

Consolidated Summaries of Vermont Climate Action Engagement Fall 2024

Overview

This briefing packet consolidates summaries of outreach and engagement activities during the fall of 2024 related to the update of Vermont’s Climate Action Plan. It includes summaries from six Input Sessions that the Vermont Climate Council’s subcommittees held on topics ranging from transportation to agriculture. The packet also contains summaries of three events led by the engagement team that focused on perspectives from low-income Vermonters and linguistically diverse Vermonters. The most recent quarterly report of outreach activities – covering a range of engagements from July through September – is pasted at the end. This input is designed to inform and influence the Vermont Climate Council and its subcommittees as they do the hard, detailed work of updating the state’s Climate Action Plan.

Table of Contents

Climate Action Input Session: Buildings and Thermal.....	3
Climate Action Input Session: Transportation.....	13
Climate Action Input Session: Rural Resilience and Businesses.....	22
Climate Action Input Session: Agriculture.....	31
Climate Action Input Session: Natural Lands and Forestry.....	39
Climate Action Input Session: Rural Resilience and Town Support.....	44
Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard.....	47
Climate Action Event with Vermont’s Linguistically Diverse Communities.....	49
Capstone Focus Group.....	52
Vermont Voices on Climate - Quarterly Report (Q3).....	55

Climate Action Input Session: Buildings and Thermal Summary of Input

Thursday, October 24, 12:30-2:00pm
*hosted by the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on October 24, 2024, focused on reducing climate pollution from the buildings and thermal (heating/cooling) sector. Approximately 70 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally, in the chat, or subsequently over email to Vermont's Climate Action Office.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Buildings and Thermal Task Group of the Council's Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee.

- [View presentation slides.](#)
- [View discussion questions.](#)
- [Watch the Buildings & Thermal Input Session recording.](#)

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below by theme.

Many comments focused on addressing the needs of low-income Vermonters

- Keep low-income Vermonters' needs and circumstances front of mind.
- A solution is needed, but it must be affordable.
- Electricity rate protections for low-income residents.

- Funding to help low-income folks weatherize and upgrade heating equipment.
- Flexible programs that center access and equity; reduce thermal demand (and electric demand) growth (not just electrify everything).
- Whatever changes happen must be at no harm to low-income Vermonters.
- Be sure not to penalize low-income Vermonters.
- Raising moderate income level.

Other comments focused on funding, implementable solutions, and local solutions

- We need a funding source, maybe a surcharge on short-term rentals?
- More money for implementation, better balanced with or exceeding money for planning.
- Set specific, measurable goals for short-term action. More implementation funding, with community-led participatory budgeting. Help make existing programs more successful (ie. WAP).
- We need to find cost-efficient and effective ways to decarbonize our existing housing stock.
- Prioritize cost-effective steps that are technically feasible.
- Focus on the achievable! Don't make a long list of things that we know will never happen.
- Federal Funding needs to be aligned with local needs.
- Community solutions
- How do we translate state policy into local action?
- Be careful with unfunded mandates.
- Integrated program coordination with municipalities.

Several comments focused on contractors, building codes and workforce issues

- Contractor training is critical and keep low-income Vermonters' circumstances in mind.
- Enforcing building codes.
- Code enforcement
- Incentivizing builders.
- "Most builders never even look at the energy code" - very true! How can we encourage/enforce that they do?
- We need workforce, but workforce won't come into being without businesses - and those businesses won't arise unless there is a defined future for thermal improvements over a course of years.

Participants had other key takeaways as well

- Focus on greenhouse gas reductions as mandated by Global Warming Solutions Act. Not on renewables. Biofuels also have greenhouse gas reductions. Also include health concerns in emissions considerations.
- Coordination among administrators and implementers.

- Education
- Regulation
- Utilities

Detailed summary by theme

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation, in the chat, and from subsequent emails, grouped by theme.

Workforce development

- Trainings and certifications
 - The weatherization workforce is limited in terms of how many workers there are, what services they offer, and whether they are doing the work themselves or outsourcing it.
 - Weatherization is not an attractive option for young people – pay scale will be crucial to attract workers.
 - Contractors are not recommending upgrading failing equipment and are simply installing what they have on hand. One of the reasons for the lack of uptake of heat pump hot water heaters is because of contractors’ lack of knowledge and/or a bad experience. Need more training for contractors who don’t attend Better Buildings by Design conference.
 - Increase awareness and training among experienced and trusted tradespeople to build fluency and confidence in energy-efficiency.
 - There is a need for workforce training about dealing with refrigerants and ensuring leak-proof systems.
 - Consider starting a mandatory contractor and professional licensure program reaching building and HVAC contractors for training, certification, education, and best practices.
 - Current weatherization training is inconvenient to travel to and only addresses workers, not companies. We need more companies doing comprehensive weatherization.
 - Encourage Office of Professional Regulation to allow for certifications (i.e. building science, energy code. etc.) and find a way to enforce contractors to register and list their certifications on the Office of Professional Regulation website.
 - Get building science certification listed on the voluntary registry. Some contractors are joining the registry voluntarily but need to reach hundreds of contractors and those in the build community who are not aware.
 - It can be challenging to access the local certifications and trainings that are necessary to enter skilled trades associated with the energy transition. Invest in workforce development to help meet the demand created by these incentives.
 - Improve language access to training (as well as the number and availability of instructors).
- Apprenticeship and co-op programs

- There are currently programs working on increasing our weatherization workforce in Vermont, but we need to increase funding to local schools. Workforce development begins with youth, Career and Technical Education programs, and certification programs that increase the pipeline of workers.
- Vermont should deliver a registered apprenticeship program for carpenters and high-performance builders (not just for carpenters because the new generation needs to understand water vapor management, energy code, and have a foundation in building science).
- Consider co-op high school programs that get students into paid internships while attending high school and community college. Staffing green trades such electrical and mechanical and HVAC technology should offer well-paying jobs and provide the workforce we need.

Affordability and support for low-income Vermonters

- Fully and thoroughly consider how any planned actions you may take to address climate change may contribute to or worsen the housing crisis which Vermont is currently facing and the 3500+ unhoused Vermonters, including many who have never struggled with housing until now.
- Develop policies for low-income electricity ratepayers as we make the transition to electrification.
- Ensure that there are no unintended financial consequences if we are requiring people who already have heat pumps to change refrigerants (i.e. adding new duct work, sensors for safety, etc.).
- While ground source heat pumps in Vermont are highly efficient, they are also very inaccessible for most Vermonters because of the costs associated with geothermal drilling.
- Heat pumps are more expensive to operate. Consider rate modification and a way to fund this work that is not reimbursement based.
- Consider having the state bulk purchase appliances such as heat pump hot water heaters and distribute them to low-income folks at no cost and middle-income folks at a reduced cost through the dealer and/or installers.
 - Heat pump purchase in this manner could depend on weatherization first.
- For older buildings in the long-term rental market that might need assistance with weatherization costs: can we include low-cost housing or long-term rentals in the potentially subsidized category?

Code enforcement

- Codes are getting stricter, and builders are not paying as much attention to them. Should focus more on addressing existing homes with large amounts of heat loss instead of on making codes more restrictive because that will only further discourage builders from following them.

- It seems pointless updating code if they are not adequately enforced — need policies that fund code enforcement for new construction, renovations, and additions. Issue non-compliance fines as well.
- Passive shading is a cost-effective strategy to reduce cooling loads from exposed windows in summer and should be added to the Residential Building Energy Standards handbook.
- The International Energy Conservation Code standard does not take into consideration Vermont’s microclimate.
- All new infrastructure that is built must include renewable energy (primarily solar) and energy-saving techniques (even if building affordable housing)
- The 2024 Residential Building Energy Standard’s base standard for air tightness is just 0.15 CFM50/ sq. ft. building shell area; this could be better. In new construction, this is very easy to exceed with the right building envelope design.
- These standards and codes need some attached “carrots or sticks” (incentives or disincentives) to ensure people who can clearly afford to build houses in compliance with the Residential Building Energy Standard are doing so. Right now that’s not the case.
- National electric code needs to allow for smart panels

Incentives and/or regulations

- Consider regulations such as “no installation of fossil fuel hot water heaters will be permitted if Heat Pump models are applicable.” Otherwise, incentives are more accepted by the public.
- Focus on incentives for domestic hot water heating instead of regulations. Seeing a lot of need for re-upping refrigerants in systems.
- It is difficult to retrofit the existing housing stock. Make incentives more broadly available for retrofits and ensure low barriers to those incentives (i.e. Efficiency Vermont’s example).
 - Efficiency Vermont’s residential programs and incentives do not always support deep energy retrofits (especially for older “leaky” houses).
- Electrification often requires upgrading panels and meters, and multiple subcontractors (electricians and plumbers/mechanical contractors). Any regulatory approach, if considered, should ensure this isn't a barrier to compliance for single-family housing and small-scale commercial property owners.
- Need better incentives from the Tier 3 IOUs and the EEU's. Current incentives from Green Mountain Power and Efficiency Vermont are not enough to make the systems achieve cost-parity with air-source heat pumps.
- Must take action toward weatherization now, primarily focusing on the lower- and middle-income residents (homeowners and renters) where their homes waste the most residential energy. Consider charging a small fee per gallon of fuel (or equivalent for natural gas) and put into funding of weatherization projects. There should be an exemption based on household income. For those not exempted, it should be an incentive for them to use the incentives to weatherization.

- Think through ways to get second homeowners and “McMansion” owners to reduce their energy use.
- Whatever incentives we can offer small businesses to promote distributed renewable energy and decrease climate-warming fuels, the better. However, in doing so we cannot burden small businesses with more taxes or fees. We want to make it easier for younger people to come to Vermont and open small businesses.

Equipment used in buildings and other strategies to reach energy efficiency

- New equipment and applying new performance standards while understanding different buildings’ needs
 - We need to carefully think through applying equipment performance standards for requiring installations in existing homes when old equipment dies. Avoid financially burdening property owners and take into consideration the limitations of the existing housing stock (i.e. layout, vermiculite, and electrical limitations). Consider offering solutions paired with significant resources for home repairs.
 - Instead of replacing heating systems, use “upgrading systems by adding heat pumps to reduce fossil fuel usage in existing structures.” Encourage heat pumps for cooling as it gets warmer, along with heat pump clothes dryers to make homes safer and warmer. No vent hole in the exterior wall can make a difference.
 - A new technology that could make a difference but is not yet widely available in the USA is induction stoves with battery storage. These do not require an electrical service upgrade, and can use the 120V electrical outlet.
 - Different buildings require different technology and not everyone's home is conducive to the current technology. Heat pump hot water heaters do not usually work for mobile homes and their wastewater and supply water designs.
- Passive House Standard
 - We should educate ourselves on the Passive House Standard and look into ways to incentivize more multi-family passive house projects. Passive house retrofits and panelization deep retrofits can have a positive effect on energy demand.
 - The Passive House Standard is ultimately more affordable and has health benefits.
 - Vermont Housing and Finance Authority gives extra 'points' in the Qualified Action Plan for competitive project scoring for passive house certification, but few developers have used this pathway.
- Opportunities for solar
 - There are many opportunities to put solar on city buildings, but we are limited. We need to raise limits substantially to ultimately increase the State’s solar capacity.
 - Solar hot water heating works in Vermont – electrification of water heating should not be the only option.
- Other strategies
 - Explore the option of Thermal Energy Networks (TENS), that capture heat, either ground source or waste and move it around as needed.

