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# Opportunities for Climate Action by Regulatory Agencies:

## Notes from the Vermont Stakeholder Workshop

### OVERVIEW

On May 11, 2022 representatives from the Brown University Climate and Development Lab, Synapse Energy Economics, and Climable.org convened a stakeholder workshop at Capital City Grange in Berlin, Vermont. This Vermont workshop was the second 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 and other stakeholders could pursue 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 Vermont workshop and describe key themes that include: (1) develop workforce, (2) improve leadership, (3) focus on equity, (4) address subsidies and incentives/increase funding, and (5) add community role/bottom-up planning.

### DEVELOP WORKFORCE

- More and more people want to spend money on clean energy technology, but we need more workforce to manufacture and install it. There is bipartisan support for clean
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energy workforce development and significant federal funding. However, Vermont's population is older than average, there is a lack of education on green jobs outside of technical colleges, and the cost of living in Vermont is high. These factors make clean energy workforce development in the state difficult.

- In general, youth are very engaged and want to be involved in a clean energy future and Vermont schools are concerned about being able to prepare students for the next generation of jobs. The opportunities need to be brought to students earlier, such as in middle or high school and better integrated into curriculum. Workforce development needs to be properly sized to match the scale of the opportunity. Money can be saved by updating curriculum within pre-existing programs.

## IMPROVE LEADERSHIP

- Vermont's Climate Action Plan is outdated and needs to be updated. Transportation system investment needs to be expanded, there needs to be a focus on electrification, and there needs to be a goal to reduce the number of cars on the road.
- State agencies are poorly coordinated, overly bureaucratic, and isolated from each other making it difficult to enact and implement policies. In some cases, interconnected projects must compete for funding. For example, building better healthcare infrastructure could free up money for the environment.
- Different groups (environmental, housing, labor, etc.) need to be unified for a common purpose. Joint programs, partnerships, and combining of previously siloed funding sources could facilitate this coordination.
- The PUC and committee heads are often swayed by politics, which slows progress.
- The PUC needs to be directed to conduct more outward engagement. Conducting more engagement could also help the PUC to better articulate their stances, which are often poorly understood by residents.

## FOCUS ON EQUITY

- The focus on greenhouse gas emissions reductions as the key performance metric does not take other goals into consideration, such as housing and equity improvements.
- Vermont needs guiding principles for equity and environmental justice to be used for climate policy. These principles need to be integral to program planning and design, rather than just tacked on at the end as it is now.
- The PUC needs staff that focus solely on equity.

- Vermont is the least affordable state in the U.S. Affordability for low and middle income residents is key. In order to keep costs down for lower and middle income residents, the wealthy should be paying for climate change solutions through taxes. Vermont's progressive taxes are a good start, but more can be done to tax those with additional homes in the state and who only live in Vermont part-time.
- As it is now, climate action is often a high-income activity. Even when low-income programs are available, such as Green Mountain Power's community solar program, they fail to support low and middle income residents.

## ADDRESS SUBSIDIES AND INCENTIVES/INCREASE FUNDING

- Longer term funding is essential (ARPA funding is not sufficient).
- Fossil fuels have been subsidized for decades. Renewable energy needs to be subsidized as we transition to it.
- Maximum income brackets for incentives need to be higher so more people can afford the transition to clean energy sources. Financing is needed to defer upfront costs and encourage diverse participation.
- Despite savings in the long run, EVs are cost prohibitive up front. We need to find ways to reduce those upfront costs in order to make EVs accessible to low and middle income people and reduce the need for gas.
- Renters are commonly left out. Weatherization is paid for by landlords, but they have no incentive to make their properties more efficient since the tenant pays the heating bill.

## ADD COMMUNITY ROLE/BOTTOM-UP PLANNING

- Municipalities are lacking true support from the state. Additionally, rural municipalities have limited staff capacity compared to urban areas.
- Solutions and planning both need to be bottom-up in order to ensure representation and accessibility for low and middle income residents. The voices of workers need to be centered in climate policy.
- Local energy commissions don't have enough control to make changes for communities and lack the funding necessary to make change.