



Vermont Voices on Climate Change

Vermont Climate Action Office

Report Overview

From July through September 2026, the Climate Action Office and its partners spoke with Vermonters at community events, food pantries, and virtual gatherings with community-based organizations. These conversations focused on how people are experiencing changes in their communities, the costs and practical realities of energy and climate solutions, and what Vermonters want to see from state and local investments.

The themes in this report reflect comments from individual conversations and small engagement activities. They are intended to show the range of concerns, experiences, and ideas shared with the Climate Action Office, not to indicate how common any particular view is among Vermonters statewide, and they do not represent the views of the Climate Action Office.

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Cover photo: Wellness Day at Crystal Lake State Park, Barton



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Objectives

Provide information and knowledge that helps people prepare for climate impacts, take action, and access programs that can benefit them.

Lift up the voices and viewpoints of communities into the implementation of climate-related initiatives and the ongoing work of the Climate Action Office and other key entities, including the Vermont Climate Council, so that a diverse group of Vermonters can influence this work.

Build relationships and communication channels that will help Vermonters work collaboratively on future climate action with the state.



Engagement Activities Conducted

During the quarter, staff and partners connected with Vermonters through:

- **July 11:** Northeast Kingdom Human Services Wellness Day at Crystal Lake State Park, Barton
- **July 16:** Montgomery Summer Concert Series, Montgomery
- **July 31:** Blueberry Festival, Whitingham
- **August 3:** Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) Food Pantry, St. Johnsbury
- **August 28:** Living Well Fair, Londonderry
- **August 28:** Final Fridays, St. Johnsbury
- **September 17:** Deerfield Valley Food Pantry, Wilmington
- **September 18:** Family Fun Fridays, Lyndonville
- **September 28:** Community-Based Organizations Gathering – Virtual
- **September 30:** Community-Based Organizations Gathering – Virtual



Figure 1: Staff member and consultant discuss climate change with a participant.



What We Heard from Vermonters

Affordability is a central concern

Affordability was one of the most consistent themes. When asked “What does energy affordability look like to you?” participants shared:

- “Access to renewable resources to all.”
- “Low monthly bills.”
- “Not having to pick which bill I pay first.”
- “Choosing between being a good person by helping the climate and reducing your costs of living should not be a reality for us.”
- “Access to knowledge and information about how to lower energy costs.”
- “Not having to worry about bills constantly.”
- “Increasing peoples wages proportionately to the cost of living would help me with energy affordability. Even if utilities are included in rent, when energy costs go up then they'll just increase the rent, so wages need to keep pace.”
- “Access to fuel assistance has helped me with energy affordability.”
- “Using cheaper methods to heat homes, like wood pellets and propane, can help with energy affordability.”
- “I would like to know how to heat my home more affordably in the winter.”
- “We got rebates from efficiency Vermont for a smart thermostat, and found it easy, which is the best part. This would help with energy affordability.”

People consistently described increasing costs for electricity, heating oil, propane, gasoline, and other household expenses. For some, the immediate concern is simply being able to keep up with monthly bills. Others are interested in making changes that could reduce costs over time but cannot afford the upfront investment.

Participants described weatherization as a particularly tangible example of a program that can make a difference. Some people shared positive experiences with weatherization, including warmer homes and lower energy costs. At the same time, others described barriers to accessing it, such as eligibility requirements or the inability to make improvements to a property they do not own.



One participant with an older home understood that their old heating system was inefficient, but could not afford the upfront cost:

"It would be helpful if the state could support first-time homebuyers when they need to upgrade their heating systems. I moved into my first home and there were problems with the heating system, and I couldn't afford to upgrade it. This would also help make homeownership more accessible."

A resident of Lydonville noted that while incentives from Efficiency Vermont helped them insulate their home, they still feel they're going broke paying for rising utility bills. Though they'd love to switch away from fuel oil, they cannot afford to.

Others described using a combination of different heat sources, and how they balance these sources to manage costs.

"We use two heat sources – fuel oil and wood pellets. The wood pellets save us money, so we try and use those more. We get a year-long contract ahead of time to lock in costs and try to buy wood pellets in the summer when it's off-season."

