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# Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

## Notes from the Massachusetts Stakeholder Workshop

### OVERVIEW

On September 28, 2022 representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a stakeholder workshop at the Fenway Center of Northeastern University's campus in Boston, Massachusetts. This Massachusetts workshop was the sixth 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 Public Utility Commission 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 could be pursued to meet climate goals based upon the workshops.

We are incredibly grateful to those who were able to attend and appreciate all the ideas and feedback we received. The following notes are from the Massachusetts workshop and describe key themes that include (1) strengthening leadership and coordination, (2) promoting equity and environmental justice, (3) enacting clear and transparent climate policies and practices, and (4) exposing and countering misinformation, conflicts of interest, and excessive lobbying and utility control.

### STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

- Decision making for electric and natural gas needs to be centralized and coordinated at the state level. A energy planning commission with longer terms of service should be

established with representatives from labor, environmental justice (EJ) communities, renewable energy companies, planning experts, geology experts, electric and gas utilities, state agencies such as the Department of Energy Resources (DOER), and innovative technology companies. The commission's mandate should be to develop the most efficient, affordable, safe, and zero emission energy system over a 20-year planning period. The commission should have the authority to hold the DPU and other regulatory agencies responsible or enact sanctions.

- Alternatives to current gas utility business models need to be identified and pursued.
- The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) file room needs to be easier to use and complex processes need to be streamlined.
- Fossil fuel and electricity/renewable infrastructure siting needs to be reformed. Infrastructure should not be sited in overburdened communities.
- Community marketing campaigns for heat pumps should provide incentives to refer a friend, leverage social media influencers to spread the word, and seek to change NIMBYism attitudes and behaviors.
- State entities need to have renewable energy and electrification goals.

## PROMOTE EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Gaps in knowledge of various stakeholders need to be bridged.
- Conversations with more stakeholders can improve future legislation.
- Community input needs to be collected upfront.
- Community representatives (including local elected officials) need to be identified and the DPU and others should develop a process to consult with these individuals.
- The ability for community representatives to intervene proactively needs to be expanded.
- Prevailing wage requirements need to be applied to the solar and other clean energy industries. Fixed pricing can be used to curb excessive inflation practices and excessive pricing increases in response to the influx of federal funding for clean energy.
- More people should be engaged in the clean energy industry through initiatives such as paid, language accessible job training and career buyouts to transition the mid-to-late career workforce to other industries.

## ENACT CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT CLIMATE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Legislation needs to be more specific as to actions, authority, and enforcement.

- The benefits of reduced climate change and health impacts need to be accounted for in the evaluation of solutions.
- Limits need to be imposed on additional natural gas system investment and aging and uneconomic assets need to be retired.

## EXPOSE AND COUNTER MISINFORMATION, CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, AND EXCESSIVE LOBBYING AND UTILITY CONTROL

- Third parties should be enlisted to evaluate what is going on and call out misinformation.
- Issues with excessive utility lobbying and control should be addressed by reducing utility power and decision-making.
- The state should move away from utility-owned renewable generation.