

Vermont Climate Council September 25, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: September 25, 2023 11:00 AM
Location: Virtual

Members Present:

Vermont Climate Council Members:

Bram Kleppner
David Deen
Jared Duval
Johanna Miller
Sec. Julie Moore
Kelly Klein
Kristin Clouser
Dr. Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux
Lily Terry
Liz Miller
Paula Melton
Peter Sterling
Richard Cowart
Ryan Patch (in place of Anson Tebbets)
TJ Poor (in place of June Tierney)

Staff and Support:

Jane Lazorchak
David Plumb
Marian Wolz
Cameron Hager

Minutes Prepared by: David Plumb and Cameron Hager

10:50 AM Convene/Welcome/Overview and Approval of Agenda
Kristin Clouser, Agency of Administration & David Plumb, Consensus Building Institute

- Agenda Approved by Council

10:55 AM Review and Approval of June 12, 2023 minutes
David Plumb, Consensus Building Institute

- Minutes approved by Council, and will be updated with the attendance list.

11:00 AM Just Transition Reflection- Flooding Response to Support Cleaner Heating Systems for Low Income Vermonter
Peter Walke, Managing Director at Efficiency Vermont

- Peter Walke, Managing Director at Efficiency Vermont, described the programs focused on low-income Vermonters and offered to send additional information to distribute.

11:20 AM [Revised Biomass Recommendations- Initial Review](#)
Councilor Writing Group and David Plumb, CBI

- Council members discussed the Revised Biomass Recommendations. Key points of feedback included the below:
 - **Overall positive reaction:** Many councilors thanked the writing group for its work capturing councilor concerns.
 - **Scope:** The introduction signals that the scope is broader than what it really is, which is focused on electricity generation.
 - **Next steps in the process:** Council members asked about next steps in the process. The Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources said the study is part of the larger conversation around budget and priorities. Given current available budget, this is looking like an effort in fiscal year 2025, she said.
 - **Revision to second recommendation:** The Public Service Department expressed concern that the second recommendation, as written, creates challenges for the department's statutory requirements around reviewing projects, and wouldn't constitute constructive guidance. Councilors agreed that a revised version should include two sentences:
 - A sentence saying something like, "The Council recommends that the State not support new electric-led generation biomass facilities while the State is completing this study"
 - A sentence saying something like, "If the state is reviewing possible new electric-led biomass facilities, it should review and address the issues described above in this document."

- **Benefits and harms language and citations:** Some of the items should be better “hedged” and/or cited, or provide more detail.
 - For benefits, hedge #3 more, and add a citation to number 5 (and consider rewording).
 - Under the examples of harms to Vermont, adjust the language to #3 to be “May have a negative impact on...”.
 - Under the example of harms to Vermont, adjust the language to number 1 to be more specific about what “meaningful amounts of CO2” are.
- For Recommendation 1, Bullet 1 and sub-bullet 1, add more information around how much electricity comes from today’s biomass generation and the role it plays in the system, to give a sense of the relative size and importance.

12:10 PM Public Comment

- The following members of the public made comment:
 - Annette Smith
 - Cheryl Joy Lipton
 - Ashley Adams
 - Pike Porter
 - Phil Merrick
 - Peter Duval
 - Melody Reed
- Key points of the comments made included:
 - A concern about the absence of key councilors on the biomass topic such as Abbie Corse and Lauren Oates, as well as Biomass Task Force member Judy Dow.
 - A request for an accounting of the subsidies that the Vermont biomass facilities have received.
 - Many comments urging Councilors to act more aggressively to stop biomass burning in Vermont, including:
 - A rejection of the idea that forest management or logging practices can offer positive impacts to forests, except when addressing invasive species.
 - Strong concerns about the amount of carbon released from biomass facilities, and that the Council isn’t taking those emissions seriously enough.
 - Concerns that the State still does not include emissions from burning biomass in its studies and analyses.
 - A request that the Council’s recommendations include a line calling for all relevant studies not to exclude CO2 emissions from biomass.
 - Concern about who will conduct the study around biomass, and the delay of waiting until fiscal year 2025.
 - Many Vermonters suffer from asthma and wood burning has a significant impact on those individuals.

- A request that the Council look at biomass for thermal use as well.

12:25 PM Revised Biomass Recommendations- Conclude Conversation
David Plumb, CBI

- Several Council members noted the concern from the public around biomass.
- A member of the Just Transitions subcommittee and Biomass Task Group noted that the legislature signaled it wanted the State to account for biomass emissions in Section 10 VSA 582g..

1:00 PM Break

1:10 PM [Council Work Planning- Initial Conversation](#)
Steering Committee Members and David Plumb, Consensus Building Institute

- In general, Councilors agreed with the initial work-planning outline. They made the following suggestions for revisions:
 - **Additional short-term responsibility around rule-making:** Several members requested that the Council be briefed in early 2024 about how the State is doing against its 2025 emissions reduction targets, and any additional rule-making the State plans to initiate in July 2024.
 - **Briefing in other areas as well:** Agencies should update the Council and Subcommittees about all the ongoing work, as a starting place for the Council to focus on gaps and priority areas for the Climate Action Plan update. Adaptation and resilience is an area where diverse expertise should be brought to the table
 - **Update on climatology and climate science:** There have been important changes in the past 2 years.

1:35 PM Climate Council Governance Document
Steering Committee Members and David Plumb, CBI

- The Council approved the document unanimously with the following change:
 - Change the first bullet at the top of page 10 to read: “If addendums include recommendations that speak to rulemaking, these rules will be considered on the schedule for rulemaking defined in the GWSA.”

2:10 PM Public Comment

- Cheryl Joy Lipton and Annetee Smith added additional public comments which included:
 - A request to clarify the role of the Agriculture and Ecosystem Subcommittee going forward.
 - A request to clarify next steps on the Council biomass document (it will go back

- to the writing group and come back to the Council for a decision in the next meeting), and how to provide input (using this email: anr.cao@vermont.gov)
- A request for the public comment portal to be re-activated.

2:20 PM Final Reflections and Next Steps
Councilors and David Plumb

- The next full Council meeting will be in December 2023.
- There are several Council terms expiring in October, which require re-appointments by the legislature.

##

DRAFT