

Vermont Climate Action Commission

Tuesday, August 15, 2017

1 – 4 pm

The Montpelier Room/ National Life building / Montpelier

Committee Members Present:

Marie Audet, Michele Boomhower, Peter Bourne, Harrison Bushnell, Kristen Carlson, Paul Costello, Tom Donahue, Bethany Fleishman, Joe Fusco, Liz Gamache, Stuart Hart, Adam Knudsen, Bill Laberge, Linda McGinnis, Brian Shupe (for Johanna Miller), Ted Brady (for Michael Schirling), Mary Sprayregen, Bob Stevens, Ed McNamara (for June Tierney), Robert Turner, and Peter Walke

Agenda Items

1:00 Welcome (Peter and Paul)

Commission co-chairs Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) Deputy Secretary Peter Walke and Vermont Council on Rural Development Executive Director Paul Costello provide opening remarks. The group's overall goal is to develop by July 2018 an action plan for the state to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals that will also grow the economy and make Vermont more affordable. It's necessary to include all Vermonters in this conversation. The work is starting from a place of strength, with several previous efforts (2007 Governor's Commission on Climate Change, 2012 and 2016 Comprehensive Energy Plans) providing the opportunity for success. This is a transformative moment in world history. There is an international competition ongoing to develop and implement solutions to climate change. The state should be applauded for policies to date that have built the economy, created jobs, and preserved environmental assets. This committee's recommendations need to find the balance point between those elements.

1:10 Introductions (All)

Each of the participating members provided an opening statement, introducing themselves to the group and stating their expectation(s). Themes were:

- Managing Change – Transition to a low(er) carbon economy will affect every economic sector in the state, in different ways.
- Economic Opportunity – Putting the state on a trajectory to meet its GHG emission goals presents many economic/business opportunities, both within the states, regionally, nationally and even internationally.
- Visioning Future – How to improve economy, health, community, society in the face of coming changes in climate and government/business/society's responses to those changes

1:25 Current Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory (Jeff Merrell)

Department of Environmental Conservation Air Quality Planning Section Supervisor Jeff Merrell provided an overview of the latest state Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory report, released in July and covering the period 1990-2013. After peak emissions equal to over 10M metric tons of CO₂ in 2004, Vermont's emissions declined steadily until 2008, have plateaued over the following 5 years. Preliminary data for 2014-2015 suggests that emissions may have increased in those years. Mr. Merrell made clear to the Commission that the state is nowhere near achieving the greenhouse gas emission goals of 40% of 1990 emissions in 2030 and 80-95% of 1990 emissions in 2050. The state's greenhouse gas emission

profile by sector is different than the U.S. profile. In Vermont, 41.9% of greenhouse gas emissions are from the transportation sector. Even when accounting for carbon sequestration in forests, Vermont is still a net emitter of GHGs.

Discussion:

Commission discussion focused on two primary issues. First, the Commission is interested in putting this information into context of broader external factors such as heating degree days, energy prices, policy efforts to see how best to move forward. Commission members wanted to have a better understanding of where the greatest opportunities exist. The Agency of Natural Resources agreed to provide additional information exploring that broader context. Additionally, the challenges associated with the significant data lag and the removal of significant federal data from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency websites were discussed.

1:40 2016 Comprehensive Energy Plan (Joanna White)

Joanna White from the Public Service Department presented a brief overview of the most recent (2016) Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP 2016). Her presentation focused on the plan development process, what CEP 2016 does, and what CEP 2016 does not address. Ms. White described that there are approximately 300 specific recommendations in CEP 2016 that the Commission can draw from, but that, intentionally, CEP 2016 does not address particular projects nor analyze every possible policy choice and external factor scenario. Further, while movement toward CEP 2016 clean energy goals will have a generally positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions, CEP 2016 does not address emissions from non-energy use sectors of the economy.

