

# Climate Action Plan Public Forums

## April 12-13, 2022

### Meeting Summary

#### Overview

The Vermont Climate Council hosted two online public forums in April 2022 to share information about its work and receive feedback. In total, 115 people attended the events, which each lasted 90 minutes and included an overview of the Council's efforts as well as facilitated conversations in smaller groups to lift up views from all participants. This document<sup>1</sup> provides a summary of key ideas and views offered during the sessions. The introductory presentation given to participants can be found [here](#)<sup>2</sup>. Annexes to this summary include the results from Zoom polls and other exercises showing the types of participants in the meeting and where they were from.

#### Key themes and views expressed

After receiving a presentation about the development of the Initial Climate Action Plan and the Vermont Climate Council's ongoing work in 2022, participants got a chance to discuss the Council's efforts and provide priority points of feedback in smaller, break-out groups. After about 30 minutes in the smaller groups, all participants returned to the plenary session to reflect on their biggest takeaways from the conversation.

The main points of discussion from the small-group and plenary sessions in both forums are summarized below. These ideas do not represent a consensus among participants, but rather are points of view shared during the forums.

#### *Just Transitions*

Several participants shared praise for the Just Transition Principles and Scoring Rubric developed as part of the Council's work last year and encouraged their continued use. Other comments about the Just Transitions Principles included:

- There appears to be a disconnect between the efforts to center equity in the Council's work and the legislature's recent activities.
  - The Council should educate the legislature about the use of the just transition tool.
  - The legislative process around the Clean Heat Standard did not feel equitable.

#### *Weatherization and Housing*

Many participants commented on efforts to weatherize homes and the climate impacts related to housing. Some participants wanted to see more attention on buildings, both on weatherization options and for the immediate benefits offered by heat pumps. Other specific comments included:

- Community members are concerned that towns will not be able to meet the

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<sup>1</sup> The Consensus Building Institute facilitated the forums and prepared this summary.

<sup>2</sup> [https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/Presentation\\_CAP\\_Summary\\_041321.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/Presentation_CAP_Summary_041321.pdf)

weatherization goals outlined in the CAP if they do not have a clear definition of weatherization.

- There should be more education around heat pumps and their benefits.
- Electric service upgrades to accommodate changes in home heating are important and should be considered during weatherization conversations with building owners.
- The Council should focus on reducing the cost burden of upfront investments needed to fuel switch, especially for those who can least afford to make these capital investments.

### *Agriculture and Ecosystems*

Several participants encouraged the Council to think more about overall systems and promote a more holistic framework connected with our natural systems. Other related comments included:

- The Council should consider more non-technological fixes, such as payment for nature-based services, including paying landowners for the carbon sequestered in forests and soil.
- There could/should be more collaboration between the Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee and the rest of the Council.
- Agriculture strategies such as the use of biochar in animal feeds or to cover manure lagoons should be considered to reduce emissions.
- The Council should consider the social and ecological impacts outside of the state caused by Vermonters' energy consumption.
- While some participants expressed appreciation for the Council's commitment to undertake life-cycle analysis this year, others raised concerns that the analysis won't be comprehensive enough. We also need to be looking at the cost of not taking action.
- Greater attention should be given to reduction in pesticide/herbicide use in state-wide land management, right of way management, and riparian restoration programs.

### *Transportation*

Several participants were pleased to see the Council focusing on transportation in 2022. While the switch to EVs is important, several participants also said a transportation strategy must be much more comprehensive. Specific comments included:

- There should be more emphasis on bike/pedestrian infrastructure and increased public transit service to help VT meet the transportation GHG goals.
- Many emphasized a need for more creative public transportation solutions such as shared transit between schools and communities in rural areas.
- There should be more focus on reduction of vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
- Several participants applauded the focus on compact settlement as a climate action strategy, given the significant development pressures occurring in the state. One participant said efforts to promote compact development need to be broader than the current focus on existing communities.
- The Council should raise awareness about affordable EV options especially with incentives under the Mileage Smart program.

### *Biomass and Clean Heat Standard (CHS)*

The Clean Heat Standard draft legislation was mentioned by several participants, sometimes in connection with concerns around the impact of using biomass as an energy source. Specific

comments included:

- Burning wood is not renewable/sustainable/low emissions energy source.
- Using agricultural lands for fuel crops instead of food crops isn't sustainable.
- Vermont must consider impacts beyond its borders when analyzing energy and fuel sources.
- The legislative process around the Clean Heat Standard has not felt equitable, and should focus more on impacts to the most vulnerable.
- The Clean Heat Standard provides a possible avenue for incentivizing fuel dealers to shift their business focus. Other incentives have not worked thus far.
- An alternative suggestion was to provide incentives directly to homeowners to help pay for changes in their thermal energy sources.

