

Vermont Climate Council
January 27, 2025, Meeting Minutes
9:30am-3:30pm
In-Person Meeting with a Virtual Option

Virtual meeting link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82468202500?pwd=pM5rQsrsu2SFsL4Q9EEb2EQJSbgIS.1>

Meeting ID: 824 6820 2500

Passcode: 866486

In-person Location: Waterbury State Office Complex (WSOC) Fox Conference Center 280 State Drive, Waterbury (Second floor above the main entrance of the “A” Building). The Council meeting is in Cherry Room A 209/B 201/C202.

Climate Councilors present:

- Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux (virtual)
- Dahlia Cohn (virtual)
- Ryan Patch (for Secretary Anson Tebbetts) (virtual)
- Secretary Sarah Clark (partial)
- Jared Duval
- David Mears
- Eric Forand
- Kerrick Johnson
- Liz Miller
- Richard Cowart
- Mark Levine
- Chris Company
- Julie Moore
- Michele Boomhower (for Secretary Joe Flynn)
- Johanna Miller
- Kelly Klein
- Jaiel Pulskamp

9:15 AM Climate Council Members Gather

9:30 AM Convene/Welcome/Overview and Council Introductions
Secretary Sarah Clark and David Plumb, Consensus Building Institute

- Secretary Clark opened the meeting by providing Councilors advance notice that the Governor’s budget address the following day would include proposals to modify the Global Warming Solutions Act, including suggested changes to the Council. In the meantime, the administration is committed to continue participating in the Climate Action Plan update

process under the existing rules, she said.

9:50 AM Reviewing the Full List of Recommendations
David Plumb

Councilors reviewed the subcommittees' detailed non-priority recommendations with the intent of flagging major concerns and finding ways to address those concerns. Below are the issues, some with quick fixes identified during the meeting, and others requiring additional work. Councilors and Subcommittee co-chairs were tasked with reporting back to the full Council in March.

- **General**
 - Climate Action Office (CAO) will reorganize all recommendations into a consistent format with a standardized numbering system.
 - CAO will address duplicates that appear in Subcommittees' sections and cross-cutting recommendations, in general leaving them in the cross-cutting section.
 - CAO will suggest a way to structure tables to be clear about which actions are ongoing or new, so implementers can have a clear vision.
 - The actions vary in detail and can be challenging. Refining the strategies to be more informative could help the Council convey a clearer vision in a concise, publicly accessible report.
- **Cross-Sector Mitigation: Transportation**
 - *Pathway 4, Strategies 1 and 2*: Incomplete in this version of the PDF. Appears to be a formatting error in this version.
 - *Pathway 4, Strategy 1, Action 3*: Remove because it does not align with the rest of the Council's objectives, and Compact Settlement recommendations cover it appropriately.
 - *Pathway 2, Strategy 4*: Add new action related to uniformity and interoperability in charging, to be worked on by a smaller group of Councilors (Jaiel, Michele, Rich, others).
 - Assure investments in charging requirements funded with state dollars include requirements for interoperability and consistent language for payment and apps. Work with Agriculture weights and measures standard contracting language.
 - *Pathway 2, Strategy 2, Action 3*: Change the beginning of the sentence to "Consider and advance, as possible, solutions..."
 - *Pathway 2, Strategy 4, Action 2*: Change "direct" to "recommend."
 - *Pathway 4, Strategy 2, Action 2 and 3*: The intent here was for VMT performance measures. Transportation Task Group leads will revisit this with Michele in keeping with the CRS.
 - *Pathway 4, Strategy 3, Action 2*: Task Group will refine. Acknowledge the importance of the programs without naming a

- specific percentage growth target (i.e. promote year-over-year growth).
- Let's make sure that electrification incentives are clearly included in the priority actions.
 - Consider priority action around data tracking and exchange that will support these electrification initiatives.
 - **Cross-Sector Mitigation: Buildings**
 - Information emerging from the Building Energy Code Working Group highlights how awkward VT law is regarding building energy codes and permits. Recommendations should align with the group's findings and implementation plans.
 - *Action 4.1.2*: Rich and Task Group revise language to be less directive.
 - “Through administrative action, *adopt* consumer protections to protect against service disconnections....”
 - *Action 4.1.3*: This is intended to deal with LIHeat/fuel assistance. Liz and Rich will make it clearer.
 - *Action 3.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1 and others that include dates*: Any dates/timelines should include language about being contingent on the legislature making funding available. Dates can send a signal of urgency if caveated appropriately.
 - **Cross-Sector Mitigation: Electricity**
 - Needs to revisit the action that suggests the Council has yet to decide.
 - **Cross-Sector Mitigation: Non-Energy**
 - Add definition to Reduce, Reuse, Repair network (and other undefined programs).
 - **Ag and Eco**
 - Chris, David, Jaiel, and co-chairs to revisit. Councilors had flagged the following issues:
 - No net loss of ag and forest lands is likely difficult to achieve in the context of other goals such as housing. Need to consider this within the context of other recommendations and discuss tradeoffs.
 - *Strategy 22B*: This requires solar and wind on new buildings only, and the wind component seems unlikely. It also conflicts with Pathway 24 which encourages farmers to add renewable generation. Revisit because it may end up being superseded by priority actions.
 - Conversations related to easements in Rural Resilience and Adaptation and Ag and Eco could be combined or cross-referenced.
 - In priority actions, there is an insufficient consideration to forest protection. Good ideas for ag land and management that could be improved with a focus on forest management.
 - Add clarity around the status/ effectiveness of the Use