- Continue conversations about waste heat recovery and community solutions because we need ground source heat pumps to be shared infrastructure. Interested in State support to ensure funding is implemented effectively.
 - Pairing a solution with community solar and electric ratepayer protection will be helpful.
- Geothermal ground loops are a cost-effective way to absorb cooling and heating energy from a shallow buried ground loop to add to Heat recovery ventilators (HRV) and energy recovery ventilators (ERV) systems.
- Some building encapsulation options (adjusting additions to buildings to encourage energy conservation) offer great potential.
- The best way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to use less energy/electricity, not simply electrifying everything. Electrification must be paired with reductions in electric demand.

Fuels assistance and fuel used in equipment

- Fuel assistance is mostly federal and currently fuel assistance can only be used for one fuel source. Even though fuel assistance is not meant to cover the entire cost, we still need to change these rules at the federal level.
 - Need to make sure low-income homeowners are not penalized if there are higher fuel costs down the road.
- Consider opportunities to use the revised Climate Action Plan to recommend actions that Vermont may not be able to take directly through its agencies or legislature, but that are important to capture in a formal written plan or recommendation (i.e. urge federal changes to fuel assistance).
- Most Vermonters have primary and secondary fuel types – make sure to consider how to maintain and advocate for flexibility both in rulemaking and in various programs. Incorporate this into ways we are collecting data, setting baselines, and tracking progress.
- Look at the clean heat standard in the context of what is being considered “clean.” Biofuels are not clean.
- The inclusion of biomass (wood) is a serious shortcoming as wood combustion does have significant greenhouse gas emissions and health concerns.
- Don’t incentivize advanced wood heat because of pollution, forest degradation, and hidden factors such as processing and transportation costs.
- Fuel source is in our own backyards — includes solar, wind, geothermal, and a renewable wood source. Using modern wood heating makes sense for our fuel needs and the local economy. Improving the McNeil plant to include a thermal heat component for the community would make that plant more efficient.
 - Source of wood is not coming from clearcutting but from management that maintains a balance of age classes. Forests that are 20-80 years old are sequestering carbon at the greatest rates. By managing our forests to have a range of age classes, we can grow older trees (150 plus) while maintaining a high

rate of sequestrations in the younger age classes. The McNeil plant uses wood from forests managed in this way.

- Other modern heat such as bulk pellets for boiler systems are an excellent source of fuel. Wood stoves are also still valuable as there is minimal processing prior to BTU (heat) output, and are traditional in Vermont.
 - Pellets manufactured in the region should stay in the region. Pellets lose their carbon value when shipped long distances. Keep things bioregional and produce our own thermal heat and electricity.

Potential funding sources

- Important to advocate for Vermont at the federal level — there is a gap between what the federal government provides for funding and how much it actually costs in Vermont.
- Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP) funds are decreasing as winters get warmer and more people switch to using electricity as a heat source. The federal job cost average of upgrading a whole heating system is around \$8,500, but in Vermont the cost of weatherization can be over \$15,000. We are having to spend State funds on jobs that are considered federal just to complete them. Need to figure out how to maintain these levels of fundings (i.e. increasing HWAP tax).
- The Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) does not provide enough money to cover all of the buildings that need upgrades and it has been difficult to identify other funding sources.
- The State needs to find a better balance between how much funding it puts into planning versus implementation (i.e. money goes into enhanced energy planning but not into implementing those plans at the municipal level).
- Hopeful that the legislature considers a bill that allows municipalities to borrow from the state's revolving loan fund and the Bond Bank's new fund for MERP upgrades without requiring voter approval since the energy savings should pay for most if not all the repayments.
- Funding is a high priority, including savings from weatherization; no interest on-bill financing.
- Consider a zero-interest revolving loan fund to fund energy projects, particularly if the funds are Federal monies coming into the state. The funds could be administered by Regional Planning Commissions around the state.
- As a housing funder, we are hesitant to require buildings to be all electric because Efficiency Vermont is only able to incentivize performance above code. It is challenging to ask developers to pay for energy efficiency that will not reliably pan out and ultimately depletes scarce housing funding resources.
 - Hopeful that greenhouse gas reduction fund money will serve as a funding solution.

Topics that have been missed

- “Embodied energy” or “lifecycle emissions”

- The amount of energy it takes to create certain building products (foam and concrete) – and therefore the greenhouse gas emissions from those – should not be left out of the conversation.
- Smart panels
 - These are critical in the transition to electric homes and cars, but also are one of the most complex interconnections of policy, regulation (both state and national), and emerging technologies.
 - People in rural areas are paying too much for panel upgrades when smart panels (breakers that shut off certain appliances when they're not needed) would be more affordable. But these aren't recognized by the national electric code yet and that needs to change.
- Education and storytelling
 - Missing components: education, outreach, and neighbor-to-neighbor storytelling and documentation.
 - Educate Vermonters about the benefits of saving energy and how Vermont can have an impact nationally.
- Off-grid residents
 - Off-grid residents will never be able to get an electric vehicle or heat pump, even with many on-site solar panels; cannot get rid of propane entirely that's needed for cooking and hot water.
- Don't overlook building foundations
 - Need to ensure that new construction has especially deep footings to hold buildings against soil loss around foundations.
 - Site design to divert water flow away from foundations, roadways and other homes and buildings.
- Explore new business models
 - Business models for electrical utilities.
 - Encourage creativity and innovation when exploring solutions, particularly systemic improvements that can address multiple challenges.
 - Develop a community-scale customer-centric and contractor-friendly approach that caters to the needs of individual households.
 - Neighborhood-oriented hubs are great opportunities for providing a range of services (i.e. transportation, vehicle pooling and mass transit as well as emergency services).
 - Spend time on how programs should run properly in order to provide the savings and benefits. Don't assume just spending money on energy efficiency means it will get results.

Participants

Sophi Veltrop, Dave Farnsworth, Marc Therrien, Chris Miksic, Scott Pinkham, Melissa Bailey, Lou Bresee, Richard Cowart, Scott McCormick, Guy Payne, Marc Mastrangelo, Dwight DeCoster, Andrew Catlin, Geoff Wilcox, Elizabeth Steel, Ari Lattanzi, Joe Uglietto, Wendy McGillivray, Sam

Lash, Dylan Giambatista, Kat Flik, Enrique Bueno, Jim Stiles, Jared Duval, Eva Morgan, Mike Roy, Alex Reese, Annette Smith, Jean Terwilliger, Ann Janda, Elizabeth Miller, Bre Wilkins, Jay Pilliod, Warren Coleman, Ryan Vazza, Dominic Gatti, Virginia Clarke, Ben Bolaski, Evelyn Seidner, Allie Webster, Phil Cecchini, Jess Neubelt, Mia Watson, Debbie New, D Gene Kraus, Alek Antczak, Liz Strong, Rowland Davis, Brian Woods, David Westman, Bram Kleppner, Lena Stier, Charlie Ansley, Norm Etkind, Matt Cota, Marian Wolz, Hilary Solomon, Richard Hopkins, Brad Cook, Keith Levenson, Dylan Zwicky, Johanna Miller, Cara Robeck, K M, Liz Amler, Mariel Hess, Jim Manley, Virginie Diambou, Gretchen Schimelpfenig, Steve Crowley, Andrea Wright, Brian Lamoureux, Victoria Underhill, David Plumb (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator)

Climate Action Input Session: Transportation

Thursday, November 7, 12:30-2:00pm

Summary of Input

*hosted by the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 7, 2024, focused on reducing climate pollution from transportation with an emphasis on vehicle electrification, clean fuels and public, active, and shared transportation. Approximately 70 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally, in the chat, or subsequently over email to Vermont's Climate Action Office.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Transportation Task Group of the Council's Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee.

- View presentation [slides](#).
- Watch the Transportation Input Session [recording](#).

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

Many comments focused on investing in and obtaining funding for reliable public transportation

- Invest in public transit!

- Invest in public transportation options.
- Strategic & specific investments needed for shared & active transportation
- Need for cultural change to promote increased use of public transit!
- Implement a strategy from one of the many public transit funding studies that have been conducted to sustainably fund public transit
- Stable funding for public transit.
- Focus on transit and active transportation, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction.
- Make public and active transportation the easiest, most affordable options!
- Microtransit in urban areas to supplement the reduction of fixed routes
- Continue to invest in innovative ideas in public transportation
- Funding of transportation policies have to be on par with our climate and equity goals.
- Don't rely on federal programs to meet transportation goals
- Clearly convey available \$ to make change versus base transportation budget simply maintain what is there

Other comments focused more specifically on active transportation alternatives

- If you build it, they will come. We need bike infrastructure across longer corridors.
- All kids should be able to walk or bike to school.
- Walkability and downtown/village vibrancy is a critical piece of climate resiliency combined with more convenient passenger rail connections between population centers and first/last mile transit
- VTrans taking the lead on adding bike lanes when repaving
- Support sustainable modes not single occupancy vehicle infrastructure

Several comments focused on issues associated with electrification, including charging

- Charging stations for multi-family and at short intervals on roads around the state
- Intentional public charging locations that limit barriers for renters to access
- Investing in EV incentives AND making the process to access them as simple/streamlined as possible
- We need to invest equitably in electrifying vehicles and reducing VMT by funding other modes.
- Make switching easier!
- Overburdened/outdated electrical grid

Participants had other key takeaways as well

- Focus on consumer economics
- Focus on policies on rural super users to lower greenhouse gases the most. Many of these people are lower income.
- Please also keep in mind to look at all sides of each story and make sure that your policies do not turn into regressive taxes or high cost compliance or more pollution.
- Investments in lowering energy consumption will save real dollars
- Equity and accessibility!
- Look to renewable diesel for heavy duty & off road vehicles.
- Barriers to adoption.
- Explore increasing the gas tax - increases revenue for these projects and taxes the thing you want to reduce.
- Prioritize people over driving!

Detailed summary by theme

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation, in the chat, and from subsequent emails, grouped by theme.