At multiple events, participants were asked which types of incentives would be most helpful. Home weatherization support received the most votes, followed by electric heat pump rebates. Electric vehicle rebates received the fewest votes.

- Electric vehicle rebates - 13
- Electric heat pump rebates - 38
- Home weatherization - 49
- Rebates for switching from oil or gas to wood or wood pellets - 16
- Others (Electricity cost support - 2; Generators for increased home resilience - 2)

For people experiencing financial hardship, participants also questioned whether income alone is an adequate measure of need. One example involved an older homeowner who continued to work and pay a mortgage but earned "too much" to qualify for certain home improvement assistance.

People want solutions that work in everyday life

People expressed interest in climate-friendly technologies and changes, but they also raised practical questions about how to apply those solutions to Vermont's geography, weather, rural communities, and different household circumstances.



Transportation was a particularly clear example. Participants discussed long travel distances, limited public transportation, road conditions, and the reliability of electric vehicle charging. One EV owner described having difficulty finding working charging stations, needing refunds after paying for charging that did not work, planning trips around charging availability, and being stranded.

Other participants raised different concerns about EVs, including range for long trips, charging time, towing capacity of EVs, the sustainability of battery production and disposal, and whether other approaches to reducing transportation emissions (i.e., public transportation, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, etc.) should also be considered.

Rural transportation also raised comments about costs. A person commuting between Barton and St. Johnsbury noted that suggestions such as “just get a bike” do not account for the cost of a reliable bicycle, rural road conditions, long distances, or the wear and tear associated with traveling on poor roads. Driving 60, 70, or 80 miles a day also involves depreciation, maintenance, registration, and repair costs in addition to gasoline.

Participants suggested that public transportation and other alternatives should be considered resources for a broader range of people, not only people with low incomes. They also emphasized that transportation information needs to be easy to find and available in places where people actually need it.

“We have too many laws and regulations here where it becomes prohibitive to do just about anything. I live in Mexico for half the year and love being out in rural areas. I don't have a vehicle there, but I don't need one because it's easy enough to grab a ride from a van, bus, or taxi. We need to invest in better and more efficient public transportation and being that we're rural isn't an excuse.”

Heating raised similar questions about how technologies function in practice. One participant who had installed a pellet stove questioned whether it was actually saving money because the system still uses electricity. Another person who had invested in pellet heating noted that handling heavy bags becomes increasingly difficult with age. Another participant uses their heat pump only for air conditioning, sharing their concern about increased electricity bills. Other participants shared beliefs that heat pumps do not work in cold temperatures, indicating a need for increased education. These experiences point to considerations that can be missed when evaluating a technology only in terms of emissions or energy efficiency.



People are already experiencing climate impacts directly

Flooding was one of the clearest examples of climate change being experienced as a direct community issue rather than an abstract environmental concern. Participants described being stranded by floods, watching fields become lakes, seeing changes in Vermont's landscape, and worrying about the condition of roads, bridges, and waterways.

An 85-year-old Vermonter reflected on changes they had witnessed over their lifetime:

"We rarely had flooding when I was young. Now it's happening so frequently, and the landscape of Vermont has changed so much because of it."

Flooding was also connected to household resilience. People expressed interest in generators and other ways to maintain power during emergencies. For someone who relies on a CPAP machine at night, maintaining electricity is directly connected to their ability to sleep safely. Community-based organizations described similar concerns about households that have not yet recovered from previous floods, questioning whether we can plan for the future if we have not recovered from the past.

Participants also raised questions about broader resilience, including the condition of infrastructure, forest and water resources, and the potential effects of land management decisions on flooding and heavy rain. One community-based organization participant specifically suggested further consideration of how changes to federal forest policy could affect the Green Mountain National Forest and surrounding communities during heavy rain and flooding.

