

Vermont Climate Council Process Roadmap

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Overview

This document offers a process roadmap for the Vermont Climate Council to conduct its work as mandated by the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA).

The Council is tasked with developing by Dec 1, 2021 a Vermont Climate Action Plan that “shall set forth the specific initiatives, programs, and strategies, including regulatory and legislative changes, necessary to achieve the State’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction...and build resilience to prepare the State’s communities, infrastructure, and economy to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change...” The statute describes in more detail the specific topical areas that the plan must cover.

This document describes **roles** for the Council and the Subcommittees, **tasks** for the Subcommittees, a **leadership structure** for the Council and Subcommittees and **decision-making rules** for the different groups. In addition, it outlines the role of the initiative’s **Director**, the **support** that will be available as well as planned public and stakeholder **engagement**.

Finally, the document also provides the **charges**, or specific focus, of each Subcommittee.

Role of the Council

The primary body for decision as defined in the legislation is the Climate Council. This is the body who is charged to bring forth clear recommendations for action and its implementation.

The Council's responsibilities shall include the following

- Set the overall direction for the work of the Council
- Generate and hone expectations for and themes to be covered in the final report to be submitted to the Legislature
- Agree on an overall process plan and confirm membership in and overall charges of the Subcommittees
- Assign responsibility to the Subcommittees to generate recommended, draft initiatives, programs and strategies in their respective areas
- Oversee and provide guidance to the Subcommittees in their work, including review their workplans, their progress and ensuring gaps are filled, redundancy is reduced, and overall efforts are coordinated
- Review, compile, refine and finalize the outputs of Subcommittees to create the Vermont Climate Action Plan
- Conduct public engagement during the process and around the draft recommendations prior to finalization
- Integrate, resolve differences, and decide upon the final content in the Vermont Climate Action Plan

Leadership structure for the Council – Steering Committee

Given the breadth and complexity of the Council's work, the Council will establish a Steering Committee to guide the overall process and ensure progress of the work across Subcommittees. The Steering Committee will:

- Develop Council meeting agendas, in collaboration with the Council
- Serve as a clearinghouse for requests for technical help/contractor support
- Assist the Council to develop a slate of membership for the Subcommittees
- Develop common frameworks for Subcommittee work such as a work plan templates, recommendations template, and other useful tools
- Track progress to ensure the process is within its timeline and delivering the expected outputs.

The Council will create a Steering Committee comprised of the following individuals:

- 2 individuals from among the Council's Executive Branch members
 - The Council Chair - Secretary of the Agency of Administration)
 - Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources
- 4 individuals from among the Council's members who were appointed by the legislature
 - These 4 individuals will include 2 from members who were appointed by the House of Representatives and 2 who were appointed by the Senate
 - Members who were appointed by the legislature will choose these 4 individuals

- In addition, on a regular basis, the Steering Committee will convene the co-chairs of the Subcommittees to ensure cross-fertilization and coordination among the Subcommittees and relevant state agencies.
- The Steering Committee will act in service of the Council, organizing the work, but not controlling it.

Role of the Subcommittees

To achieve the Council’s mandate, the GWSA establishes four Subcommittees and charges them to “assist with preparing the [Climate Action] Plan and carry out other duties.” The four Subcommittees specifically identified in §591(c) of the GWSA are:

- Rural resilience and adaptation
- Cross-sector mitigation
- Just transitions
- Agriculture and ecosystems

The GWSA also allows the Council to create additional Subcommittees to advise the Council. To address the technical complexity and data needed for this effort, to improve upon the state’s emissions inventory, undertaking scenario evaluation of draft recommendations, and establishing from which to measure progress over time, the Council also will create a fifth Subcommittee:

- Science and data

The core function of the Subcommittees is to recommend draft initiatives, programs and strategies for the Council to review, refine and compile into Vermont’s Climate Action Plan. As outlined in the legislation, the Subcommittees collectively must further the following objectives:

- Prioritize the most cost-effective, technologically feasible, and equitable GHG emissions reduction pathways, adaptation and preparedness strategies;
- Provide for GHG emissions reductions that reflect the relative contribution of emissions from different sectors;
- Minimize negative impacts on marginalized and rural communities and individuals with low and moderate incomes;
- Ensure that all regions of the state benefit from GHG emissions reductions;
- Support economic sectors and regions of the state that face the greatest barriers to emissions reductions, especially rural and economically distressed regions and industries;
- Support industries, technology, and training that will allow workers and businesses in the state to benefit from GHG reduction solutions;
- Support the use of natural and working lands to reduce GHG, sequester carbon and increase resilience; and
- Maximize the state’s involvement in interstate and regional initiatives and programs designed to reduce GHG emissions, and build upon state, national, and international partnerships and programs.