Concerns and possible solutions related to affordability and how to support low-income communities

- The goal of affordability is crucial.
- Hopefully, policies won't be implemented so quickly that Vermonters can't participate.
- What is envisioned for the deaf community in this transition to electric/ hybrid vehicles and how will they afford it? Many in the community are low-income and do not own homes.
- Need to broaden the target audience beyond low-income folks to include retirees who are dependent on social security income to survive.
- Although there are ways to buy electric vehicles through subsidies, many are still worried about charging and many subsidies come with regressive tax breaks.
- Need to ensure policies don't have unintended consequences.
- Upgrading large old apartment buildings to heat pumps is expensive and in some cases not possible. The costs would go to the tenants and this would make rent rates go through the roof.
- Many of the Vermont EV incentives have lapsed. These must be reinstated and funding needs to be secured to create similar and other incentives. Low and middle-income households need to be able to afford fully electric transportation, and such incentives are crucial to making that possible.

- Many Vermonters are struggling to afford food – there are serious financial barriers to adoption of heat pumps or electric furnaces.
- Used vehicle tax credit of \$4,000 is available at the time of sale. No need for tax liability.

Solutions for multi-family units and renters

- Burlington Cohousing has 32 multi-family units and two level-two chargers that work with Burlington Electric Department (BED) for off-peak charging.
 - Burlington Cohousing has 9 affordable units through CHT among its 32 units. One of those CHT residents owns an electric car – need to shift the perception because electric cars can be affordable using incentives, trade-in, and holiday dealer sales and because some can be leased for low monthly payments.
- Offer incentives for buying the chargers and assistance and getting them installed.
 - For landlords, incentives for offering multi-family units level two chargers if they are to run off of a common meter.
- Burlington has a good residential incentive program through BED but not being able to charge residentially using a common meter is a challenge. Need to be working with a company that has the software to support what BED needs to see that charging is being done during off-peak hours.
- The State needs to focus on building out charging infrastructure, and in particular charging that serves residents of multi-unit housing, especially in more densely populated areas. I live in South Burlington, in a 60-unit condo high rise with a basement garage having assigned parking spaces for residents. It is impossible to create individual charging in-garage for EV owners living in this kind of setup, and difficult, complicated, and very expensive to install Level 2 chargers outside of the building in either roadside or public parking-lot locations.

Funding opportunities and challenges related to public transportation

- The budget last year dedicated about 870 million dollars to transportation, and not nearly enough to pay for sustainability programs. The State needs to be committed to get the budget aligned with our values, and the Climate Action Plan needs to be explicit about how we are going to align our budget with our equity and climate goals.
- The majority of funding as a public transit provider comes from federal grants, and in order to receive them, there needs to be local match funds. Many of the local match funds are contributed by the State, and also by local communities, sometimes private institutions, and even ski resorts. It is not easily predictable year-to-year what local match is going to be available, which poses challenges to expanding routes, increasing

frequency, etc. Many in the public transit industry feel grateful for the support received, but would like to provide higher quality of service which will only be possible if there are more predictable and ongoing sources of local match funding.

- Community Rides Vermont received State funding for a pilot program called *Mobility for All* that may have important lessons for other public transit providers related to how to best serve people without cars and foster an environment where people are less reliant on their own vehicles. Community Rides VT is a quasi-public transit provider with an all electric vehicle fleet that provides taxi-like services to the general public and is a contract transportation provider for local schools.
 - The public transit system meets most peoples' needs, but there are still people that slip through the cracks. Because of this, the Mobility for all funding stream could be important to implement statewide.
- If we are concerned that federal support for EVs and lower carbon solutions will be reduced soon, can we quickly expand Vermont's programs to maximize the amount of federal co-funding we can draw down in the next year or 18 months?
- We should spend money in the budget on projects that shift people away from car usage. Other states have implemented a cap on greenhouse gas emissions or VMT increases that can result from major transportation projects. During planning, if a big transportation project is to be done, it has to be evaluated for its effect on greenhouse gas emissions or VMT, and if it is going to increase greenhouse gas emissions or VMT, those have to be mitigated elsewhere, or the project has to be changed in order to go in the direction of the goal (i.e. in Colorado).
 - The current Climate Action Plan discusses a sustainable transportation plan that looks at VMT reduction and what is needed to achieve that in terms of investments. This should specifically explore a planning rule or a regulatory scheme similar to the [mechanisms](#) Colorado has put in place.

Reducing dependency on single occupancy vehicles

- Structural / cultural change and associated challenges
 - Reducing car dependency will require a structural/mindset change. State leadership is essential to provide other transportation solutions. Many think this won't be possible due to Vermont's geography and settlement patterns, but the subcommittee should look at models in places such as Switzerland, one of the best rail-connected countries that is also extremely rural and more mountainous than Vermont.
 - Car ownership used to be a luxury, similar to the way people use private planes now and it was also the case that transportation was seen as a collective

responsibility. Should return to this collective approach that aims to reduce costs for Vermonters.

- Hands-on learning and talking to students/ kids of all ages about transportation is key to shift the culture around cars. There is already widespread acceptance from youth about the different available modes of transportation such as biking and walking, while also being aware that it depends on the road or sidewalk situation.
 - However, there are limits to promoting this as public transit is not an option for many kids. If kids don't see that there is a viable option for them to take a local bus, there isn't anywhere for that conversation to go/ any way for them to practice the skills involved in taking public transit. This will look very different depending on where people are in the State, so we need a systematic approach that makes public transportation/ other alternatives to driving a viable option that works reliably and is accessible to a variety of people across the state.
- Alternatives (i.e. car-sharing, biking, walking, rail)
 - Acknowledge that some people cannot get rid of their individual vehicle due to work (i.e. as a landlord, it would be difficult to get rid of personal transportation, especially in terms of delivering new supplies to buildings and plowing parking lots and roads.)
 - VTrans could consider Electric Truck demonstrations/rides to interested residents.
 - Expand car-sharing programs throughout the state for jobs like deliveries, recognizing that most people have a need for doing a major equipment delivery pretty infrequently. Likewise, for street plowing - we already collectivize this for our public roads, and we could simply extend this as a town or smaller-than-town-area plow-sharing program, as well.
 - Consider increasing the gas tax.
 - Continue (and expand) e-bike incentive programs and bike/pedestrian infrastructure programs.
 - The idea of setting up a "bike/walk bus" where kids get organized to bike/walk to school together invariably falls on busy and exhausted parents. Need to focus on building systems that let more people participate without adding more work to volunteers.
 - Rail is a good concept, but there have been financial barriers for decades to finance and bring more efficient rail to Vermont.
 - The last-mile challenge, or the challenge of getting people from a rail station to a rural residence, still looms large. Luckily, Vermont, unlike many other rural states

in the US, has dense, walkable town centers that can serve as centers for rail connections. One solution is similar to what Green Mountain transit does in Montpelier with an on-demand vehicle. Another solution is to expand electric bike parking at stations, as well as the use of electric bikes to get to and from rail stations for shorter distances.

Electrification

- Electrifying the fleet (public transportation and SOVs)
 - Need enhanced incentives for public transit and other transportation companies to electrify, because the benefits of electrification (given experience with EV vehicle fleet on the road all day everyday the past 18 months) in terms of cost, reliability, and pollution reduction are significant. Getting other businesses to electrify would generate substantial cost savings and pollution reduction.
 - How do you respond to claims that we are harming the earth in order to build batteries for electric vehicles?
- Charging
 - The state should devote greater effort and resources to solving charging problems (such as those in multi-unit housing) that severely hinder EV adoption.
 - Green Mountain Power (GMP) has a great program in terms of EV incentives, but these incentives are not consistent statewide. The State needs to implement equitable charging rates throughout.
 - How do we address having quick charging stations at regular intervals across the State for those who are traveling long distances, also taking into account that Vermont's economy is dependent on tourism income?
 - Many people commute from rural areas that are more affordable to jobs in urban centers. Investing in workplace charging at major employment hubs could help encourage "rural super users" to consider EVs.
 - Concern about the push to electrify the vehicle fleet because we cannot keep up with the electricity requirements now. Are we improving the grid enough to also have everyone charging cars, too?
- Other limitations
 - There are many towns in which areas are limited in terms of thermal capacity and installing new solar. It doesn't matter how much we promote EVs if this is not changed. Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) does not even offer on-demand metering as a service. Getting all our utilities on the same level should be a primary goal.

- There are barriers people in single family homes and in apartments face when they try to upgrade their systems. Perhaps we should be looking at the utilities to provide a minimum service level at each household as part of our strategy.

Local capacity and regional collaboration

- Any statewide decisions that are trying to increase incentives or provide opportunities for towns to implement these initiatives need to make sure that the towns have the capacity and resources to do the planning work.
- Need to work together to enhance local and regional planning (especially if other paving or infrastructure projects are happening at the same time). Otherwise, municipalities can be left on their own to plan and implement transportation infrastructure, make investment decisions, and deal with increased costs of road maintenance which is becoming more expensive due to extreme weather.

Other

- Need to ensure that incentives work for lower-income folks, but also incentives should target high users, too, so we are getting the best payback.
- Intersecting issues
 - Need to combine thinking with other intersecting issues in the State such as affordable housing, forestry, etc. and how that connects to the public's needs for efficient transportation, especially in rural areas.
- Adopt the "investment" mentality
 - Need to look at financing as investments. If we are able to overcome the challenges associated with getting lower-income families electric vehicles or convert their oil burners to heat pumps, we know they will save money in the same ways.
- Concern that the Affordable Heat Act is not actually transparent or affordable at all, that government officials don't have the public's best interest in mind, and that taxpayer dollars are not being efficiently spent, leaving Vermonters in a hard spot.
 - Concern that weatherization involves insulating homes with non-environmentally friendly products.
 - Concern that older people are being forced to upgrade their homes, leading them to take on debt.
 - What are the rate/tax increases accomplishing?
 - What alternatives are in place in terms of fuels besides electricity via GMP? Concern that GMP is raising their rates.

- Concern that people skilled in the trades are in high demand and short supply.

Participants

Ari Lattanzi, Beth Meachem, Barbara Dailey, Logan Nicoll, Jason Hirsch, Joy Yakie, Scott Campbell, Geena Baber, Johanna Miller, Sharyl Green, Andrea Wright, Karl Kemnitzer, dave farnsworth, Edward Barber, Jonathon Weber, Melissa Bailey, Reuben MacMartin, Samantha Page, Christine Forde, Adams Carroll, Laural Ruggles, Peggy O'Neill-Vivanco, David Roberts, Katherine Lee Goyette, Caleb Grant, Liam Abbate, Abby Bleything, John Haffner, Callie Fishburn, Dave Pelletier, Cara Robeck, Colin Bratton, Liz Amler, Alex Grist, Maja Klostermann, Lena Stier, Keith Cubbon, Brian Woods, Sarah Camille Wilson, Collin Smythe, Eliana Fox, Leigh Martin, Eleni Churchill, Richard Cowart, Evelyn Seidner, Jason Charest, Robb Kidd, Jared Duval, Jeremy Roy, Jane Lazorchak, Susan Bowen, Ann Janda, Neva Cote, Rep Phil Pouech, Rep Scott Campbell, Sophia Donforth, Otis Ellms-Munroe, Annie Bourdon, Val Hughes, Kati Gallagher, Deirdra Ritzer, Ingrid Malmgren, Karen Horn, Amanda Carlson, Charlie Ansley, Bram Kleppner, Amanda Holland, Ross MacDonald, Adam Aguirre, Victoria Underhill, David Plumb (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator), Hannah Gantt (ASL interpreter), Hilda Colondres (ASL interpreter)

Climate Action Input Session: Rural Resilience and Businesses

Friday, November 8, 12:00-1:30pm

Summary of Input

*hosted by the Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 8, 2024, focused on supporting the climate resilience of businesses—especially small to medium-sized businesses and the organizations that support them. Approximately 50 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally, in the chat, or subsequently over email to Vermont's Climate Action Office.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Public Health, Community Capacity, and Building/Infrastructure Task Groups of the Council's Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee.