- Value Appraisal (UVA) program.
 - Revisit Strategy 23G Action 2 about tree planting and add clarity.
 - Generally, need more clarity on programs – add definitions and outcomes (e.g. recommendation 72).
 - Four new actions at the end of the climate resilient land use sheet are not in sync with the priority action on biomass/ what the state government is already doing. Need to be deleted or modified.
 - *Pathway 10, Strategy 10A, Action 13*: Revisit inventory issue.
 - *Pathway 25, Strategy 25, Action 2 and others concerning biomass*: Revisit and consider how they relate to the overall priority recommendation around biomass.
 - Circle back to conversations about anaerobic digesters. Can we get in the plan that not all subcommittee members were enthusiastic?
- Rich from CSM will work with someone on Ag and Eco on interconnected renewable energy issues.
- **Rural Resilience and Adaptation**
 - Chris, David, Jaiel, and co-chairs to revisit. Councilors had flagged the following issues:
 - Rural resilience and adaptation should be examined in the context of, and integrated with, other state policy initiatives being done over the last few years.
 - Look at energy components - do they belong there or with CSM?
 - In Infrastructure and Built Environment, the third substantive line under Strategy 15A should be eliminated or discussed as it conflicts with a priority action below about aging infrastructure and electric.
 - Where is river corridor planning addressed? Is there any discussion on the potential use of eminent domain to acquire land to mitigate flooding damage downstream?
 - In Community Capacity Planning and Public Health, we should take an all-hazards approach, rather than focusing solely on flooding. We don't want to leave out other critical human and landscape considerations, and this will also allow us to incorporate the resilience implementation strategy, the state hazard mitigation plan, and other initiatives.
- **Cross-Cutting: Education**
 - Many actions are already underway at the Agency of Education, and Vermont's State Standards align with the national Next Generation Science Standards, integrating climate topics across disciplines. In the Pathways, focusing on co-benefits across

strategies may prevent overemphasizing individual actions at the expense of broader efforts.

- *Pathway 19A, Strategy 19A Action 2*: Add clarity around hiring/staffing.
- **Cross-Cutting: Compact Settlement**
 - Re-emphasizing the administration’s concern around the state planning office which we flagged in the first version of the plan. Although it says unchanged and no action taken, concern remains.
 - Although there may not be a state planning office, Act 181 may implement a statewide land use plan.

12:30 PM LUNCH

12:50 PM Public Comment

Earl Hatley and Harry Graves offered comments that included:

- Line 25 related to biomass in public buildings was meant to be about the state promoting the use of wood pellet biomass in schools and other public buildings, which raises concerns. 350 Vermont and allies are advocating for thermal energy networks and geothermal solutions as alternatives. These thermal networks, being developed in several towns and also in NY and MA, are designed to heat and cool public buildings, town squares, and neighborhoods. They work well with the existing natural gas infrastructure in terms of plumbing and reduce reliance on the grid. Promoting wood pellet biomass is counterproductive, yet schools feel mandated by the state to use them. The carbon imprint of biomass is not much different from using fossil fuels — it’s basically trading one for the other and cutting down trees in the process.
- There is a comprehensive worldwide effort to double the world’s wind and solar capacity and build significant hydrogen capacity. These plants are designed to produce green hydrogen at \$1/kilogram as compared to \$5+ today. The message here for affordability is that we can cut energy costs in half, not only for transportation but for power, heat, air conditioning and storage. It’s a worldwide program and we hope Vermont gets the chance to have a Quad Factory. Be bold – Vermont could be a super leader in this climate action effort. Consider the possibility of a 2030 all-electric new car law from the Governor, in which we would be able to deliver electricity and green hydrogen from the state at an affordable cost.

1:20 PM Priority Actions – An Approach to Prioritization
David Plumb

Councilors shared the following input on managing the number of priority actions:

- Councilors should look across all 50+ priority actions and set clear criteria for consistency, which will naturally lead to some combining and other

adjustments. The Council needs to do an exercise during the March meeting to deeply engage with the substance.