Two of the Subcommittees – Just transitions and Science and data – will create a workplan that focuses on providing inputs into and reviewing outputs from the other three Subcommittees. The

remaining three Subcommittees will create a workplan that, among them, mirrors the tasks described in the statute:

1. Inventory existing programs to related to your Subcommittee's Charge;
2. Identify, analyze and evaluate new strategies/programs needed to meet your Subcommittee's Charge;
3. Evaluate cost-effectiveness of both existing and new strategies and programs;
4. Develop financing strategies;
5. Develop monitoring strategy for assessing:
 - a. GHG emissions
 - b. Program effectiveness
 - c. Impacts of climate change on Vermont's climate, wildlife and natural resources
 - d. Community resilience;
6. Identify rules to be adopted (by ANR)

Additional detail on the specific charge for each of the Subcommittees is provided below.

As noted in the statute, the Subcommittees works will be based on the "reports, plans, and information pertaining to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate resilience strategies from the Agency of Natural Resources, the Department of Public Service, other State agencies and departments, and, where appropriate, the State Comprehensive Energy Plan..."

In addition, the statute calls for the adoption of the Vermont Climate Action Plan by Dec 1, 2021 and an update of the Plan every four years thereafter.

Leadership structure for the Subcommittees – Co-Chairs

Each Subcommittee will have co-chairs. One co-chair will be a Council executive-appointed member or their designee, and one co-chair will be a Council member appointed by the legislature or their designee. In specific cases, an additional co-chair may be designated from outside the Council depending on the needs and purpose of a particular Subcommittee. The primary criteria for selecting co-chairs are:

- Sufficient availability to dedicate substantial time to the Subcommittee, particularly during the initial months of developing the group's draft recommendations.
- A substantive expertise on the topics and ideally some direct role in, or clear understanding of, aspects of the implementation of the proposed recommendations.
- A willingness to work collaboratively with a diverse group of experts and stakeholders to develop recommendations.

The Subcommittee co-chairs will:

- Take the lead in implementing the workplan of their respective Subcommittees, including designing a sequence of conversations and developing draft recommendations
- Coordinate regularly with other co-chairs and the Steering Committee, and report back to the Council on issues and progress on a regular basis

- Be supported by agency staff¹, technical consultants, and facilitators
- Direct their technical requests and needs through agency staff. Only the contracting agency can direct technical consultants (with the exception of the facilitators who are jointly directed by the Steering Committee).
- Ensure all Subcommittee members have been trained on open meeting laws and their implications for the work of the Subcommittees.

Subcommittee membership

Subcommittees should aim for a limited number of core members (approximately 8 to 12) ready and willing to do the work. *However, please note that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee and Just Transitions may need more members given the range of economic sectors involved and diversity of Vermonters we are trying to reach, respectively.* Agency staff and technical consultants, if available, will support each Subcommittee.

The Subcommittees will include non-Council members. Time commitment is intensive and could include as much as a meeting per week (4 to 6 hours per week of time commitment during the initial months).

Subcommittee membership should consider the following:

- Council members and some measure of balance across the three designations
- Specific expertise necessary to create the work
- As needed, geographic balance
- As needed, sectoral balance
- Equity and representation of vulnerable populations

To establish the Subcommittees, the Council's Steering Committee will:

- Ask Council members to self-select in which Subcommittee they wish to participate, and work with Council members to address gaps and achieve balance.
- Solicit ideas from Council members about names of non-Council members to add to the Subcommittees.
- Create and disseminate a public participation survey whereby members of the general public can indicate their interest in being considered for a Subcommittee.
- Generate a slate based on this input and public survey feedback, including rounding out any key missing technical expertise or stakeholder interests
- Present the slate to the Council for final additions, if needed, and approval

All Subcommittee meetings will be noticed and managed through all applicable open meeting laws.

Decision-making by the Council

The Council will strive to make decisions by consensus, including matters of process and substance.

¹ The level of support will depend on the availability of staff time.