People want climate action to address connected needs

People consistently described climate change, housing, transportation, energy, and household finances as connected issues rather than separate challenges. For example, weatherization and energy-efficiency improvements may reduce household costs, but they can be difficult to pursue when a home is already damaged or unhealthy, when a renter depends on a landlord to make improvements, or when eligibility rules do not reflect a household's full financial circumstances. Flood recovery, housing availability, wastewater permitting, energy costs, and weatherization can all affect one another. Participants also emphasized aging in place, describing older Vermonters living in drafty homes and struggling with the cost and upkeep needed to remain safely at home.

During a conversation amongst community-based organizations, participants pointed to opportunities to build upon local resources and economies. Wood banks and free or lower-cost firewood can help households manage heating costs, while changes in the



forest products market are affecting small firewood producers and logging businesses. One idea was to better connect landowners, loggers, processors, and households so that lower-quality wood could be used to support local heating needs. Participants also identified clean water, healthy forests, reuse, recycling, and affordable and accessible waste disposal as part of the broader climate and community resilience conversation.

Several people questioned whether measuring individual program outputs (such as the number of homes weatherized) captures the full picture. They suggested looking at how many households remain in poor housing conditions, how many renters are unable to make improvements, and how many people fall just outside program eligibility but still face significant financial barriers.

One participant summarized this approach as looking for opportunities where policies overlap rather than treating them as competing priorities:

“My concern is that we’re often asked to choose between two options when the answer is both. For example, housing development or climate solutions. We should be building more housing while optimizing for local, environmentally friendly materials, affordability, carbon storage, and resilience. If we want meaningful change that helps people, we need to find where different policies overlap instead of treating them as competing priorities.”

People want information that is understandable, accessible, and useful

Many people described information and assistance as valuable only if people can find, understand, and use them. Transportation information, climate resources, and assistance programs can be difficult to navigate, particularly for people who do not regularly use online tools. One person described trying to find basic bus route information online and suggested making transit information more visible in places such as shelters and community organizations. Others noted that climate-related resources can exist in separate “silos,” making it difficult for community organizations to know what is available or share it with the people they serve. There was interest in better connecting existing resources, providing regular updates, and making it easier for community partners to stay informed. Participants also noted that information can be inconsistent across state, municipal, and utility sources, and emphasized accessible formats, including ASL for Deaf Vermonters.

People also raised concerns about the barriers built into assistance programs, including income-based eligibility, applications, property ownership, and assumptions about who



needs help. Income alone may not capture the financial impact of a major home repair, disaster recovery, medical expenses, transportation costs, or a mortgage. Renters may need energy improvements but have little ability to make them themselves. Another theme was that support should not require people to navigate complicated systems alone or identify themselves as being “in need.” Community meals and mutual-aid approaches were offered as examples of ways to make support available while preserving dignity. Community-based organizations described a need for more wrap-around support so residents are not left to navigate multiple disconnected programs and referrals on their own.

Finally, several people emphasized that effective climate action depends on relationships and trust, not just information and programs. Community-based organizations expressed interest in a predictable, ongoing relationship with the Climate Action Office, including opportunities for peer learning, direct access to State staff, and regular updates. Participants also described the value of care teams and active listening in conversations about flooding, housing, homelessness, recovery, and other issues. In some cases, simply knowing that someone was available to listen and help made people more comfortable participating. Participants also described community capacity (staffing, funding, relationships, and local knowledge) as foundational to connecting people with climate programs and resources.

“Being genuine, hearing people’s stories, remaining open to experiences they may never have encountered personally, and continuing to show up.”



Figure 1: A staff member speaks with someone attending a community event.



Upcoming Outreach Activities

Outreach and engagement activities will continue through the winter. Planned activities include continuing to gather community-based organizations, and attending community events such as food shelves, fall harvest celebrations, and more.

We will continue to listen to Vermonters' opinions on state investments in reducing climate pollution and energy-related programs and policies. This work will align closely with engagement for Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan which is required to be updated in 2028. This plan is closely aligned with the Climate Action Plan but also includes energy system planning for grid infrastructure, how to meet energy demands, and how to keep electric rates down. It also has a focus on clean and renewable energy development.

If you know of community events in your area and would recommend the Climate Action Office attends to meet Vermonters where they are, please let us know. We will do our best to show up.

Contact Information

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