- View [presentation slides](#).
- Watch the Rural Resilience and Businesses Input Session [recording](#).

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

Many comments focused on improving disaster planning and preparedness

- Support businesses to recover from climate disasters by preparing in advance
- Connecting local stakeholders and businesses with programs and technical support -- how best to do this?
- Explore and implement strategies to expand local emergency preparedness and response capacity
- Information sharing and collaboration with the business community seeing organizations as facilitators of input - not just in times of recovery but in planning for the future
- Pro-active planning for climate resilience that includes businesses
- Engagement and relationship-building
- Known, community rooted assistance

Several comments focused on incentives

- More incentives and grant programs for the business community
- How to balance some businesses getting incentives for solar or heat pumps with increased costs for everyone else to pay those incentives
- Incentives are much more effective than fines, and grants are much more helpful than loans

One comment highlighted the tension between facilitating re-development, while also limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

- Calculus balancing between new developments/cutting red tape vs GHG emissions

Detailed summary by theme

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation, in the chat, and from subsequent emails, grouped by theme within the relevant Task Group category.

Building/ Infrastructure:

Housing/ infrastructure

- There needs to be a critical review done on the new regulations and standards related to housing. There are conversations happening about the urgent need for housing, and at the same time there are conversations about increasing regulations and costs through building standards. There should be a cost-benefit analysis done to understand what regulations are needed in terms of housing to enhance resiliency and efficiency, and

what added costs are simply getting in the way of helping to get people housed in resilient places in Vermont.

- We need affordable housing, but it needs to be built in areas closer to centers of towns, not out on the rural landscape, and not near flood zones. Act 250 continues to be very important and must remain strong.
- All new infrastructure that is built must include renewable energy (primarily solar) and energy-saving techniques (even if building affordable housing).
 - Improve trail infrastructure.

Community Capacity:

Engagement, regional collaboration, and the importance of trusted on-the-ground support for planning and recovery

- The most impactful projects are ones with people least likely to access the programs, so it is essential to have trusted, community-rooted organizations on the ground to provide technical assistance in navigating the programs.
- Information and support networks (including business to business/economic development organization relationships and organization to organization relationships need to be established proactively, anticipating and getting ahead of climate-related business impacts). We need to be organized when urgent action is needed.
- Every area in the State has a conservation district that is a regional entity and the Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District is an option (not speaking for all conservation districts in Vermont, but we have an interest in forward-thinking, planning, and on-the-ground projects). In our case, everybody already has connections with their small towns, but often the town doesn't have the capacity to administer the funds, which is where the conservation district or RPCs step in. In order to do this, we need to have already established relationships, which means being an adequately funded entity to begin with.
- Encourage partnerships where recreation businesses could work with the downtown organizations/ local recreation/ parks organizations and be directly involved in the planning for the future, so that businesses do not have to just be reactive.
- The State does a great job in bringing businesses associations and stakeholders together in the aftermath of disaster, and it would be great if we could channel that energy towards proactive organizing. Need to build established relationships, clear information channels, and a "go-plan" in advance.
- In Waterbury, there has been immense social and municipal support during flooding events. A long-term disaster preparedness support/ recovery group called [CREW](#)

(Community Resiliency for the Waterbury Area) was established and can serve as an example for other municipalities.

- Businesses downtown with retail or in resorts or that own large amounts of land/ manage recreation assets were affected physically by the flooding and that was obvious. The more challenging cases were tourism and hospitality, where businesses were also affected but did not necessarily have an entry into the recovery conversation because they didn't lose their inventory or storefront. Vermont's outdoor recreation economy contributes 4.6% of VT's GDP, which is the second highest in the country. Need to think through how to engage all businesses that have an impact and a role to play in solutions.
 - The Kingdom Trail Association (KT) has an estimated \$10 million economic impact annually as the user experience extends beyond the trails into the fabric of the community. This summer, they experienced massive flooding that caused an estimated \$30,000 in trail damage (not accounting for the loss in revenue as membership numbers dropped during what should be the peak of their season. And it could have been hundreds of thousands more if they were responsible for some of the vital infrastructure that KT uses like bridges owned by VAST, yet still serves as a critical connection for both summer and winter trail operations. This is the main corridor for both KT and VAST to connect Caledonia to Essex County).
 - Vermont needs to provide long-term solutions — the State should right-size its investment in stewardship, providing consistent and sustainable funding for the planning and maintenance of our public-access recreational assets. If the State wishes to continue being a leader in outdoor recreation, it must future-proof trail infrastructure so KT can continue to provide the economic, public health, and conservation benefits that communities like ours derive from outdoor recreation.
 - The Kingdom Trail Association looks to the Vermont Trails & Greenway Council for guidance and priorities among the broader trail community.

Additional thoughts on building relationships to support planning and recovery efforts

- Businesses and local & regional governments
 - Federal funds that are available to support businesses are all rooted through municipalities or regional development corporations, and unless the business has a pre-existing relationship or the confidence to build one with those entities, they will not be able to access those funds. Leads to disappointment and distrust in government and need to consider different ways to more effectively distribute resources to businesses in the revised Climate Action Plan.

- The Business Emergency Gap Assistance program provided a dedicated source to businesses for a variety of physical damages from inventory to storefronts – there were businesses able to work with their municipalities on identifying commercial impacts and solutions for investments to protect their commercial district in the future. Businesses want to see the vitality of their communities, and can be a resource for how to protect the downtown or the village in terms of municipality investments (that can also have a positive impact on businesses themselves).
 - There needs to be a dedicated source to businesses that does not make them present their case in competition with homeowners or community members or with municipal infrastructural damage because that creates an uncomfortable tension.
- Need to have better messaging going out to businesses in the aftermath of disaster. Telling businesses to do gift cards/ start a GoFundMe is not sufficient. Need to think about how dollars are flowing into businesses during the recovery phase and also what is the narrative around support for businesses in that phase.
- We must remain vigilant in the conservation of our forests, waters and lands. Our gem is Vermont, our best defense against climate warming is nature itself, and in the long run, our natural resources will be what is most valuable. As Vermonters, we must always favor respect for our natural surroundings over disrespect, and integrity and education over lies and ignorance.

Tradeoffs/ tensions in terms of what benefits businesses and climate goals

- There are tradeoffs between being a small business owner and wanting to contribute to climate resiliency efforts, while also not wanting it to be more difficult for businesses to operate (increased costs and red tape). Any incentives for small businesses to transition and pitch in this way is extremely helpful.
- There are instances in which business-oriented actions contradict goals of the Climate Action (i.e. degrading resilience, releasing emissions, hurting water quality, hurting biodiversity, etc.).
 - Need to be careful about what we are suggesting will benefit the climate – for example, there is a focus on forest management, yet the wood product sector is a large part of the economy.
- How can we incentivize good decisions / encourage active management of forests to get the wood products that we need while also making sure to create places on the landscape that boost resilience to floods, droughts, and other challenges to species in Vermont. This is an important question that has to be embedded in conversations, and

we have to make choices about balancing uses on the landscape. We can't do everything everywhere.

- We rightfully get 96% of our wood product volume from private lands in Vermont. Public lands in Vermont can provide flood resilience, carbon storage, and biodiversity benefits that private lands can't provide with the same level of public accountability. Need to ensure that we are getting the maximum public goods and services from public lands and dollars that go to resilience-related and emissions reduction efforts.

Workforce:

- Consider workforce impacts and how different employees have experienced climate change (i.e. how heat has impacted employees who work outside)
 - There is momentum in the workforce around companies developing products, technologies, and services for reducing greenhouse gases and many businesses are thinking about how to be innovative and sustainable whether they are conservation, natural resource, or land-based professionals. There are a lot of forward-thinking business and public sector job opportunities that are looking for problem-solving and teamwork as necessary skillsets which is what we will need to have in the future workforce to foster partnerships with education, address urgent needs, etc.
 - The Public Health Task Group is considering the effects of extreme temperatures and air quality on a workforce that works outside and is negatively impacted by increasing problems with ozone, smoke from wildfires, etc.. More people are having to do work in the heat, including those who come to assist during disaster recovery.
 - We need a workforce that is equipped to provide services related to wind turbines, solar panels, and heat pumps, and understand and become installers of the new technology that is not fossil fuel related.
 - There is a need for more climate change classes taught in high schools and middle schools, as well as more programs in technical high schools in order to build the workforce.

Continuing to engage around these issues

- Vermont Chamber of Commerce is happy to partner with the Council in the future to raise awareness of businesses to come and speak about their concerns directly/ or get their written input.

Participants

Sophi Veltrop, Dustin Bowman, Scott McCormick, Jeremy Roy, Marian Wolz, David Deen, Andrea Wright, Jim Stiles, Edward Barber, Megan Sullivan, Edward Fox, Kelly Pajala, Stephen Dotson, Dahlia Cohn, Bronwyn Cooke, Owen Sette-Ducati, Evelyn Seidner, Brian Woods, Danielle Bombardier, Henry Amistadi, Chris Company, Jeremy Little, Caroline Paske, Max Saylor, Eric Forand, Anna Vold, Miranda Dupre, Sam Mayne, Katharyn Hassan, Liz Amler, Molly Mahar, Anne Margolis, Callie Fishburn, Stephanie Boucher, Otis Ellms-Munroe, Judy Kowalczyk, Kelly Klein, David Snedeker, Roxanne Vought, Kelly Ault, Charlie Ansley, Ben Rose, Zack Porter, Jackie Dagger, Mike McConnell, Logan Nicoll, Catherine Lowther, Val Stori, Hilary Solomon, Carra Cheslin, Alice Peal, Bill Chidsey, Kati Gallagher, David Plumb (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator)

Climate Action Input Session: Agriculture

Tuesday, November 12, 12:00-1:30pm

Summary of Input

*hosted by the Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 12, 2024, focused on looking at how to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration, support adaptation and economic viability for farms, and promote climate resilient practices in Vermont's agriculture sector. Approximately 50 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally and in the chat.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the GHG Reduction and Sequestration, Support, Adaptation, Viability, Recovery, Economies, and Workforce, and the Climate Resilient Land Use Practices Task Groups of the Council's Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee.