The Council will strive to reach as broad a consensus as possible on its Vermont Climate Action Plan in order to promote state-wide buy-in into the strategies it is proposing and to motivate a range of actors to be active participants in the implementation of the strategies. Consensus is defined by broad agreement among Council Members: all or nearly all Council members can live with the proposed decision. Consensus is also defined by the process as well as the outcome of group deliberation. Thus, the Council will seek to articulate and explore members' interests and concerns, creatively develop ideas and options, seek to meet the needs and concerns of members to the greatest extent possible, and problem-solve in the face of disagreement. Consensus on the final slate of recommendations does not suggest all members will be equally satisfied with the outcomes nor prefer each and every recommendation. Rather, a consensus indicates that the slate of recommendations in total advances the public interest and well-being of the citizens of Vermont to the greatest extent it can.

Broad consensus has several benefits: 1) politically more powerful; 2) brings in cross-sectoral support essential for such a complex problem; 3) ensures more rapid implementation, reducing or avoiding litigation, and moving forward more quickly.

The Council will be supported in reaching consensus by: 1) extensive vetting and work at the Subcommittee level; 2) an iterative process of development of ideas, honing, and prioritizing; 3) facilitated dialogue that avoids the many pitfalls of classic Roberts Rules of Orders created to achieve majority vote, not broad acceptance; and, 4) Steering Committee guidance, support, and informal "mediation" to bridge differences between meetings as needed (within Open Meeting Laws). Consensus will be tested at various steps in the process through discussion, straw polls, informal, non-decisional surveying on issues and ideas between meetings, and carefully facilitated discussion toward the end of formal votes.

If the Council cannot reach consensus on specific issues, despite its best efforts, the Council will use the majority voting protocol described in the GWSA. In addition, different viewpoints on specific issues can be noted in the Council's Climate Action Plan, which will be one, single report. The Council will use a high bar to include multiple viewpoints in the final report and will agree on what constitutes that high bar prior to discussions on a consolidated draft Action Plan document.

Decision-making by Subcommittees

The Subcommittees will be operated by consensus as well, as defined above for the Council. For disagreements that can't be resolved in a Subcommittee as part of a consensus set of recommendations to the Council, the Council members of the Subcommittee will determine what is forwarded to the Council. What is forwarded may include:

- The recommendations supported by all or most of the Council members of that Subcommittee
- A slate of options for a particular issue or recommendation, together with the advantages and disadvantages of these options as developed by the Subcommittee.

Public engagement

This process of developing the Vermont Climate Action Plan will have multiple layers of stakeholder and public engagement designed to promote a Plan that is wiser, better informed,

and broadly supported. The process of public and stakeholder engagement should seek to foster information exchange and shared learning. The intent is dialogue and joint development.

- The Council's membership represents diverse interests and stakeholders in the state
- The Subcommittees' membership will represent an even broader group of interests and stakeholders in Vermont, all working collaboratively towards draft recommendations.
- The Subcommittees will conduct targeted outreach as needed to improve their discussions and decision-making.
- The Just Transitions Subcommittee will play a leading role in designing a public participation plan that facilitates broad engagement to gain input from all residents of the State, paying particular attention to creating opportunities for rural, low income and marginalized communities to engage meaningfully and with voice and influence. The Just Transitions Subcommittee will strive to develop tool(s) that can be used to assess the efficacy of community engagement efforts related to the development of the Climate Action Plan.
- At a minimum, Subcommittees will hold at least one public on-line meeting to create public dialogue around their initial draft recommendations. These may need to be held at a variety of times (nights and days), formats (webinars, focus groups, written comment) and means to input (verbal, written).
- In addition, at a minimum, the Council will hold public input sessions for several weeks on a draft version of its Climate Action Plan, prior to finalizing the document. These may need to be held at a variety of times (nights and days), formats (webinars, focus groups, written comment) and means to input (verbal, written).
- All meetings of the Council and the Subcommittees will be open to the public. Most will include a time on the agenda for public input. Non-members will be able to reframe from the chat function and turning cameras on until the public comment period. The Council will explore digital platforms such as Zoom that simplify and facilitate online public meetings.
- The initiative will have a website that allows for asynchronous input.

Project Director and support

The process will have a Director housed in ANR whose primary functions will be to:

- Manage and keep track of the different components of the process, in particular the coordination of the Subcommittees, the Steering Committee and the Council.
- Oversee contractors, including the facilitation team and the technical services.
- Shepherd the written deliverables, in particular the Climate Action Plan.

