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# Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

## Notes from the Vermont Virtual Stakeholder Workshop

(updated 3/10/23)

### OVERVIEW

On October 25, 2022, representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a virtual stakeholder workshop on Zoom. This Vermont workshop was the tenth 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 Vermont—especially those representing environmental justice communities—regarding the climate actions of the utilities, the regulatory structures that the Vermont 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 Vermont workshop and include PUC actions and actions by other stakeholders.

### PUC ACTIONS

- Review and update renewable energy policies and programs
    - Stop viewing minimum Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requirements as caps
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- Evaluate mechanisms for public participation and share information about how the PUC operates and how stakeholders can participate

## ACTIONS BY OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

### Legislators:

- Interest in a Percent of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) to ensure that low-income residents pay no more than a certain percentage for electricity
- Attempted to pass a Clean Heat Standard
  - Increased PUC from 3 to 5 members to include specific technical expertise in energy justice and climate
- Passed environmental justice legislation: (1) Implementing an environmental justice council, (2) Mapping/identifying EJ areas, and (3) aligning spending with environmental justice policy
- Change structure of PUC from quasi-judicial to quasi-legislative
- Have a ratepayer advocate that is outside of, independent of, the PUC
- Increase RPS carve out for in-state renewable development of 5 percent
- Update carbon accounting rules (Vermont is 15 times cleaner than any other state in New England due to the ways that the carbon impact of various fuels are measured - specifically biomass and high efficiency wood furnaces).
- Provide guidance to the PUC on how to receive and incorporate public comment. Ensure that public testimonies matter to the PUC
- Institute Green Savings Smart for low-income customers/renters
- Shift focus from voluntary incentives focused on demand to supply side solutions as they are less costly, drive faster change, and have a higher impact. Mandates could require:
  - Diversification of products that oil dealers market/install to include cleaner options
  - Weatherization for anyone who wants to stay on fossil fuels
  - Notification by oil dealers to all customers, including low-income customers, regarding alternative systems and fuel costs
  - Prohibitions of new fossil fuel infrastructure. Must establish a trusted regulatory agency to implement this change

### **Research Institutions:**

Engage research institutions in the transformation. UVM contributions include:

- Research on renewable energy adoption rates based on a national sample of electric utilities (research paper: [Shades of Green: Modelling Differences in Thought and Action among Electric Utility Regime Actors in the Energy System Transition](#)) to define and promulgate the human characteristics that drive transformation
- Demand charges/rate design structures for industrial customers
- [Energyshed VT pilot](#) (there is also also a National Science Foundation pilot for the NE Region)

### **Organizations/Individuals:**

- Start a VT Chapter of the [Citizen's Climate Lobby](#)
- Disseminate information and encourage community participation using [front porch forum](#)