easier. The rest of the plan makes sense.

Marlena asked what information the committee would need to address implementation steps.

Peter requested to see the requirement for a standalone regional energy plan and to compare those requirements against our existing plan to see if it is worthwhile to go through that extra effort. He added that the committee needs to do its best for what the state wants but it also needs to push back if it is a problem for individuals and municipalities.

A discussion began on where the existing plan fails against the standards. Marlena noted that the current plan lacks a required equity goal, mapping needs and data targets need to be updated. This chapter came first because this is the only chapter that changed in a drastic way since the last plan. The old chapter is very context dense. There is a desire and need to streamline the old plan and make steps easily available for municipalities and individuals when they ask the question on what they need to do. This is not intended to be a rewrite of the old plan.

Marlena agreed to go through the 2017 Regional Energy Plan and fill out the Regional Determination Standards and review the results to the committee.

Barclay asked for hardcopies of the draft regional plan and the last regional energy plan to be mailed.

Bill apologized to Marlena for having to chair the meeting. In the chair's absence the vice chair should have run the meeting. The committee hasn't heard from the Chair since he resigned from NRPC Board. Bill would like to have a discussion with Catherine on what the committee should do about a chair. The nominating committee for NRPC is meeting soon but this is an ad-hoc committee made up of mostly Board representatives which can elect/appoint a chair without the NRPC nominating committee.

The committee agreed to meet monthly with no meeting in August and possibly no meeting in December. The committee agreed to appoint/elect a new chair after Bill meets with Catherine.

Adjourn

B. Morris motioned to adjourn. P. Sealey seconded.

Everyone thanked Marlena for her efforts during this difficult meeting.

Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:10 pm.