In addition, each Subcommittee will have staff support assigned to it from different state agencies. These staff will assist Subcommittees to prepare meeting inputs, plan meetings with co-chairs and draft outputs. Staff will coordinate with the Director to assist in shepherding written deliverables.

Facilitation team

A facilitation team will assist with the following tasks:

- Prepare and lead monthly Council meetings
- Prepare and facilitate Steering Committee meetings

- Support Subcommittees be assisting during their initial set-up, during stakeholder and public outreach and during particularly difficult decision-making moments
- Assist the Director with process advice
- Provide materials and tools to help the Council make decisions as it consolidates its Climate Action Plan
- Support public meetings around the Draft Climate Action Plan

Technical Services

ANR will hire technical experts to provide priority technical analysis that will assist the Council and Subcommittees to make informed decisions. The Director will work collaboratively with the Council and Subcommittees to identify the most useful technical inputs that can be delivered in time to support decision-making.

Specific Duties of Each Subcommittee

Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee will focus on pressures climate change will place on Vermont's transportation, electricity, housing, emergency services, and communications infrastructure, with particular attention to the challenges faced by rural communities across the state in addressing these pressures. The Sub-committee will also assess how individual and community preparedness impact resilience to climate change.

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee shall identify, evaluate and analyze existing and new strategies and programs that build resilience and prepare the State's communities, infrastructure, and economy to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change. This work is anticipated to emphasize reducing Vermonters' energy burden and seeking opportunities for nature-based solutions within the built environment.

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee shall (by statute):

1. Develop a "municipal vulnerability index" to identify those communities that may be most adversely affected by climate change;
2. Develop best practice recommendations specific to rural communities for reducing municipal, school district, and residential fossil fuel consumption; fortifying critical transportation, electricity, and community infrastructure; and creating a distributed, redundant, storage-supported local electrical system;
3. Recommend a means of securely sharing self-identified vulnerable residents' information with State and local emergency responders and utilities;
4. Recommend tools for municipalities to assess their climate emergency preparedness, consider land use changes that reduce vulnerabilities, evaluate their financial capacity to address infrastructure resilience, and prioritize investment in that infrastructure;
5. Review existing planning efforts, including local and regional land use planning, transportation planning, energy planning and operations planning, and identify opportunities to

better integrate and support these efforts in service of GHG emissions reductions, building resilience and designing a resilient future.

6. Utilize Vermont Emergency Management biennial reports to recommend program, policy, and legislative changes that will enhance municipal resilience to increased hazards presented by climate change.

In addition to these statutory mandates, it is anticipated that the sub-committee will consider additional areas of work including, but not necessarily limited to, the role of nature-based solutions in enhancing landscape resilience in the built environment. Work around nature-based solutions will require early and close coordination with the Agriculture and Ecosystems Sub-committee to establish the roles of each sub-committee related to adaptation and community resilience.

Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee

The Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee will focus on comprehensively “identifying the most scientifically and technologically feasible strategies and programs” to achieve the GHG emissions reduction requirements of the GWSA. It should be noted that local and regional land use planning and decision-making has long-term impacts on GHG emissions that should be incorporated into the work of this Subcommittee. Initiatives, strategies, and programs found to be feasible will then be evaluated through economic analyses to determine the equity considerations, economic case, and relative cost-effectiveness of each strategy or program.

The Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee will establish a framework for consistently evaluating initiatives, strategies, and programs, with support from the Science and Data Subcommittee. The framework should include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

- GHG mitigation potential;
- Cost-effectiveness;
- Affordability and impacts on vulnerable populations;
- Ability to identify and track measurable outcomes;
- Demonstrated/proven effectiveness;
- Legal authority (existing or needed) to support implementation;
- Co-benefits

In service of this effort, it is anticipated that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee will need to establish sector-specific task leads to ensure the capacity and expertise needed in order to identify and evaluate a full range of sector-specific initiatives, strategies and programs. Because of the scope of this Subcommittee, the membership may need to be somewhat larger than the other Subcommittees.

