



Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

Notes from the Maine Stakeholder Workshop

OVERVIEW

On March 24, 2022 representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a stakeholder workshop at the Viles Arboretum in Augusta, Maine. This Maine workshop was the first 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 planning and implementation, equity, and cost.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

- A comprehensive grid planning effort is needed. The plan should address electrification and the grid should be open access. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) may benefit from a separate division dedicated to grid planning.
 - More technical capacity and transparency is needed at the PUC and utilities. Specific areas of focus include general support and funding for equity improvements, support
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for electrification, better reporting and improved data access, active engagement with frontline communities, and support for clean energy workforce development.

- There has been good planning in Maine, but implementation has been relatively limited. There is a need to implement these plans.
- A comprehensive strategy is needed to implement climate and energy goals and tactics, with a focus on making the individual pieces fit together.
- While standards and goals have been set in Maine, roles and responsibilities need to be assigned and a framework needs to be established for how these entities will work together to achieve the goals.
- There should be more cohesion around energy facility siting. For example, New Hampshire has an energy facility siting board. In Maine, the process goes from PUC to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC).

EQUITY

- Definitions of equity and environmental justice need to be standardized in legislation to allow for more coordination and collaboration across different departments and organizations.
- Environmental justice should be incorporated into all state agency decision-making. All state agencies need to be more proactive in their efforts to reach out to frontline or affected communities. All state agencies should implement environmental justice trainings.
- Technical material can be difficult to understand for a broader audience, which decreases community engagement. The PUC and other governmental bodies can do more to provide general, plain language materials about key topics and explain why they are important/what the impact will be. An office should be tasked with coordinating and disseminating updates across all state agencies/departments. A united statewide front should be implemented to provide updates, along with a centralized repository for updates.
- To increase transparency, PUC proceedings and other public meetings should allow for more opportunities for public comment. Meetings should be held outside of work hours and in places that are easily accessible to environmental justice communities.
- Volunteer labor is not sustainable; involvement and engagement opportunities with the PUC should be compensated.

- There is a need to build municipal energy planning capacity.
- There needs to be a concerted focus on community resilience partnerships in Maine.
- A just transition to clean energy creates many job opportunities. We need to provide proper green job training to prepare people for these opportunities. There should be an emphasis on youth workforce development and education. Outreach for workforce development should prioritize frontline and other underserved communities. Pathways for this goal could include: incorporating new technologies into education, funding green trade schools and apprenticeships, and partnering with community groups.
- PUC and other governmental body appointments should include diverse perspectives and experiences.

Please note: Bill LD2018 is pending and related to incorporating EJ in regulatory decisions. Progress on this will be reflected in the final report.

COST

- Energy efficiency (with a focus on home heating and transportation electrification) and renewable energy needs to be accessible to more people. A transformational approach needs to be taken for housing. Sustained investment in electric vehicle chargers is a priority. More federal funding is needed to offset costs for individuals. Funding from a Green Bank Bill can be used in low-income communities. It is important to consider what the utilities are contributing vs. the state as PUC-approved costs can increase electric rates and deter electrification.
- More financial support is needed for local energy committees and sustainability coordinators.
- The built-in cost drivers (not under PUC control) for the grid and investment required in the grid need to be better understood, as do how these cost drivers affect planning.
- Rate-of-return (ROR) regulation for public utilities needs to change, which requires legislative changes.
- Legislation needs to address inclusion of equity and social cost of carbon in PUC benefit-cost analysis.
- Other ideas include a carbon-themed dividend (so there is a clear difference between the costs associated with carbon and non-carbon choices), social bonding (so there is a clearer and more transparent way to support socially beneficial choices), and selling renewable energy credits to corporations based on energy savings (to increase investment opportunities in clean energy).