### *Public Outreach*

Many participants encouraged the Council to do more outreach and said most Vermonters are likely unaware of the Council's work. Future outreach discussions could focus on specific issues, to allow for more detailed conversation. In addition, participants said:

- Partners such as VT Healthy Soils Coalition could help to get the word out about these meetings, especially to increase the reach in southern Vermont.
- The Climate Council website is helpful to access the information about meetings and other resources from the Council.
- Still, it's difficult to understand how to engage in this process. People don't know how to have their voice heard. In addition, it is not always clear that input in public forums is being conveyed in full to the Council members.

### *Additional Reflections*

Participants expressed views on other issues as well, such as:

- One participant wanted to see a more all-hands-on-deck approach to climate, particularly the role of large institutions and the private sector. The Council should do more to promote market-based strategies to incentivize changes within businesses, institutions, and the private sector.
- Municipalities will need support for plan implementation -- both financial, staffing capacity, and otherwise. Overall, the state needs to better understand the full cost of implementing the recommendations in the plan.
- Education of the public will be a critical part of successful implementation.
- The Council was given a very short timeline by the legislature in the Global Warming Solutions Act.
- Several individuals suggested that the Council give more thought to climate migrants and the state's preparedness to accommodate the potential influx of migrants.
- Many expressed concern that the legislative process has not benefited from the learning that took place in the development of the CAP. Legislators would benefit from greater education on the strategies in the initial CAP.

### **Next Steps**

Jane Lazorchak, director of the Global Warming Solutions Act, offered next steps at the end of the forums

- A meeting summary will be produced and shared with the Council and the public for reflection.
- The next full Vermont Climate Council meeting is Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, from 11 AM to 2 PM.
- Be on the lookout for more public engagement opportunities.

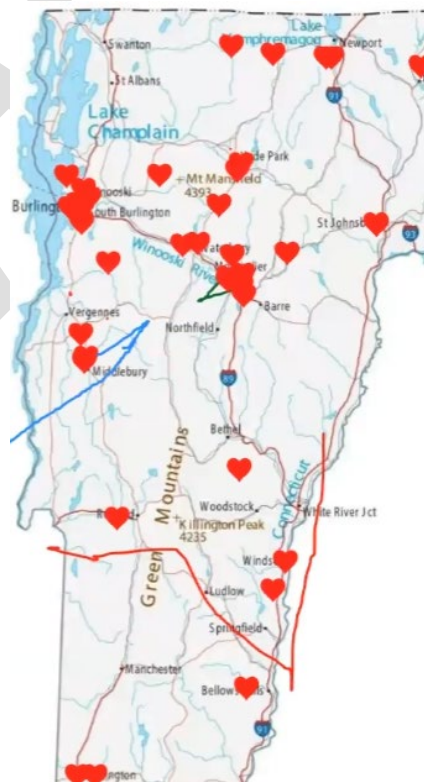
## Appendix A

### 1. Initial exercise: Where is home?

*April 12 Forum*



*April 13 Forum*

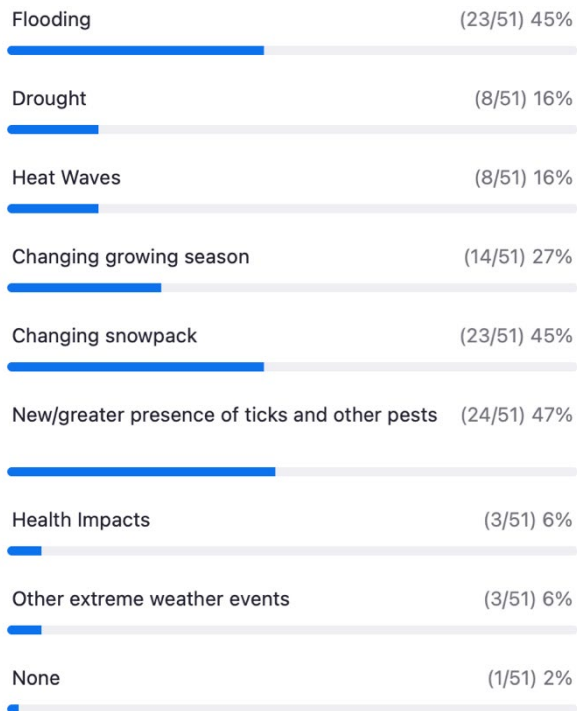


## 2. Initial Zoom Polls

*Below are the results from three initial Zoom polls used at the beginning of each forum. Results from the April 12 forum are on the left and from the April 13 forum on the right.*