In preparing its annual GHG emissions inventory, the State of Vermont currently tracks emissions from the following sectors: agriculture; buildings (residential/commercial/industrial); electricity (consumption); fossil fuel; industrial processes; transportation; and waste. The GWSA also specifically calls for strategies that limit the use of chemicals and substances or products that contribute to climate change. It is anticipated that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee’s work will be organized consistent with these sectors, with particular attention given to the building and transportation sectors given the outsized role these sectors play in Vermont’s GHG emissions profile. The Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee will require early coordination with

the Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee to establish the roles of each subcommittee related to the agriculture sector, including where strategies related to agricultural emissions will be taken up. Once formed, this Subcommittee will determine a workstructure regarding sectors to be reviewed and approved by the Council at its March meeting.

Just Transitions Subcommittee

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will develop principles to guide and evaluate the work of the other Sub-committees to ensure that the initiatives, programs and strategies necessary to achieve the State's GHG emission reduction requirements and build resilience and climate adaptation of Vermont communities and natural systems support all residents of the State fairly and equitably. The Sub-committee will review the SOV Equity Impact Assessment as a starting place to inform the principles to guide this work, and will further consider job, economic and demographic impacts of various proposed recommendations set forth by other Sub-committees to establish equitable policies free from any form of discrimination or bias.

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will further rely upon an environmental justice framework to ensure the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all Vermonters, while working to uncover any underlying assumptions that may have historically contributed to and produced differential exposure and unequal protection of the State's climate policies. Future policy decisions must acknowledge past harms done and seek a path forward which is reparative and restorative. Through the environmental justice framework, the Sub-committee will promote tools and strategies to eliminate unfair, unjust and inequitable conditions and policy decisions.

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will be of service to all VCC Sub-committees. In particular, it will work in close, ongoing coordination with the Science & Data Sub-committee to: i) identify and evaluate the State's most vulnerable and at-risk communities, including the use of vulnerability indices and mapping, with an intention to make data more inclusive and fill historical gaps; and ii) promote the State's sound investments in low-emission, job-rich sectors and technologies. Here, joint Sub-committee efforts will ensure that all equity principles remain need-based and data-driven.

It is anticipated that, once the set of principles that will be used to guide Vermont's climate have been established, members of the Just Transitions Sub-committee will:

- offer tools or processes for evaluating both existing and recommended programs and strategies through a just transitions filter or lens;
- to the extent they are able, join and participate in the other Sub-committees to ensure that these principles are fully integrated into the more technical components of this work; and
- review recommendations from other Sub-committees for their just transition impacts.

This approach will help ensure that the initiatives, programs and strategies consider the disproportionate impact of climate change on rural, low-income, black, indigenous and people of color, and marginalized communities and that programs and incentives for building resilience are accessible to all Vermonters and do not unfairly burden any groups, communities, geographic locations or economic sectors.

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will also have a leading role in designing and guiding a public participation plan that facilitates broad and ongoing engagement to gain input from all residents of the State, paying particular attention to creating opportunities for rural, low-income and marginalized communities to engage meaningfully and with voice and influence. The Just Transitions Sub-committee will develop tool(s) that can be used to assess the efficacy of community engagement efforts related to the development of the Climate Action Plan.

Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee

Context (language from the Global Warming Solutions Act): Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee. This subcommittee shall focus on the role Vermont's natural and working lands play in carbon sequestration and storage, climate adaptation, and ecosystem and community resilience. This subcommittee will seek to understand current initiatives in the agricultural and forestry sectors and the businesses that depend on them and to develop actions and policies that restore wetlands; increase carbon stored on agricultural and forest land and in forest products; and support healthy agricultural soils and local food systems.

1. Carbon Budget: Develop a current carbon budget for the State of Vermont that quantifies existing carbon storage in soils and biomass and carbon fluxes (emissions and sequestration) associated with natural and working lands, including biomass growth, management and utilization, and natural processes, in support of the GWSA requirement to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across all sectors.
2. Emissions reductions: Identify and develop initiatives, programs and strategies that reduce gross and net annual greenhouse gas emissions from Vermont's natural and working lands, including land-use conversion. This includes strategies to maintain or increase carbon sequestration in Vermont's natural and working lands.
3. Assessment of co-benefits and impacts: As emission reduction initiatives, programs and strategies are identified and developed, assess their co-benefits for such factors as water quality, soil health, quality of life, food security, and impacts on economic and ecological resilience and sustainability.
4. Nature-based solutions for Adaptation/Resilience: Identify and develop initiatives, programs and strategies to improve adaptation and build resilience in Vermont's natural and working lands. This work should also consider nature-based solutions – and human impediments to those solutions – that build resilience in Vermont's communities. 'Resilience' means the capacity of individuals, communities, and natural and built systems to withstand and recover from climatic events, trends, and disruptions.
5. Food and forest systems/security: Identify and develop climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives, programs and strategies that promote Vermont's local agricultural and forest economy, improve healthy soils, create greater access to healthy, local foods for all Vermonters, and improve water quality.
6. Land use planning: Advise other subcommittees on land use issues and opportunities, including nature-based solutions to reduce vulnerability to our built environment and siting of new renewable energy generation.