Discussion:

Commission discussion primarily focused on what recommendations in CEP 2016 the Department would recommend the Commission pursue. In response, the Department agreed to put together a status update for the Commission with progress toward or completion of certain recommendations noted along with opportunities for action. Robert Turner asked about how Act 174, which addresses energy siting, has impacted the energy landscape. He raised specific concerns about town planning committees lacking the capacity to develop effective plans. Ms. White responded that the regional planning commissions have fully embraced the Act 174 planning process and will be supporting town plan development required by 2018. Kristin Carlson noted the latest Green Mountain Power data shows that energy consumption is decreasing and that consideration needs to be given to ensuring that existing infrastructure can be maintained at a reasonable cost to ratepayers.

1:55 Workshop Session (ANR Facilitators)

The plenary group separated into 4 breakout groups, each provided with a facilitator, and asked to address the following questions with respect to greenhouse gas emissions reductions – what is working right now, and where are the greatest opportunities?

2:25 Report Out / Discussion (Paul)

The plenary reconvened and each breakout group had a spokesperson review the items identified for each question. Common themes: alignment of values; support for clean environment/green economy, success in electric sector (renewables); opportunities in transportation and thermal; efficiency as economic benefit; biomass utilization; and carbon markets & carbon pricing.

See accompanying table for breakout group results.

2:45 Commission Process (Peter)

Peter Walke provided an overview of the Commission process. He reviewed the derivation of the Commission, historical antecedents, and the direction of the Governor established through the Executive Order.

Mr. Walke described several steps in the process:

- Public scoping sessions to be held in September and October around the state
- Review of existing climate change-related executive orders by December 31, 2017
- Formation of the Technical Advisory Group
- Report to Governor at least three recommendations by January 1, 2018
- Report to Governor Action Plan by July 31, 2018

Mr. Walke also described the structure that would be applied to the Commission's work. Each Commission member will participate in two subcommittees, one sector specific and one cross-cutting:

Sector subcommittees:

- Power Production, Distribution, and Use
- Commercial and Residential Buildings
- Transportation
- Agriculture/Forestry/Waste/Industry

Cross-cutting subcommittees:

- Access to Capital
- Education, Communication, and Outreach
- Rural Solutions
- Research and Development / Non-emissions-based climate actions

Discussion:

The Commission members expressed eagerness to begin working in subcommittees as quickly as possible. Therefore, all members were asked to provide their preferences as soon as possible. Mr. Walke detailed that two state employees would be assigned to facilitate each subcommittee.

Brian Shupe (on behalf of Johanna Miller) requested that recognition of Ms. Miller's email sent to other Commission members raising process concerns about the Technical Advisory Group be made part of the public record.

3:15 Schedule of Work (Paul)

Paul Costello discussed the schedule of work for the Commission with the goal of providing action short-term and mid-range recommendations to the Governor with the goal of recommendations being ready by May to allow time for Commission discussion. These recommendations should inform policy-making but should also be actionable by the private sector and through partnerships. Mr. Costello also described that following the action plan development, there is no specific conclusion to the Commission's activities.

Discussion:

Commission members requested based on municipal schedules to hold the public scoping sessions on Thursdays. Additionally, Commission members wanted to make sure that sufficient notice and attempts

to alert the public to scoping sessions was made. There was also specific interest in creating a student subgroup to be organized by Harrison Bushnell. After discussion with Commission members, the following schedule was established:

- September 14th – St. Johnsbury, 6-8pm
- September 21st – Manchester, 6-8pm
- September 28th – St. Albans, 6-8pm
- October 5th – Brattleboro, 6-8pm

Peter Walke proposed a monthly standing meeting to be held on the 2nd Thursday of each month from 1-4pm, beginning on October 12, 2017. Commission members agreed that Montpelier was the best location. After discussion of time commitment, Mr. Walke agreed to explore mileage reimbursement for Commission members

Linda McGinnis raised how to engage experts and to arrive at a common format for submitting comment. Mr. Walke agreed to have the Agency of Natural Resources explore developing an online comment portal.

3:30 Concluding Remarks (Peter and Paul)

Paul Costello and Peter Walke provided closing remarks, challenging Commission members to think boldly. Mr. Costello noted that while many of the issues discussed today might not be necessary, but it's clear more action is needed that brings in broad perspectives and participation. Mr. Walke praised the Commission for a strong start and expressed gratitude at the willingness of Commission members to get to work.