- Consider an additional level of prioritization into top priority actions by Subcommittee (instead of pitting recommendations from different Subcommittees against each other).
 - Potential criteria for the additional level of prioritization:
 - Scale (in terms of mitigation, risk reduction, and sustainability)
 - How important is early action?
 - Is it foundational?
 - Does it align with equity goals?
 - Incorporate GWSA criteria (which is what initial prioritization framework was based on): e.g. cost-effectiveness, technological feasibility, equity
 - Top priorities may emerge after the March draft is released, public comment is gathered, and the Council is aware of the budget and legislative changes.
- Over the next month, chapter leads will reach out to ask for support in drafting/ aligning the chapter's narrative with the priority actions.
- There is a concern that affordability and the realities of program implementation is being considered sufficiently.
- The Council should make this a long-term, science-based plan focused on emissions reduction / the energy transition / resilience and adaptation, and not get caught up in concerns about funding or current programming.

2:00 PM

Working Together as a Council

Indra Acharya, Consensus Building Institute consultant

Councilors participated in an exercise to build shared goals. They discussed their connections to climate change efforts, highlighting both personal and professional involvement, a deep appreciation for nature, and a commitment to protecting future generations. They also reflected on key challenges they faced while participating in the Council:

- Navigating moments of tension when Councilors have different opinions. In these moments, it's helpful to remember that everyone has good intentions.
- Frustration with the pace of the work – after many years of trying to do this work prior to the Council's establishment, it feels like we are rushing to finish everything at once. Unsure if there are solutions, besides just being optimistic.
- Insufficient resources to implement this work in terms of what is expected from Councilors and the limited agency staff.
- Governance model where the Council operates in between the Governor and legislature is complicated.
- Overly broad mandate and extensive scope of our responsibilities in terms of the GWSA criteria create challenges in defining clear operational

boundaries.

- Many other parts of the government are already undertaking similar initiatives, which may not be fully aligned with the intended outcomes of this effort.
- The size of the Council is challenging at times.
- The Council is not set up to undertake the outreach and engagement needed for such complex social change.
- The polarization of ideas can limit our ability to reach a more nuanced and balanced set of actions.
- Maintaining presence is challenging.
- There is a level of interpersonal respect among Councilors, which was not always the case in Subcommittees.
- Trying to navigate between broader, vague goals and actionable work as well as navigating between competing plans and figuring out how Council recommendations fit into them.
- There is a clear shared goal of addressing climate change, but tension remains over interpretation of the statute (whether it is practically implementable, whether it defines our course of action, etc.)
- A key question is whether an action is cost-effective and should be a priority—how should that triage be conducted?
- Grappling with the possibility of long-term benefits vs. short-term implementation struggles.
- What is our obligation, when discussing initiatives we don't like, to offer alternatives that accomplish similar objectives?
- The role of the Council chair could be done differently. Maine provides an example of a Council with an effective chair.
- Staffing and supporting a plan that is not a State plan is awkward administratively.

Councilors reflected on their tendencies during difficult conversations – whether action-oriented, relationship-oriented, vision-oriented, or detail-oriented – and shared insights on how they aim to approach challenging moments as a Council in the coming months:

- Regardless of who appointed us, we should all remember that we are public servants of Vermont, committed to serving the State.
- This goes beyond a job, it is our responsibility as human beings.
- What can make challenging moments even more challenging is knowing discussions are recorded and posted online.
- Some Councilors are naturally more comfortable speaking up than others, and we should make space for those who might not feel as comfortable moving forward.

2:50 PM

Coordinating the Council's Timeline with the Legislature
David Plumb and Jane Lazorchak

The Council considered options to meet the statutory timeline for updating the

Climate Action Plan (e.g. inserting caveats to reflect uncertainties of outcomes from the legislative session). Councilors shared the following input:

- Add time to meetings to hear legislative updates.
- Add caveats / language to the March draft to make the timeline more realistic:
 - Emphasize that this is only a draft.
 - Only aim to release the priority actions
 - If needed, include descriptions explaining the range of Councilors' views on a particular action, if they are not fully agreed on.
 - Include a narrative that highlights the need for solutions addressing transportation, thermal, and other areas, and note that the priority actions are the Council's best thinking so far on how to do this.
 - Constructive feedback from Councilors and the public is most helpful, meaning that if someone expresses a concern or opposition, they should also offer an alternative or solution to replace it.
 - Emphasize that this is a 4-year plan for the state of Vermont through June of 2029.
- The Steering Committee will continue to monitor and discuss issues related to the July 1st deadline.
- Would rather try to meet the July 1st deadline with the best recommendations we can offer using current knowledge with the possibility of revising them later, if needed.

3:20 PM Next Steps

- There is an opening on the Steering Committee for a House-appointed member. If you are appointed by the House, consider joining the Steering Committee.
- The next meeting is on February 10th and will focus primarily on Cap and Invest.
- The meeting on March 10th is in-person in Berlin.
- In addition to having better formatting, there are contracts in place to add photos, stories, and to generally help humanize the plan as well as copy edit for plain language.

3:30 PM Adjourn

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