Science and Data Subcommittee

The Science and Data Sub-committee is responsible for incorporating the most recent and highest quality data and information available about climate change, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience into the Vermont Climate Action Plan. Our commitment is to be guided by evidence and peer-reviewed science, while employing credible, consistent, and transparent methods of assessment and analysis for Vermont. Additionally, because weather, climate, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions do not stop at state boundaries, a regional approach shall be used to complement the state-specific analysis of this subcommittee in order to address the full scope of data being explored and to set Vermont within the context of the climate change work taking place in neighboring states across the Northeast. The subcommittee will identify any critical scientific information, monitoring and/or evaluation gaps that currently exist, both for statewide and sub-state analyses. One of the main deliverables of this subcommittee will be establishing an energy use and emissions baseline, including reviewing the suitability of Vermont's current GHG emissions inventory for assessing progress toward meeting the requirements of the GWSA.

Specifically, the Science and Data Sub-committee shall:

1. Work in partnership with the other sub-committees in an iterative manner to advise on the best available science on which to frame their work, and to learn from their analyses whether key sectors and populations have been omitted from data analyses and/or modeling and should be included.
2. Establish an energy use and emissions baseline based on current state and regional policies, as well as an assessment of options for meeting Vermont's energy needs through 2050, including appropriate allowances for efficiency and growth, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions in an economically viable and just manner.
 - a. Review the State of Vermont's approach to preparing the existing GHG emissions inventory and recommend modifications or adjustments, if needed, so that the inventory can serve as the basis for measuring progress toward meeting the GHG reductions requirements established in the GWSA.
 - b. Identify critical gaps in availability of and/or access to energy use, emissions, and climate science data that would be ideally used to provide recommendations on how to develop the datasets to support future modeling, monitoring, and/or evaluation work at a statewide and sub-state level.
3. Build scenarios based on the work of the Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee and in concert with the technical contractors as appropriate including:
 - a. The cost to the State of doing nothing in response to climate change; an emissions analysis of draft greenhouse gas reductions strategies proposed by the Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee; and an economic analysis of the draft emissions- and adaptation-related strategies proposed by the sub-committees.

- b. Reflection of the relative contribution of each sector or category of source of emissions.
- 4. With the other subcommittees, develop the most appropriate recommendations for evaluating, tracking, and monitoring the progress of the implemented Climate Action Plan in the areas of mitigation, adaptation, community and landscape resilience to climate change.

Vermont Climate Council Protocol for Making Decisions

October 2021

Overview

This document aims to clarify how the Vermont Climate Council and its related bodies (Steering Committee and Subcommittees) will make decisions as the Council heads into the final months of putting together its Initial Climate Action Plan by December 1, 2021.

The Council's Approved Process Roadmap Document

The Council's Process Roadmap Document, approved by the Council in March, says the following about decision-making. The Steering Committee approved changes to this document in its Sept. 29, 2021 meeting (changes are in **bold**).

Decision-making by the Council

The Council will strive to make decisions by consensus, including matters of process and substance.

The Council will strive to reach as broad a consensus as possible on its Vermont Climate Action Plan in order to promote state-wide buy-in into the strategies it is proposing and to motivate a range of actors to be active participants in the implementation of the strategies. Consensus is defined by broad agreement among Council Members: all or nearly all Council members can live with the proposed decision. Consensus is also defined by the process as well as the outcome of group deliberation. Thus, the Council will seek to articulate and explore members' interests and concerns, creatively develop ideas and options, seek to meet the needs and concerns of members to the greatest extent possible, and problem-solve in the face of disagreement. Consensus on the final slate of recommendations does not suggest all members will be equally satisfied with the outcomes nor prefer each and every recommendation. Rather, a consensus indicates that the slate of recommendations in total advances the public interest and well-being of the citizens of Vermont to the greatest extent it can.