- View presentation [slides](#).
- Watch the Agriculture Input Session [recording](#).

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

Many comments focused on land access and food production

- Agricultural land access and adequate resources to support farming that land for the future.
- Land and quality soil availability, conservation and access in the face of a plummeting agricultural economy and pressures from the energy sector in the face of decarbonization
- Land access, support for farmers
- Support local regenerative food production through land access and resources

Several comments focused on ways to support farmers and farming

- Targeted funding to keep farmers in business.
- Direct support for farmers and farm viability
- Tax breaks for farmers
- Direct support for farmers and farms
- Push mandate re: resiliency and adaptation (land equity and access, healthcare, protecting farmworkers, anti-trust, animal power, food production as central to climate change, just livelihoods, etc)
- Set specific, concrete goals with shorter time-frames. Multi-solve: Agrivoltaics, Universal Basic Income (UBI) for regenerative/sustainable working land practices... all great ideas/examples Farmer/Forester designed solutions

Other comments focused on concerns related to renewable energy siting

- Important to protect agricultural lands from renewable resource siting, while also promoting the overall installation and use of renewables.
- Alternative/developed locations for renewable resources

Participants had other takeaways as well

- Importance of providing payments for ecosystem services, recognizing that land has more values besides just agricultural production.
- Holistic solution- agroecological frameworks
- Support capacity of our existing service delivery system
- Flood resiliency
- Intersection of climate mitigation, resilience, adaptation with water quality and biodiversity

Detailed summary by theme

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation and in the chat.

Supporting farmers and farmworkers

- What are your plans for supporting/protecting farm workers (dairy farmers, vegetable farmers, etc.) given recent political changes and the President-elect's plan to deport undocumented workers?
- Consider farmers, farmworkers, and foresters' quality of life – healthcare, childcare, elder care, and mental health in conversations about climate resilience.
- Continue reaching out to farmers, including their voices, and understanding how to best support them and acknowledge the structural limitations they face. They are good stewards of the land, and the economic system they work within is the reason that they are not able to store the land as well as they want to.
- The Universal Basic Income (UBI) program for farmers who adopt organic regenerative practices and soil health practices is a great program. Healthcare, dental care, childcare, etc. could be built into a UBI along with the technical service providers, grants, and potentially regional price support as well. We don't necessarily have to be talking about direct payments to farmers from the State, but rather we can build out a lot of these supportive programs. In many ways, this transition to soil health practices in the long-term should also improve the bottom line of farmers.
 - There is lots of movement and research around Universal Basic Services in the UK as an alternative approach to UBI.
- A lot is expected of our farmers and they will need far more assistance to survive economically. As a farm business advisor, it is incredibly hard for farmers to make a living.
- Need to change at the base level what is valued most. Farmers should be paid and funded by the State and supported by public banks as state workers who are crucial to the public health and future of our children.
- What does integrating climate-related education at all levels mean? Is it climate related or is it about agriculture and working lands - teaching people how to be foresters, farm, and harvest wild foods and medicinals?

Supporting farm viability

- What are more significant regulatory steps we can take to push the envelope in terms of farm viability? No matter how much money we can throw at this, property values are beyond the ability for people to access, even with some financial help – and that is just for new people, let alone people trying to survive in a tough agricultural economy with floods.
- Farms are a climate solution, a food security solution, and an economic vitality solution. Supporting farm viability and helping young people get on the lands is urgent if we want the land to be making our communities more resilient.

Adopting an agroecological approach

- Why isn't agroecology being discussed related to climate resilient land use practices? The Institute for Agroecology at University of Vermont is thriving and is already doing work to braid together traditional Western science and traditional and indigenous knowledge. Please connect with the Institute and raise awareness of their research on increased resilience and increased success with climate adaptation and climate mitigation on agroecological farms.
 - The technical assistance actions do already include the UVM extension and there could be a great opportunity to incorporate the Institute.
- Need to fuse traditional, indigenous knowledge about ecology with what we are doing now in order to make real progress.
- We should make our existing agricultural acres wildly more productive than they currently are in order to effect a truly-systems level transition of the agricultural sector to embrace agroecological principles and practices. As the New England Feeding New England projections suggest that we need thousands of more acres, we would also be restoring soil health and biodiversity as well as addressing ecological overshoot (greenhouse gas emissions can be seen as the symptom of our predicament as human beings in ecological overshoot with our habitat).
- The agricultural agroecology approach will be more labor-intensive than the industrial agricultural model that dominates Vermont. We will need more young people to join the cause, and we will need to make it apparent that they can make a Vermont living wage doing this essential labor. Many farmers now have to go into debt in order to keep operating.

Floodplains and flood resilience

- Managing riparian lands for flood resiliency is extremely important, as extreme flood events are increasing.

- One of the best investments Vermont can make for both flood resiliency and water quality is to provide farmers with adequate compensation to get agricultural production out of the floodplain. At Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), we provided funding to US Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire agricultural floodplain parcels, which will now be managed for wildlife, habitat, and flood resiliency.
 - While there are impacts in the floodplain, it is also a significant resource to farmers as agriculture originated from the floodplains and that is where the most productive soils are.
 - Historically, river valleys and floodplains have been places of great agricultural fertility but what does the testing overtime reveal about the chemicals and heavy metals carried by these bodies? What does research show about how we would be able to deal with those and how that affects the nutritive value of food or potential contamination of food or livestock?

Alignment with pre-existing programs

- As someone who works with private landowners in the agriculture and forestry sector, I have seen many activities and practices happening on private lands that do benefit the climate.
- There is still opportunity to do work that benefits the climate using existing programs. Until we change the system and have something different to work with, there are programs in place that could help landowners.
- There are a lot of other plans and initiatives happening in Vermont – to what extent were these referenced in developing priorities (i.e. clean water work through Act 76, tactical basin plans, etc.)?
 - Making sure priorities are deployed in ways that are compatible with other priorities in the environment is a foundation of the emissions reduction approach. For water-based priorities, the Water Quality Division at the Institute of Agriculture ensures that the funding distributed to farmers to implement conservation practices that have co-benefits for climate resilience and greenhouse gas mitigation is also aligned with other priorities/ organizations' work.
- When plans are developed, we sometimes run into issues executing the actions items due to lack of capacity. Have you had conversations about this? To what extent would this plan call for directing funding strategically into pre-existing programs or to what extent would this require the development of brand new programs that would need to be rolled out at the state level?

- From the perspective of the Support, Adaptation, Viability, Recovery, Economies, and Workforce Task Group, we are definitely prioritizing strategies and actions that are looking to enhance existing programs, organizations, and delivery mechanisms. Something else that we've talked about as a full subcommittee is that we feel we have a strong service-provider system in place, and that anything we develop implies an additional level of service or expertise, and we need to fund at that appropriate level (i.e. we have named conservation districts as an entity to provide increased funding for as one action).
 - We appreciate the conservation districts being named in this and the emphasis of funding existing service delivery structures here in the State.
- The CAP ag strategies would be a good presentation topic for the Ag Water Quality Partnership annual meeting this winter.

Challenges related to land access

- Community resilience and climate adaptation can have broad interpretations. When farmworkers and young farmers in particular think about resilience, it's about their bottom line. When we think about the future of climate change, land is the big question.
- The New England Feeding New England projections of needing hundreds of thousands more acres of land in production in New England to even meet 30% of our region's food resilience by 2030, yet farmers can't get access to land and they certainly can't have long-term tenure or ownership. Most are leasing land. Many young farmers studying agriculture are worrying about how they will ever make enough money working at a farm to save up for their own farms, let alone pay off their student loans.
- Do you have any new ideas for improving land access? That remains to be a problem for beginning farmers and for older people who want to get back into farming. Having more farms would also increase the amount of carbon sequestration.
- What are recommendations around regulatory solutions for land, specifically for changing it from a capital-based system to a community rights and community sovereignty-based system?
 - Some of the big international climate agendas are threatening human rights, food and land sovereignty, and community control over resources. Is there a food sovereignty plan and what are the details? The subcommittee needs to look at these land questions as fundamental to the task moving forward.
 - Climate change is an equity and structural power issue. Need to think critically about carbon markets and other concepts because they may make matters worse (i.e. electricity emissions being offset by renewable energy credits - the same

ones that are bringing multi-state operators in to displace farmers by taking that land).

- The Vermont Pension Investment Committee invested 100 million dollars of Vermonters' Pension in a subsidiary that has been found to be land grabbing around the world. If we are focused on climate resilience and agriculture, our State's investments outside of Vermont should also reflect this. The Climate Action Plan could be helpful in this process, and could even generate more radical conversations about public banks and other ways of generating our own income to support farmers.

Renewable energy siting and the competition for agricultural land

- I'm concerned about the competition for land use between renewable energy projects, namely solar operations, agricultural land use, and sometimes forests. The solar siting law was last revised in 2014, so we need to review what is and is not working. The law has proven to be inadequate to protect our best agricultural soils, and is also interfering with farmland access. VT is falling behind other states in addressing these conflicts and developing policy, criteria, and regulation, including defining what constitutes agrivoltaics and when agrivoltaics are appropriate and well-designed and not just "greenwashing." All solar projects should have some sort of dual use under them whether that is agriculture, wildlife habitat, or pollinators.
 - The energy siting conflict - balancing the need for renewable energy production and food production is a real challenge that the subcommittee is thinking about.
- Incentivize and consider mandating solar and wind capacity on new buildings as well as in previously disturbed or developed areas and avoid and minimize forest clearing for renewables through incentives and other siting policies, rules, and regulations.
- Efficiency Vermont unfortunately can't address concerns around energy generation/siting, but is happy to be in contact with any type of agricultural enterprises and perform on-farm energy assessments to find opportunities to increase efficiency and hopefully complete projects which increase resilience for power systems and lower bills, and to connect the customer with more funding resources across the State for energy efficiency projects. Reach out at dany@veic.org. Also, more than happy to connect with any interested members of this subcommittee to engage in technical/strategic conversations on farm energy projects.
- Efficiency VT offers great programs for farmers, but there needs to be additional financial assistance and technical support for a wider array of technologies and infrastructure for reducing energy use on farms, the greater electrification of agricultural equipment including delivery trucks and vans, and the production of renewable energy

on the farm for the purpose of meeting farm energy needs. More farms would take more steps in this direction if capital was not a barrier.

Other suggestions and questions specifically for the revised Climate Action Plan

- A lot of the work seems to be based on this greenhouse gas emissions story which is inherently flawed, and the subcommittee should look at the larger directives as holistically as possible.
- Does the Agriculture section of the CAP include greenhouse gas savings from local food production instead of importing food?
- I hope the eventual plan will make quantitative estimates of the percent of animals or acres that have had mitigation strategies implemented as well as the resulting contribution of each of these measures to the desired reduction in CO2 emissions.
- Appreciate that agroforestry is being included.

