



Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

Notes from the Maine Virtual Stakeholder Workshop

OVERVIEW

On September 21, 2022, representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a virtual stakeholder workshop on Zoom. This Maine 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 Maine—especially those representing environmental justice communities—regarding the climate actions of the utilities, the regulatory structures that the Maine 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 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 Maine workshop and describe key themes that include promoting equity and environmental justice and increasing and sustaining funding and capacity.

PUC ACTIONS

- Maine has taken major steps in developing next steps in the Climate Action Plan. The comprehensive grid planning effort passed and is in the process of being implemented (Legislative Directive 1956). There is a required stakeholder process that takes place before grid planning. Stakeholders are supposed to come up with priorities and
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assumptions and the PUC is required to work with the utilities to incorporate these their grid planning process.

- The existing statute does not provide specific guidance about how to conduct the stakeholder engagement process and who should be included as participants. The PUC has an initiative to reach 300+ entities across the state, but is not receiving much response. The PUC's budget proposal includes adding a position to the PUC that is focused on outreach and this individual will be tasked with identifying affected groups and providing them with notifications. The PUC is finding that building public engagement is a challenge and trust is needed to build that engagement over the longer term.
- The PUC is requesting public/stakeholder comment on how to improve the process and is open to suggestions and willing to accommodate any stakeholder who wants to participate. The PUC has a place on its website to collect this type of general feedback (<https://www.maine.gov/mpuc/about/contact/form>) and contact information for those who want to contact the PUC by phone. It is the PUC's intention to keep the rules as broad and flexible as possible (<https://www.maine.gov/mpuc/about/how-to-participate>) and the PUC is willing to work with interested stakeholders individually to enable participation. There was discussion about how people can engage more meaningfully when specific questions, rather than general questions, are asked of them. Also, it is not easy to get individuals to show up at meetings or events so multiple flexible options are needed to enable the public to provide input.
- Participants identified the following critical stakeholders: Climate Justice Communities, Environmental Justice Communities, BIPOC communities, Low Income Communities, New Mainers, Fishing Industry, Ecosystem and Wildlife, Youth and Future Generations, Differently Abled people, LGBTQ+, Older Adults , Seasonal Workers, and Workers in Impacted Industries.

ACTIONS BY OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

- GHG mandate came into effect last year that requires the PUC, as part of its core mandate, to facilitate achievement of GHG emission reduction targets.
- Although legislators' intentions are to steer Maine in a good direction, they are not always the experts in the field of climate change. State legislators are only paid for a half-time position meaning that legislators are limited on what they can focus on/learn. Legislators need to have the technical expertise to understand grid planning and distributed energy resources and they should be given educational training on these topics and be offered full-time jobs to understand the challenges in the field. Also, if

staff could be retained for several years, more experts would have a deeper understanding of the problem.

- Maine Conservation Voters is acting as a regulatory advocacy organization in addition to a legislative advocacy organization.
- A Climate Council working group and DEP are leading on legislation to clarify definitions and resolve inconsistencies between national and state definitions (did not pass last session).
 - <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP1500&item=6&snum=130>
 - <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/Final%20DOE%20Justice40%20General%20Guidance%20072522.pdf>
 - <https://energyjustice.egs.anl.gov/>
- Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) came up with a document based on a series of workshops with environmental justice communities about ways that the PUC could better incorporate equity:
[https://www.maine.gov/dep/publications/documents/GOPIF%20Report%20Pursuant%20to%20Public%20Law%202021%20Chapter%20279%20\(LD%201682\)_2-25-2022.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dep/publications/documents/GOPIF%20Report%20Pursuant%20to%20Public%20Law%202021%20Chapter%20279%20(LD%201682)_2-25-2022.pdf)
- OurPowerMaine.org municipalization proposal will be on the 2023 ballot (passed previously but was vetoed by Governor): <https://ourpowermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/pine-tree-power-petition-final.pdf>
- It is important to develop institutional capacity at the grassroots level and work on ways to make funds available to existing or new organizations to do public outreach. Cross-cultural information sharing and translation of documents are crucial for equity and accountability. The Sustainability Office of the City of South Portland is making connections at a local level and can be used as a model for other cities and towns.