Broad consensus has several benefits: 1) politically more powerful; 2) brings in cross-sectoral support essential for such a complex problem; 3) ensures more rapid implementation, reducing or avoiding litigation, and moving forward more quickly.

The Council will be supported in reaching consensus by: 1) extensive vetting and work at the Subcommittee level; 2) an iterative process of development of ideas, honing, and prioritizing; 3) facilitated dialogue that avoids the many pitfalls of classic Roberts Rules of Orders created to achieve majority vote, not broad acceptance; and, 4) Steering Committee guidance, support, and informal "mediation" to bridge differences between meetings as needed (within Open

Meeting Laws). Consensus will be tested at various steps in the process through discussion, straw polls, informal, non-decisional surveying on issues and ideas between meetings, and carefully facilitated discussion toward the end of formal votes.

If the Council cannot reach consensus on specific issues, despite its best efforts, the Council will use the majority voting protocol described in the GWSA. In addition, different viewpoints on specific issues can be noted in the Council's Climate Action Plan, which will be one, single report. The Council will use a high bar to include multiple viewpoints in the final.

Decision-making by Subcommittees

*The Subcommittees will be operated by consensus as well, as defined above for the Council. For disagreements that can't be resolved in a Subcommittee as part of a consensus set of recommendations to the Council, the Subcommittee **can activate a majority voting protocol, treating all sub-committee members equally. What is forwarded to the Council may include:***

- *The recommendations supported by all or most of the Council members of that Subcommittee*
- *A slate of options for a particular issue or recommendation, together with the advantages and disadvantages of these options as developed by the Subcommittee.*

Protocol for implementing this approach at the Council

Implementing this approach in practice will require the following:

- Clear decision request: For each agenda item, the Council must know what kind of action or decision it is being asked to take. For instance, sometimes the Council will be approving a final recommendation or proposal that will go into its Climate Action Plan. Other times, it will be providing consolidated feedback on a draft, and will need to agree that its feedback has been accurately captured. Council agendas will specify the type of decision/action.
 - Councilors will be able to see in written text what they are being asked to agree on.
 - Proposals will be circulated days prior to each meeting
 - If proposals are adapted during a meeting through discussion, specific suggested changes will be written down and shared on screen or through the chat.
 - If Councilors are providing feedback on a draft document, the consolidated notes of the discussion will be shared on a screen prior to concluding the conversation, to ensure key points are accurately captured (including differing viewpoints, if there are any)

- Consensus-based approach: We will continue to use our consensus-based approach – meaning we’re striving for a single product from this group that addresses all members’ interests and concerns. The steps outlined below are built into the process to reflect that consensus on the plan in its entirety is the goal and that to get there, we may need to reflect various opinions on individual actions.
 - We will use facilitated dialogue and other tools to address differences.
 - We will take the temperature, through real-time polling, of the group periodically on tough issues to test the different viewpoints.
 - If real-time polling shows most councilors support a proposal, yet unanimous support for the proposal cannot be reached in the time allotted in the meeting agenda, we will take the following steps:
 - For those Councilors with concerns, we will invite them to allow the proposal to move forward and to have their concerns memorialized in the meeting minutes.
 - If the Councilors with concerns aren’t satisfied with that option, they will be asked to help write a dissenting opinion on that particular proposal in the Climate Action Plan. These comments will be reflected in an appendix to ensure that the majority voice prevails in the plan but that the caveats are captured in a consolidated format.
 - If these options are unsuccessful and the group is still stuck, the majority voting protocol will be activated (see below).
- Majority voting: The Council has a majority vote protocol outlined in the GWSA statute.¹ For all the reasons described in the Council’s process roadmap, formal voting should be a last resort employed after using the steps described above. At that time, a vote could be asked for by any Councilor and will need to be seconded by another Councilor. Votes will be reflected in the minutes.

Protocol for implementing this approach at the Subcommittees

The Steering Committee agreed to alter the original Process Roadmap to ensure that, in the event of a vote in a subcommittee, all subcommittee members would be treated equally in that vote. To be sure, subcommittees should employ the same steps as the Council does prior to opening up the possibility of vote. Sub-committee recommendations to the Council are not binding on the Council.

¹ “A majority of the sitting members of the Council shall constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Council may be authorized by a majority of the members present and voting at any meeting at which a quorum is present.”