



Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

Notes from the Massachusetts Virtual Stakeholder Workshop

OVERVIEW

On November 10, 2022, representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a virtual stakeholder workshop on Zoom. This Connecticut workshop was the final of 12 that will be conducted around New England in 2022. The purpose of the workshop was to crowdsource insights and discuss ideas from stakeholders in Massachusetts—especially those representing environmental justice communities—regarding the climate actions of the utilities, the regulatory structures that the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) has in place to mitigate climate change and the opportunities and challenges for implementing lasting and equitable climate and energy solutions.

The insights from each workshop are summarized, distributed to all participants, and posted publicly here: <https://climable.org/brown>. In early 2023, a summary report will present a variety of options that state regulatory agencies could pursue to meet climate goals based upon the workshops.

We are incredibly grateful to those who were able to attend and appreciate all of the ideas and feedback we received. The following notes are from the Massachusetts workshop and include DPU actions and actions by other stakeholders.

DPU ACTIONS

- Integrate DPU and utility decision-making with resilience.
 - Utilities should participate in Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness.
-

- PUC planning should incorporate anticipated future flooding (e.g., parts of the MBTA are expected to be underwater in the future).
- Address understaffing and capacity issues (especially regarding DER expertise).
- Reprioritize climate action and equity relative to cost and reliability.
- Leverage accountability mechanisms to ensure that stakeholders can and do participate and that the DPU responds to comments made by smaller organizations and individuals. The Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) website invites participation through a form and the ability to view other stakeholder comments. The DPU's Future of Gas proceeding shows improvement in conveying information to stakeholders on the topic areas, schedule, and opportunities for participation.
- Integrate health and jobs into benefit cost analysis.
- Evaluate the distribution of benefits and harms.

ACTIONS BY OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

- Create a separate energy/grid planning department (ideally outside of the DPU).
- Revise existing legislation and programs to reform siting and address/reduce land use impacts.
- Develop a list of qualified individuals for appointment to leadership roles throughout the state, including for the DPU.
- Leverage the opportunity presented by recent election to make changes to the DPU/DOER and recommend individuals for key roles.
- Accelerate timeframe for building performance standards. Enhance grid capacity to support electrification (to address a key barrier that was raised).
- Create an electricity and natural gas planning review commission and address gas utilities banking on RNG and hydrogen to keep using existing infrastructure and keep supplying at existing capacity levels. Create a separate commission focused on transportation oversight.
- Require community involvement and public engagement processes.
- Expose and address fear tactics used by utilities with communities (Newton city councilors are unable to intervene in decision-making in their community, recent pressure on Winchester to allow for gas infrastructure to get MassSAVE incentives)

- Expose and address lobbying, by revealing participation by powerful interest groups such as utilities and fossil fuel industry representatives
- Replicate Acton's collective block scale electrification effort (using Abode to go door to door in areas on leaky gas lines or not on gas lines at all, aggregating 40 households to achieve economies of scale and to make projects more attainable for those with fewer means).
- Reach out to funders like Barr Foundation to support an effort to map out key collaborators and build coalitions across cities and towns. Representation on key initiatives could look like: (1) EEAC seat designated for municipal representatives (MAPC playing this role), (2) MAPC's multi-town gas leaks initiative with communities in National Grid service territories, or (3) the building electrification accelerator (Rocky Mountain Institute). Leverage individuals who are already active in communities to help like John Farrell of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) who hosts the Local Energy Rules Podcast. Focus on efforts to transition away from gas and unite existing organizations and efforts.