Participants

Jake Claro, Evan Horne, Ryan Patch, Emily Finnegan, Nancy LaRowe, Elisa Clancy, Nathanael Johns, Jaiel Pulskamp, Max Saylor, Amber Perry, Marli Rupe, Adam Aguirre, Liz Amler, Margo Ghia, Judson Peck, Stephanie Boucher, Stephen Leslie, Allie Webster, Charlie Ansley, Lee King, Chris Smith, Margaret Fowle, Katharyn Hassan, Andrew Milliken, Graham Unangst-Rufenacht, John Van Hoesen, Erica Hiller, Nora Brown, Billy Coster, Ari Lattanzi, Molly Anderson, Duncan Murdoch, Clare Ireland, Mike Ghia, Katherine Lee Goyette, Eric DeLuca, Kristin Blodgett, Mariah Noth, Hilary Solomon, Richard Hopkins, Kristan Doolan, Charlotte Rosendahl, Mary Perchlik, Alissa White, Alli Lewis, Dany Boyle, Pam Bryer, Lindsey Ruhl, Albert Sabatini, David Plumb (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator)

Climate Action Input Session: Natural Lands and Forestry

Wednesday, November 13, 6-7:30pm

Summary of Input

*hosted by the Agriculture & Ecosystems Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 13, 2024, focused on Vermont's natural lands and forestry. Approximately 40 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally and in the chat. The summary also includes some comments that participants sent in after the meeting.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee related to natural lands and forestry.

- View presentation [slides](#).
- Watch the input session [recording](#).

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

Many comments focused on supporting land caretakers, including some specific policy proposals

- Need to better support land and water caretakers
- Use Value Appraisal (UVA) updating.

- Allow zero cut option for all forest owners in the UVA.
- Pay-For-Performance type program
- Managing and valuing forests and local forest products the same way we do agricultural lands
- Link co-benefits across sectors and our well being. Ecologically managed forests that support local wood systems that keep emissions down (less transport for the things we consume).
- Ensure that Vermonters can afford to own land
- Strong forest economy supports keeping forests as forests

Several comments spoke to management practices and land use planning

- Support climate smart forestry practices- including active management and the tools needed to keep it viable
- Management for old forest characteristics; think at the watershed scale
- Land use planning to reduce rural sprawl and better maintain large forest blocks
- Set aside substantial areas of wild forest
- Protect public forests
- Young managed forests sequester more carbon than old forests.

Commenters had different views about burning biomass to generate energy

- Stop burning wood
- Stop burning wood. Full stop.
- Bio fuel is vital part for forest stewardship and needs to be supported
- Use more wood for energy

Other comments

- Reaching town planners via RPCs
- Work on reduction, and do not put all climate solutions onto forest lands (public and private)

Detailed summary by theme

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation and in the chat, grouped by theme.

Aspects of the presentation that participants found particularly valuable

- The breadth of the recommendations
- The pathway “Manage natural and working lands and waters for biodiversity, forest health, water quality and climate resilience.” Vermont needs to be thinking about co-benefits and across systems.
- Protection of old growth forests
- Maintaining natural and working lands

Policies to support natural lands and forests

- The Use Value Appraisal program to be updated to make more lands eligible with a “no-cut” option.
- There are many laws on the books already that need capacity to implement them. Act 181 in particular needs adequate resources.

Impacts from biomass

- Harvesting for biomass has an impact on the land.
- Vermont should stop burning biomass to make electricity and other industrial scale burning. A moratorium should be considered. “What an outrageous waste of our forests in addition to the massive amount of carbon pollution, impact on biodiversity, flooding, human health. Thank you, thank you [for considering a moratorium].”

Land use planning

- Importance of watershed scale planning. Would like to see more of that in the document.
- Land use planning is an important tool to protect waters, forests and other important habitats.
- Information and advice needs to be transmitted down to the municipal level. As planning commissioners, we have limited views on how to engage with all those private landowners. How to have these conversations.
 - There are 14 Conservation Districts in Vermont which are considered watershed governments. They can provide assistance to land owners and managers to create conservation plans for their land

- Glad to see that a prioritization is being looked at for siting renewable energy on sites other than productive ag lands and forested areas. There is always a balance because it is all needed.
- [Comment sent in after the meeting] Act 250 continues to be very important and must remain strong. Because Act 250, Vermont still holds much of its defenses against climate warming (wetlands, forests, mountains, etc.) and we must not forget that fact...as difficult as it may be in the coming years, we must remain vigilant in the conservation of our forests, waters and lands. Our gem is Vermont, our best defense against climate warming is nature itself, and in the long run, our natural resources will be what is most valuable.
- [Comment sent in after the meeting] Help us ensure that outdoor recreation is appropriately integrated into the Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative and leveraged as a tool to help achieve the goal of permanently conserving 30% of Vermont's landscape by 2030.

Key pressures on forests and the forest economy

- Invasive species are already here and will likely get worse. They are a major threat to biodiversity.
- Overpopulation of deer is hurting forest regrowth.
- This plan needs to be more focused on the pressures the industry faces.
- Forestry deserves and needs the same types of support that ag gets.

Balancing conservation with supporting the forestry economy

- The real issue in VT to keep forests viable is preventing them from turning into development. This requires us to keep every tool in the toolbox to support landowners to keep forest owning viable.
- 80% of forests are private, and 2/3 of those are individual owners. All of the individual decisions they make are really important.
- As a society, we need to consider that the wood growing here is doing a lot of good things, and as a society, we are using a lot of wood, and we need to balance those two. If we don't provide the wood, it will come from some other part of the world.
- Proforestation, sooner the better, and perhaps have 2 management systems - one for production and one for carbon capture. Eliminate clear cuts as forests warm now.

Pesticides

- What is the group doing about reducing use of pesticides? The great majority of people push chemicals to address invasives.

Subcommittee process for developing recommendations

- Please post on the website the working documents that show draft prioritized actions and other materials
- Help us understand the moments when we can/should provide written comment

Emissions

- Want to see more about reducing demand and reducing emissions

Other

- Not seeing where these recommendations recognize the cooling benefits of green cover

Participants

Seth Clifford, Peg Merrens, Evan Horne, Billy Coster, Dave Wilcox, Stuart Blood, Sam Lincoln Ryan Patch, Marli Rupe, Edward Barber, Julie Evans, Nathanael Johns, Gabe Russo, Dana Doran Christine McGowan, Jaiel Pulskamp, Walter Poleman, Virginia Clarke, Tony D'Amato, Ashley Adams, Sadie Brown, Cheryl Joy Lipton, Ed Larson, Elizabeth Lesnikoski, Curt Lindberg, Ken Gagnon, Zack Porter, Steve Parren, Sarah Christopherson, Stephen Leslie, Aamore Richards Margo Ghia, Henry Swayze, Andrew Milliken, Al Freeman, Kate Forrer, Li Shen, Daniel Koenemann, David Plumb (facilitator)

Climate Action Input Session: Rural Resilience and Town Support

Friday, November 15, 12:00-1:30pm

Summary of Input

*hosted by the Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council*

Overview

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 15, 2024, focused on supporting the climate resilience of rural towns, with a focus on hearing from organizations and entities that support municipalities. Approximately 50 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally and in the chat.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Public Health, Community Capacity, and Building/Infrastructure Task Groups of the Council's Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee.

- View presentation [slides](#).
- View discussion [questions](#).
- The input session recording will be posted soon.

Summary of input

High-level summary

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" They offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

Many comments focused on the importance of local, regional, and state collaboration on climate resilience and emergency planning, preparedness, and recovery

- Community-led resilience planning

- Community-oriented training sessions on how to be prepared for Extended Power Outages
- Building local communication, collaboration, and coordination for preparedness, response, and recovery
- Support municipal capacity. They can't do it on their own.
- Implementing specific capacity needs
- Regional coordination support as well as capacity for organized response and recovery
- Coordination among various resilience efforts statewide

Other comments focused specifically on planning efforts

- Pre-planning work w/capital budgets
- Locally-led Participatory budgeting for community resilience investments
- Pre-incident preparation (what can you do before an incident to make recovery less of a lift)
- Taking action on the plans, not just planning

Several comments focused on developing and expanding access to existing resources

- Knowledge of and access to existing planning mechanisms and resources
- Fund pre-existing service delivery infrastructure
- Build out what exists and works well
- Compensation to secure current volunteer positions
- Assistance with documentation for FEMA reimbursement
- Community engagement through existing stakeholders

Participants highlighted other key themes and takeaways as well

- Efficiency
- Food access and security
- Social resilience and connections needed

The detailed summary will be available shortly.

Participants

Scott McCormick, Liz Amler, Marian Wolz, Ann Lawless, Andrea Wright, Beate Ankaer-Jensen, Edward Barber, Clare Ireland, Nicole Bourassa, Eric Forand, Margaret Woodruff, Anne Margolis, Diana Chace, Chris Company, Patricia Moulton, Eric Pulver, Kail Romanoff, Bronwyn Cooke, Danielle Bombardier, Mike Morin, Mike McConnell, Otis Ellms-Munroe, Jared Ulmer, Caroline Paske, John Sayles, Lena Greenberg, Jens Hilke, Stephanie Boucher, Destinee Pierce, Laura Cavin Bailey, Ben Rose, Laurie Kozar, Victoria Hellwig, Allie Webster, Sydney Steinle, Kelsey Pasteris, Charlie Ansley, Jackie Dagger, Hilary Solomon, Michael Burke, Maggie O'Brien, David Deen, Catherine Gott, Alice Peal, Kym W, Logan Nicoll, Dara Zink, Val Stori, Shelby Anderson, Catherine Morris (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator)

Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard

A conversation with community action agency staff across Vermont

Front-line staff from Vermont's five community action agencies requested a meeting about the Clean Heat Standard currently being studied by the Public Utilities Commission, to understand the initiative better and provide input from their clients' perspectives. The Climate Action Office convened the virtual session with the PUC in late September.