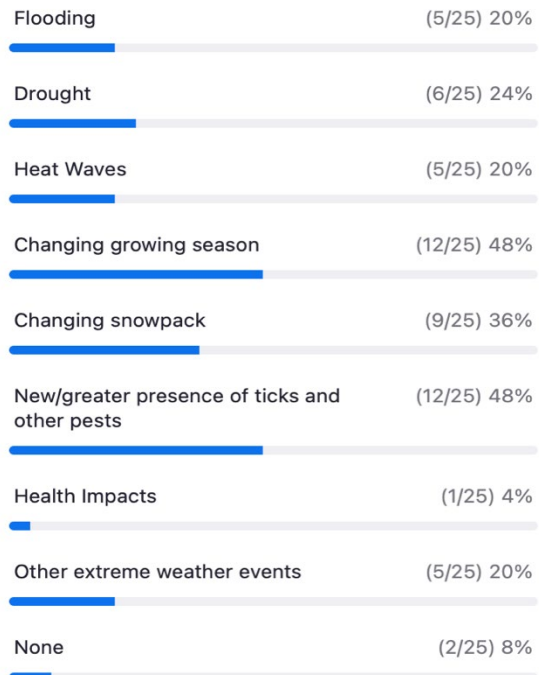
1. What climate or weather-related impacts are you seeing in your community? Pick 2 (Multiple Choice) \*

51/51 (100%) answered



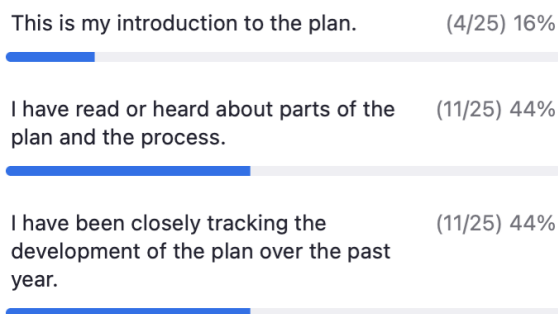
1. What climate or weather-related impacts are you seeing in your community? Pick Two (Multiple Choice) \*

25/25 (100%) answered



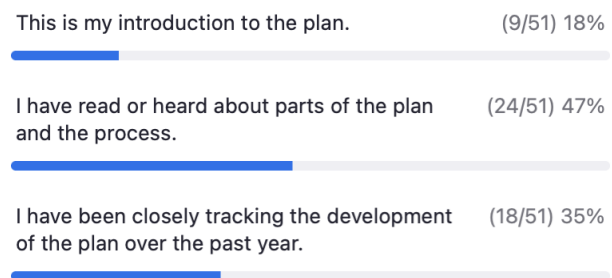
2. Which of the following best describes your current knowledge of the initial VT Climate Action Plan? (Multiple Choice) \*

25/25 (100%) answered



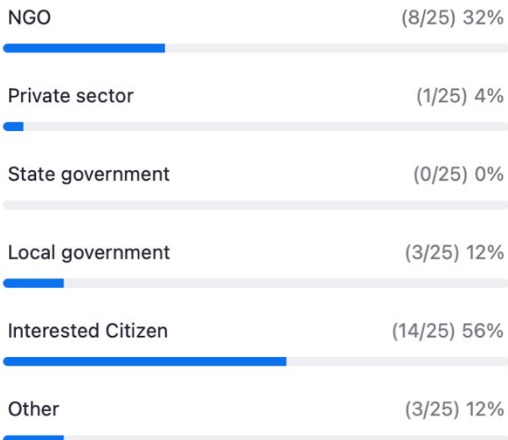
2. Which of the following best describes your current knowledge of the initial VT Climate Action Plan? (Single Choice) \*

51/51 (100%) answered



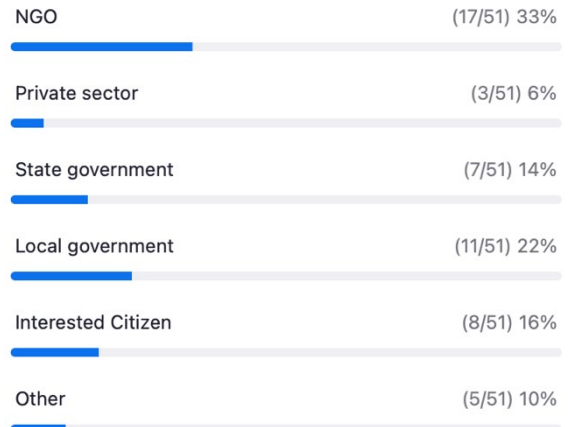
3. Which best represents your affiliation  
(Multiple Choice) \*

