

NW Regional Energy and Climate Committee

Wednesday, February 21, 2024. 6:30 pm

Virtual Meeting

Chair Al Voegele called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM

Attendance: NRPC Staff: Marlena Valenta and Emily Klofft

Committee Members: Dan Seeley, Bob Buermann, Al Voegele, Bill Irwin, Matthew LaFluer, Kirk Waite

Adjustments to the Agenda

No adjustments to the agenda.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of December Minutes

Bill motioned to accept the minutes. Bob seconded. Motion carried.

Kirk abstained given his absence at the December meeting.

Review Final Piece of Draft Targets Chapter

Bill commented that the chapter is frustrating noting that the acronyms and reading level could be confusing for readers. He also found the targets to be unrealistic and off-putting. Marlena responded that the RPCs don't have flexibility in reducing the targets to a more realistic level, but that we are adding context to make them feel more applicable.

Kirk noted that tables with targets would be more informative if they included the current status. Emily agreed adding that this is harder than it seems as data is not readily available.

Kirk inquired about energy storage targets and whether they were considered. Marlena replied that this is a priority topic at the state level right now. We will likely see more guidance around it soon.

Kirk noted solar should be incentivized to be the most efficient in order to use less land and prioritize projects that use tracking panels. He was surprised at the low number of plug-in EVs that were included in the table.

Kirk and Bill are concerned about putting out a plan with 2025 targets that we will fail to meet almost immediately after the plan is released. Emily replied that DPS requires 2025 targets. Kirk suggested that we add information on why we are unable to meet the targets. Al suggested adding a discussion of what citizens are able to control.

Matt stated that consistent data is an issue and that resident polls and information on resident views should be prioritized. The plan should address the fact that volunteers do a lot of crucial work in the state and the plan should address the equity implications of that. He suggested a one-page summary of this chapter to make it more accessible. Marlena clarified that providing a summary that focuses on the directionality targets we have would be ideal.

Kirk questioned why the targets don't include public transit and why the state is decreasing public transit options. Emily explained that the lack of VMT data is due to the state de-emphasizing reducing VMT as a goal for energy.

Bob suggested that the main audience for this document should be clarified in order to help make it more targeted and helpful. Is it the general public or is it more municipal staff and energy committees? Marlana suggested including a few pull out pages that provide simplified overview data while still allowing the plan to include more detailed data and information. The group generally agreed.

Review of Draft Energy Maps

Marlena gave a brief presentation on the energy maps and the needed updates. It included a change in the classification of vernal pools as constraints and the expansion of habitat blocks and municipal conservation constraints.

Bill has been involved in developing a conservation district at the town level. He suggested to tailor what the plan says to the local municipal reader so they understand what needs to be done at the municipal level to protect areas.

Regional Land Use

Matt noted that Catherine Dimitruk presented this map to the legislature and asked if there will be changes to this map. Emily gave an overview of the state proposal for changes to land use planning statewide and noted that this could change this map if it goes through. Staff will keep the group updated.

Kirk noted he was confused by the labelling of agriculture land where there are developments and near waterways. Emily explained that those issues are part of the reason the changes are being proposed.

Wind

Bill suggested we add context to explain how municipalities can use these maps during a specific energy project review and share how they may be useful to prepare for future energy projects. Al speculated to what degree municipalities should market prime wind opportunities as a benefit to its tax base.

Dan pointed out the alternative style of wind generator called vertical access generators (egg beater style). They can be lower to the ground, cheaper and easier to maintain, and they could be a good option for our region instead of the much taller horizontal access generators.

Natural Gas Lines

Kirk asked if this only shows where hookups are available and not major transport lines. Emily confirmed this is the case. Bob asked for the inclusion of gas transmission lines as this could be helpful for placing major feeders like biodigester projects.

Energy Burden

Kirk asked for the definition of "energy burden". Marlana explained it is the percentage of income spent on energy including transportation, heating, and electricity.

Matt hoped that this equity lens is used more often and considered more often. Kirk noted this map could mask equity, it could hide individual needs and is too broad. Marlana noted that this type of municipal data is not made to be used individually. Programs for low income or high energy burden

individuals use different qualifying data and it does not go by town. Kirk is concerned it could evolve into being used for those purposes. Bill suggested adding language that addresses this concern.

There are questions from multiple members about accuracy of data. Al is concerned it is not accurate enough to be included like this. Bill would like to hear from EVT about how this data is created and also how it is used. Emily shared a report with the committee that delves into this slightly.

Marlena stated she understands the concerns of the committee but is hesitant to lessen the presence of energy burden as it is such a key marker of equity. Marlena and Emily will look at reworking and finding new ways to present the data.

Hydro

No comments.

Solar

Bob explained the half mile buffer is the amount of distance you can go from a transmission line without significant loss from generation. All agreed a statement explaining the context would be helpful. Marlena will add context for ease of use.

Utility Service Areas

Bob noted that this map is useful for siting projects.

Transmission and 3 Phase Power

Bill noted that this map is very useful especially for larger projects. The half mile buffer should probably be added to all potential generation maps because it applies to more than just solar.

Woody Biomass

Bill asked to have the context blurb explain what the key means.

Existing Facilities

There was a discussion on misplaced solar facilities with Georgia as an example. Alburg has a solar facility that is not shown. The inaccuracies should be noted for readers. Town roads should be added and rivers and streams be removed as they are less relevant.

Emily stated that there are challenges in determining exact addresses for generation facilities.

Adjournment

Kirk motioned to adjourn. Bill seconded. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 8:13 PM.