Major themes and takeaways

- Low-income weatherization incentives must take into account that clients do not have up-front cash to spend. For example, when Community Action Agencies install a fan that would cost someone \$10-15 over the course of the year, that is a big deal. They may be debt-averse or have low credit. Incentives applied through taxes do not apply, as clients do not pay enough taxes to get the benefit.
- A senior citizen on a fixed income and tight budget receives fuel assistance. He is doing the right things already: he weatherized his home through NETO and has a heat pump. If he were to only use the heat pump, he's concerned it will cost more than running the furnace because he would no longer get fuel assistance [because of switching to electricity]. He would *like* to run only his heat pump, but it would be too expensive. He understands and agrees with the goals of switching to clean energy, but the impact of doing so would "burn my wallet".
- Concern about competition with new entities providing weatherization services. Workforce availability is already a serious issue—how would this impact the existing challenge of finding contractors? Would other entities prioritize all the 'easy to complete' projects and leave Community Action Agencies with the most difficult projects, which would spread their resources even thinner?
- "As a middle-class Vermonter, single parent of two kids, \$1.70 increase in my fuel would not leave me with any money to fuel switch or weatherize. Middle class is not considered in the Clean Heat Standard."
- Where the funding comes from matters a lot. Federal funds only cover the lowest income tier. State funding is crucial to meeting weatherization needs for mid-low-income tier, and for pre-weatherization activities such as home repair, vermiculite, and knob-and-tube removal. Current temporary funding will be expiring soon. Sustainable funding source is needed to continue these activities.
- Everything you say the Clean Heat Standard wants to do, Community Action Agencies are doing a great job already; we need more money to do more of it.
- With all the data and targets out there, don't forget it's **people** we're trying to serve. When processes become too restrictive or administratively burdensome, they no longer benefit the very people they're trying to help.
- We cannot talk about energy transition without also talking about housing issues. Staff spoke about aging homeowners in Rutland County and the Northeast Kingdom having trouble keeping up with the costs of homeownership. Staff also noted that the lowest

income Vermonters are often renters. Clean Heat Standard doesn't address the [split incentive problem](#), making it difficult for clean heat measures to reach renters.

- Mobile home owners (30% of people served by Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity) have barriers to clean heat measures. Most are on 100 amp services, which would need to be upgraded to 200 amp for a heat pump. Because of the water system design in a mobile home, a ductless heat pump or mini-split wouldn't work; only ducted heat pumps work otherwise water pipes will freeze.

Climate Action Event with Vermont's Linguistically Diverse Communities

Date: Saturday, October 19, 2024

Location: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Time: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Attendees

- **Community Members:** 12 individuals representing diverse backgrounds
- **Climate Councilors:** Julie Moore, Bram Kleppner, Kelly Klein
- **State Staff:** Amy Redman, Jared Ulmer, Claire McIlvennie, Patrick Murphy, Harry Schoppman, Stephanie Smith
- **Facilitators:** Sophi Veltrop, Indra Acharya, Jane Lazorchak, Anne Nelson Stoner, Kashka Orlow

Overview

The event aimed to gather insights from Vermont's linguistically diverse communities on key climate action topics, including transportation, resilience, and agriculture. Discussions highlighted the need for climate action efforts to be accessible, relevant, and aligned with community realities, particularly regarding economic, cultural, and logistical challenges.

During the final hour of the event, participants interacted directly with state staff who are running programs related to climate action, such as transportation initiative, emergency response, and health programs. State staff's reflections on the event are included at the bottom of this summary.

Discussion Highlights

Transportation:

Participants shared that climate justice efforts must be grounded in everyday realities. Concerns around transportation, particularly public transit access, affordability, and inclusivity, were central themes:

- **Climate Justice Perspectives:** Participants stressed that discussions need to connect to immediate community concerns, such as affordability and daily needs, rather than distant policy goals.
- **Public Transit Challenges:** Limited bus schedules and inaccessible transit options create barriers to employment and daily activities, especially for individuals with disabilities and those without personal vehicles. Participants suggested that investments in alternative transit options, like 15-passenger vans, could ease these challenges.
- **Financial Barriers:** Many noted that transportation costs consume significant portions of household budgets, creating an added burden for low-income residents.

Resilience:

The conversation turned to disaster preparedness and community resilience, particularly following recent flooding events:

- **Flooding Response:** Attendees voiced frustration over the lack of accessible information and support following floods. Concerns were raised about rebuilding in flood-prone areas, with calls for policies that prevent repeated losses and prioritize relocation.
- **Community Engagement:** Participants highlighted the need for culturally relevant disaster preparedness and face-to-face engagement with decision-makers. Translating information alone isn't enough; it must be shared in ways that reach diverse communities effectively.
- **Practical Communication Tools:** Visual aids, like posters and signage, were suggested to communicate practical benefits and preparedness steps, especially for those with limited literacy.
- **Community Education:** Many long-term residents still struggle to navigate local systems, underlining a need for greater support in education and healthcare access.

Agriculture, Forestry, & Land Use:

Discussions on agriculture revealed both cultural differences and logistical barriers faced by immigrant farmers:

- **Flooding and Generational Trauma:** Repeated flooding in areas like the Intervale has created long-standing stress for farmers, particularly those who rely on vulnerable lands for their livelihoods.
- **Cultural Differences in Farming Practices:** Immigrant farmers expressed a desire to learn more about local farming practices, pest control, and environmental risks that differ from their home countries. Access to information on topics like tick prevention and sustainable harvesting was identified as a key need.
- **Cost Barriers:** The high cost of materials such as compost and soil poses challenges for immigrant farmers, especially when their fields are frequently impacted by floods.

Closing:

This event underscored the importance of integrating the voices and experiences of linguistically diverse communities into Vermont's climate action planning. Participants stressed that climate initiatives should prioritize accessible information, practical solutions, and culturally responsive engagement to address both immediate and long-term community needs.

Reflections from state staff (and Climate Councilor) after the event:

- Vermont Emergency Management staff member Harry Schoppmann reflected that a lot of people that they work with are town staff or leaders. This is with the goal of helping the greater community – but this conversation helped him realize we're missing a target audience and not doing enough to figure out how to better serve your communities. He is talking with his co-workers about this already.
- Agency of Transportation staff member Patrick Murphy noted that the high-level conversation was a good start, but it would be great to get even more into the details and take the conversation to the next level, talking about trade-offs and costs versus

benefits—especially when it comes to public transportation. Then, there could be more of a back-and-forth dialogue about the challenges that stand in the way of better transportation options. This would empower people to push for change with a broader understanding of the choices and potential consequences before us.

- Department of Public Health staff member Amy Redman says the time spent was invaluable and she is beyond grateful for the opportunity. They learned that more plain language information is needed, as well as oral communication for community members with less reading proficiency. They also heard a significant need for accessible transportation. When talking about climate change and mental health, they learned that perhaps the Western construction of mental health does not resonate with many who are new to America and Vermont.
- Public Service Department staff member Claire McIlvennie shared that the conversations have her thinking about the challenges of passing along electricity-cost savings to renters, emphasizing the need to continue to focus on that issue.
- Climate Councilor Kelly Klein says that hearing directly from community members as they shared experiences and what they have heard from others in their communities was incredibly helpful. As one of the co-chairs of the Just Transitions Subcommittee (which focuses on justice and equity in climate action), she will be taking the messages you shared back to that group to help make sure that these stories and needs are reflected in the updated Climate Action Plan.

Capstone Focus Group

Nov. 13, 2024 - Notes

Overview

Vermont's Climate Action Office, along with members of the state's Climate Council, met with Capstone Community Action clients and staff to discuss the update to the Vermont's Climate Action Plan. The meeting, held in person on November 13, 2024, was an opportunity to share information about topics being addressed in the update, and to hear about priorities, ideas, concerns, and questions from the perspectives of the low-income Vermonters who use Capstone's services. These summary notes capture ideas that emerged in the conversation. Approximately 9 clients and 4 staff members participated in the conversation.

Notes

Opening prompt: "When you hear the words climate change, what comes to mind?"

Participants' answers:

- Polar bears
- Impermanence
- Point of no return
- Food
- Fear, stress, how will things change?
- Uncertainty and fear
- Opportunity, silver lining we have a chance to make a lot of changes on this planet, exciting
- Choice - climate change is the consequence of the choices we have made and shapes the choices we have to respond to it.
- I think about how long it would take to deplete wildlife in my area if everyone depended on it
- Acceptance and ingenuity
- Safety
- My thought is towards my children, and all of our children - if we don't do something now to curb the tide, when is too much.

Group discussion – Climate Action Plan Update

Sophi Veltrop from the Climate Action Office presented an overview of the process to update Vermont's Climate Action Plan. Participants looked at notecards with the topics that the Council's subcommittees are working on. They provided individual reflections and then discussed in the group. Comments included:

- Worried about grid resiliency, and susceptibility to outages etc. recommend utilizing multiple backup sources for heat/cooking/hot water – “it’s costly, I know it has a bad environmental impact but can’t risk it currently.”
- Emphasized personal consumption choices. And cost benefit of things like smart phones - what’s the cost (environmentally?) “is it really worth it?”
- Concerned about lack of public transportation infrastructure
- We have solutions, but struggle to build them to scale... there are solutions already demonstrated elsewhere - for instance gas is 11 bucks a gallon in Europe - it incents investments in clean technologies...
- How do we pay for the solutions we know to exist?
- It isn’t enough to give people tax breaks and little bits of funding here and there - eliminate all barriers and just get people what they need. Not a credit towards an EV, just buy them an EV etc. Also, there are too many programs and they are too complicated to understand and manage.
- Referenced a study that shows cars are only used for 3% of their life, they sit idle 97% of the time, increasing car sharing would help a lot. Increase use of public transportation and bicycles like they do in Amsterdam.
- Huge transportation is the biggest polluter, and we need to address it at scale
- Why aren’t the waterfalls generating electricity any more?
- An investment in affordable housing at scale needs to be part of the solution.
- Ensuring everyone has access to adequate healthcare is critical.
- Addressing the root causes of homelessness, additional support for people returning to the community after incarceration etc.
- A deeper systems level change is needed, not just band aids.
- Return to Roosevelt era taxation approach - tax the rich.
- Enhance available jobs by building infrastructure improvements needed for a clean energy transition.
- Adopt land use policies to promote development that can handle the extreme weather we’ve been seeing.
- Learn from other climates. Where has innovation and learning taken place that can help us here?
- Return to neighbor helping neighbor community-based support ethos. This meets basic needs while improving people’s mental health.

- Public health - water safety is key. Better wastewater plants. Public health insurance for all.
- Don't underestimate the stress and mental health implications of climate change.
- Community is so important - doing something fun together will have a huge impact.
- Intergenerational approach.
- We've gone so far from this - human beings are more independent and isolated than ever before.
- 350.org (350 million parts per million carbon, pollution counter on top of a mountain in Hawaii as far away as possible from pollution sources is already measuring 420 parts per million).
- In other parts of the world climate change is already driving migration and bringing people into conflict over scarce natural resources and land. Only .5% of water on earth is currently drinkable.

Vermont Voices on Climate - Quarterly Report (Q3)

Vermont Voices on Climate

Vermont Climate Action Office

July 1 to September 30, 2024

Report Overview

This is a summary of public outreach activities conducted by the Vermont Climate Action Office with support from the Consensus Building Institute during July, August, and September 2024. Outreach focused on reaching the full range of geographical areas across Vermont, emphasizing events that would attract frontline community members. Previous reports this year are available here: [April-June 2024](#), [January-March 2024](#). Climate Action Office's [August](#) & [September](#) email updates shared additional information about climate action across the State with subscribers.

Objectives of this climate action outreach are:

- **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.



Activities

Our goal is to speak with and listen to as many Vermonters as possible, especially frontline and impacted communities.