25/25 (100%) answered



3. Which best represents your affiliation (Single Choice) \*

51/51 (100%) answered

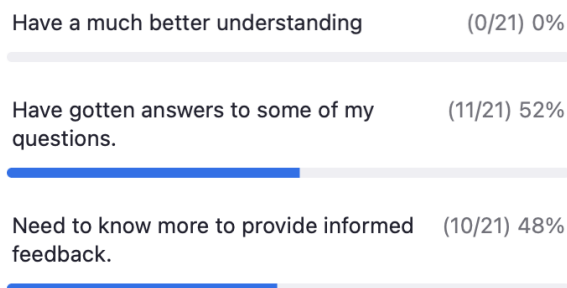


### 3: Concluding Zoom polls

*Below are the results from three concluding Zoom polls used at the end of each forum. Results from the April 12 forum are on the left and from the April 13 forum on the right.*

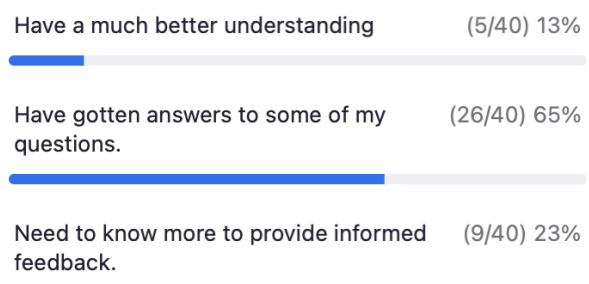
1. Compared to my understanding of the initial climate plan and its implications when I joined this meeting, I  
(Single Choice) \*

21/21 (100%) answered



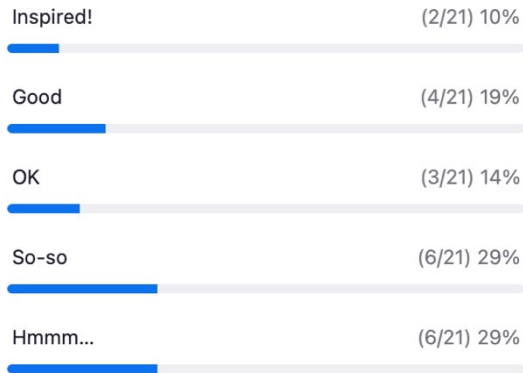
1. Compared to my understanding of the initial climate plan and its implications when I joined this meeting, I  
(Single Choice) \*

40/40 (100%) answered



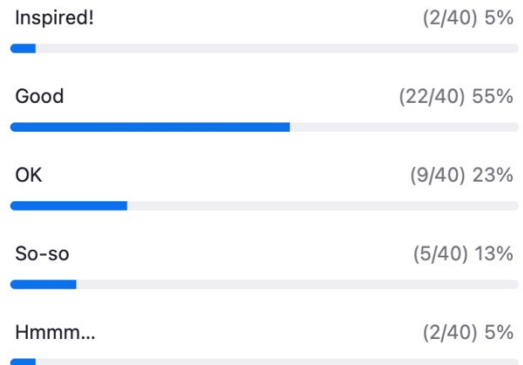
2. Inspirometer: How do I feel about the council's work on climate action in Vermont? (Single Choice) \*

21/21 (100%) answered



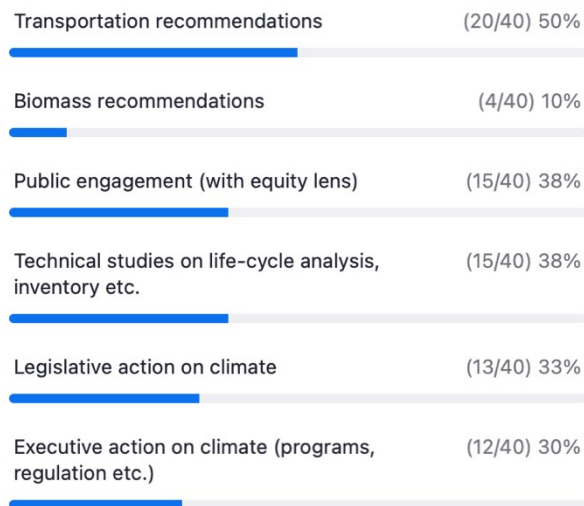
2. How do I feel about the council's work on climate action in Vermont? (Single Choice) \*

40/40 (100%) answered



3. Where would you like to see the most progress this year? Pick 2 (Multiple Choice) \*

40/40 (100%) answered



3. Where would you like to see the most progress this year? Pick 2 (Multiple Choice) \*

21/21 (100%) answered