Outreach focused on:

- 1. Attending events** and meeting Vermonters who aren't typically part of climate policy discussions. We attended 9 events all around Vermont (*see list to the right*).
- 2. Meeting Community-Based Organizations**, including Community Action Agency staff working directly with low-income clients.

Events Tabled and Attended

- Northeast Kingdom Human Services' Wellness Day (Barton)
- VT Council on Rural Development's Community Visit (Johnson)
- Lake Memphremagog Festival (Newport)
- The RAMBLE at Old North End (Burlington)
- ACORN'S Farmacy Distribution Day (Middlebury)
- Abenaki Land Link Harvest Festival (South Burlington)
- Vermont State Fair (Rutland)
- First African Landing Day (Burlington)
- All Brains Belong Community Health Education Fair (Montpelier)



What Vermonters are saying

A sample of views expressed at events across Vermont

On disasters and resilience

Resilience means supporting elderly in their buildings during times of extreme hot or cold temperatures.

Redirect our funding to implement locally based, community-led solutions.

Please keep in mind people with disabilities when planning resilience strategies

Our family of four have lived in Plainfield 17 years & lost our home to July floods. I urge state government to create concise, centralized response to disaster. We have to navigate the bureaucracy while mourning.

I am really concerned about how small businesses, and small farms, will be able to withstand the impacts of climate change.

We need to think about how climate change is connected to other issues, such housing, food insecurity, and health and wellness, and how the impact may be different for different people

The kids in my classroom get scared as soon as it starts to rain hard & the wind begins to blow. Honestly, I get scared myself. There's definitely trauma.

I worry about the impact of climate change on our food systems; how are we prepared to deal with cascading impacts and reliance on food markets outside of New England?

Perspectives from the Abenaki Land Link Harvest Festival

Regrow and support healthier riparian buffers [vegetated areas alongside streams and rivers]

Restore wetlands. We need them!

The Emerald Ash Borer is destroying ash trees, which the Abenaki use to make black ash baskets. Black ash grows in riparian areas, and acts as a stabilizer, buffering the impacts of floods. The loss of local black ash trees has impacted this deep and rich Abenaki tradition of black ash basket making, and is impacting the ecosystem's ability to be in balance. We must see each living thing as a part of a much greater whole... Invasive species are threatening our cultural history, and the resilience of our landscape.

What Vermonters are saying (continued...)

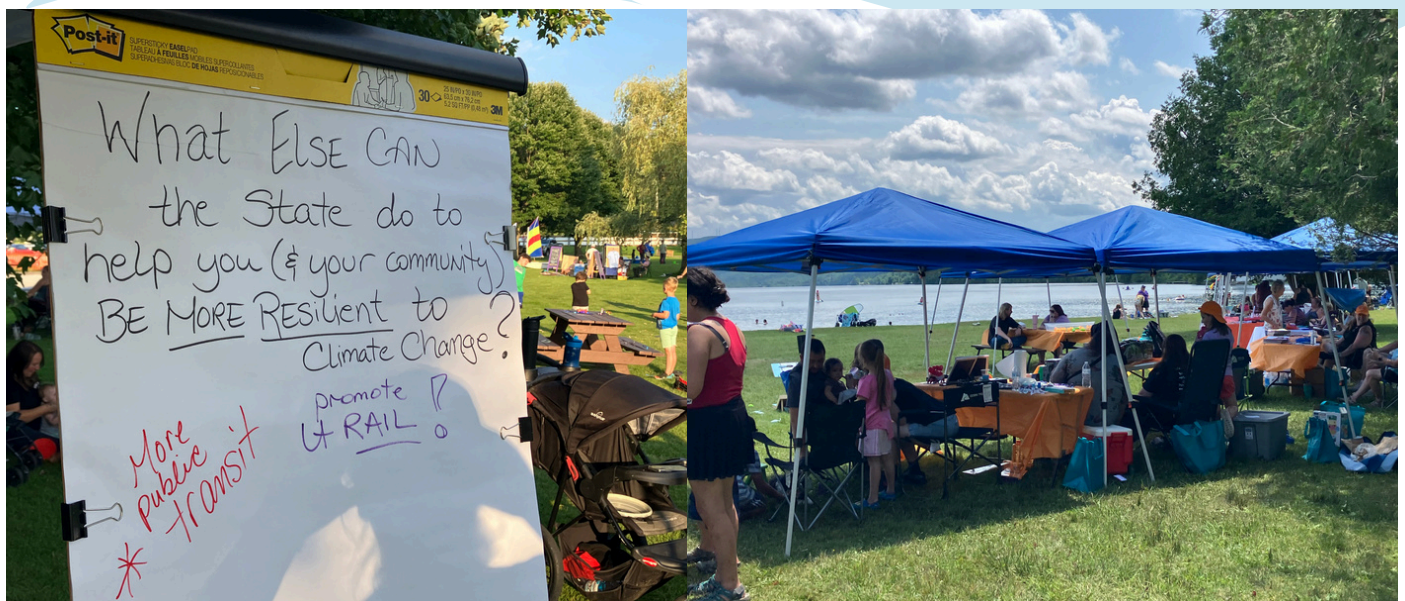
A sample of views expressed at events across Vermont...cont.

On current state programs

I qualified for a free heat pump through BROCC. It's been great. What would be awesome is if there were follow-up, someone to check in on how it's going and answer questions.

Why do all the incentives and benefits come with complicated and long forms and bureaucratic process and barriers? They are burdensome to people who have disabilities, limited education, and no time to go through the whole process.

I had a good experience with an Efficiency Vermont audit. Had them insulate & seal the attic and a gap in my sunroom, then had other contractors do other things based on the info learned from the audit, such as installing a heat pump.



What Vermonters are saying (continued...)

Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard

A conversation with community action agency staff across Vermont

Front-line staff from Vermont's five community action agencies requested a meeting about the Clean Heat Standard currently being studied by the Public Utilities Commission, to understand the initiative better and provide input from their clients' perspectives. The Climate Action Office convened the virtual session with the PUC in late September.

Major themes and takeaways

- Low-income weatherization incentives must take into account that clients do not have up-front cash to spend. For example, when Community Action Agencies install a fan that would cost someone \$10-15 over the course of the year, that is a big deal. They may be debt-averse or have low credit. Incentives applied through taxes do not apply, as clients do not pay enough taxes to get the benefit.
- A senior citizen on a fixed income and tight budget receives fuel assistance. He is doing the right things already: he weatherized his home through NETO and has a heat pump. If he were to only use the heat pump, he's concerned it will cost more than running the furnace because he would no longer get fuel assistance [because of switching to electricity]. He would *like* to run only his heat pump, but it would be too expensive. He understands and agrees with the goals of switching to clean energy, but the impact of doing so would “burn my wallet”.
- Concern about competition with new entities providing weatherization services. Workforce availability is already a serious issue—how would this impact the existing challenge of finding contractors? Would other entities prioritize all the ‘easy to complete’ projects and leave Community Action Agencies with the most difficult projects, which would spread their resources even thinner?
- “As a middle-class Vermonter, single parent of two kids, \$1.70 increase in my fuel would not leave me with any money to fuel switch or weatherize. Middle class is not considered in the Clean Heat Standard.”

What Vermonters are saying *(continued...)*

Low-Income Vermonters and the Proposed Clean Heat Standard

A conversation with community action agency staff across Vermont

Major themes and takeaways *(Continued...)*

- Where the funding comes from matters a lot. Federal funds only cover the lowest income tier. State funding is crucial to meeting weatherization needs for mid-low-income tier, and for pre-weatherization activities such as home repair, vermiculite, and knob-and-tube removal. Current temporary funding will be expiring soon. Sustainable funding source is needed to continue these activities.
- Everything you say the Clean Heat Standard wants to do, Community Action Agencies are doing a great job at already; we need more money to do more of it.
- With all the data and targets out there, don't forget it's **people** we're trying to serve. When processes become too restrictive or administratively burdensome, they no longer benefit the very people they're trying to help.
- We cannot talk about energy transition without also talking about housing issues. Staff spoke about aging homeowners in Rutland County and the Northeast Kingdom having trouble keeping up with the costs of homeownership. Staff also noted that the lowest income Vermonters are often renters. Clean Heat Standard doesn't address the [split incentive problem](#), making it difficult for clean heat measures to reach renters.
- Mobile home owners (30% of people served by Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity) have barriers to clean heat measures. Most are on 100 amp services, which would need to be upgraded to 200 amp for a heat pump. Because of the water system design in a mobile home, a ductless heat pump or mini-split wouldn't work; only ducted heat pumps work otherwise water pipes will freeze.

What Vermonters are saying (*continued...*)

Wellness Day at Crystal Lake State Park

Orleans County, Saturday July 13, 2024

It was a gorgeous, hot Saturday with a slight breeze coming off the lake. This event fell on the one-year anniversary weekend of the devastating floods experienced by thousands of Vermonters the year prior. Vermont towns had yet again experienced a flood the day before. This became a solemn and heavy topic during this otherwise uplifting family event.

Many people talked about their own experiences during last year's flooding as well what they felt and experienced the previous night, as the rains continued to pound. The storms have left a permanent scar not only on the landscape, transforming some towns and neighborhoods, but also, for some, creating a palpable sense of fear and dread.

- A woman from Richford spoke about the inequities for people with disabilities. She said nature trails should be handicap accessible.
- A farmer from Newport, urged Vermont to spend more money on youth-focused programs and outdoor activities, to support mental health and build community resilience.
- A woman from Orleans is still working at 67. She is grateful to Efficiency Vermont for putting in a better furnace in her home, but it really needs to be better insulated and all of the paperwork scares her.
- Quite a few people spoke about the changing climate, having to deal with flooding and being scared of what's next...storms being more severe and preparing for the worst.
- A middle school teacher spoke about her students who had dealt with last year's flooding; being afraid every time there was a report of a thunderstorm. "I've definitely seen a lot more climate catastrophe-related trauma and fear."
- Another person showed gratitude that the Climate Action Office is "out here talking with us," but said the government is slow to respond and shouldn't require citizens to document damages while dealing with life altering events.

Kashka Orlow

Upcoming Outreach Activities

The outreach plan for the final three months of 2024 include three lines of activities.

- **Meeting Vermonters where they are:** Speak with Vermonters at a handful of late fall events, including Missisquoi Festival in Swanton and the Intervale Fair Share Distribution Day.
- **Small-group conversations:**
 - Hold at least six Input Sessions on key topics under discussion by the Vermont Climate Council's subcommittees, as they prepare their recommendations for an updated Climate Action Plan.
 - Hold a half-day event in October: Climate Conversations with Linguistically Diverse Community Leaders
- **Working with Community Based Organizations:** Continue to coordinate with community action agencies to hold discussions of mutual interest.



Vermont Voices on Climate: Past Reports

- [April, May, June 2024](#)
- [January, February, March 2024](#)
- [July, August, September 2023](#)
- [October, November, December 2023](#)