



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

EERMC FULL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, December 17, 2020 | 3:30 - 5:30 PM

Meeting conducted virtually using Zoom with additional audio conference capabilities

Members in attendance: Nick Ucci, Matt Ray, Bob White, Anthony Hubbard, Bill Riccio, Peter Gill Case, Kurt Teichert, Roberta Fagan, Joe Garlick, Tom Magliocchetti

Others Present: Nathan Cleveland, Becca Trietch, Margaret Hogan, Mike Guerard, Jessica Darling, Hank Webster, Sam Ross, Laura Rodormer, John Tortorella, Joel Munoz, Rachel Sholly, Angela Li, Adrian Caesar, Craig Johnson, Tim Faulkner, Samantha Caputo, Kevin Rose, Brenda Clement, Daniel Tukey, Ben Rivers, Yasmin Yacoby

All meeting materials can be accessed here: <https://rieermc.ri.gov/meeting/eermc-meeting-december-2020/>

1. Call to Order

Acting Chairman Hubbard called the meeting to order at 3:32pm

2. Approval of Council Meeting Minutes

Acting Chairman Hubbard asked for a motion to approve the November Meeting minutes. Mr. White made a motion to approve minutes from the November meeting as written. Mr. Gill Case seconded and all approved by roll call vote.

3. Executive Director Report

a) General Update

Commissioner Ucci reported on the 100% Renewable Electricity by 2030 effort, summarizing the three technical workshops and three community listening sessions on the project, its data, and potential recommendations. All of that feedback will be incorporated into the final report due by the end of 2020. Recommendations will focus on the importance of energy efficiency and ensuring that legislation to support EE continues.

Commissioner Ucci informed the Council that the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE) rankings for their 2020 State Energy Efficiency Scorecard were released yesterday and Rhode Island was ranked fourth this year, among the national leaders and in the top five for the seventh consecutive year. He did note that Rhode Island had drop one place from our 2019 ranking of third place, but everyone here should be proud of this result and that he and the Office of Energy Resources look forward to continue working with the Council and other stakeholders to improve Rhode Island's score in the year ahead.

Lastly, Commissioner Ucci noted that Council member Bob White had announced his intention to step down from the Council after this meeting and took an opportunity to thank Mr. White for his service on this Board and contributions to the achievement of our collective goals.

Mr. White then took a brief opportunity to thank his fellow Council members and wished everyone well in their continued efforts to support the important work of energy efficiency.

4. Acting Chairperson Report

a) General Update

Acting Chair Hubbard reviewed the agenda for today's meeting, including the focus on a number of Council business items to set up for 2021.

Acting Commissioner Hubbard also mentioned to the Council that with the multiple open Council seats it is imperative that Council members communicate any absences with Ms. Trietch in advance of meetings so she can ensure the Council has a quorum to conduct necessary business.

Lastly, he thanks Mr. White for his service on the Council and contributions to the important conversations and decisions that have been made with his support and wished him well in his future endeavors.

5. Program Oversight

a) Update on COVID-19

Mr. Ray shared with the Council that despite increasing case rates in Rhode Island, energy efficiency contractors and customers are remaining safe using the approved safety protocols. However, he did note that the Community Action Program (CAP) agencies indicated in early December that they were no longer comfortable performing in-person services in light of rising case rates in Rhode Island. National Grid has engaged with them to discuss how to best support them and the income-eligible customers they serve moving forward. One option, given other contractors continued availability, is to utilize the existing referral program to provide in-person services to customers who want them.

Lastly, Mr. Ray detailed that some Commercial and Industrial (C&I) customers, like hospitals, have instituted protocols that are making it more challenging to complete some energy efficiency work and/or post-inspections. This will likely have some, currently un-quantified, impact on year end savings achievement.

b) Update on Energy Efficiency Plan Hearings at the Public Utilities Commission

Mr. Ross reviewed the hearings that took place over three days last week on the Energy Efficiency Plan, including extensive data requests from the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to National Grid leading up to those hearings. The vast majority of testimony was from National Grid witnesses, which was in proportion to the amount of data requests each agency or entity received from the PUC.

Mr. Ross indicated that the consultant team, representing the Council, testified about some of the implications of the Performance Incentive Mechanism (PIM) and cost effectiveness screening.

Their comments were particularly focused on the impacts if these analyses were conducted at the sector level or focused solely on the power system benefits provided by the programs, rather than at the portfolio level or inclusive of all societal benefits as currently considered.

Mr. Ross then reviewed a list of the key topics covered during the three days of hearings, including: sales forecasting and the methodology employed to develop those forecasts; rate and bill impacts of the programs and maintaining the system benefit charge (SBC) at the 2020 level; questions around the budget setting process and comparison to historical budgets; the performance incentive mechanism design and process used to reach this new net-benefits framework proposed for 2021; the Efficient Buildings Fund (EBF) and its budgets and savings as accounted for in the plan, as well as testimony from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank on the importance of EBF and how it helps and incentivizes municipalities to make investments in comprehensive energy efficiency projects.

6. Council Business

a) Council Review, Discussion and Potential Vote on 2021 Energy Efficiency Planning Timeline & Meeting Material Submission Process

Please refer to the [Consultant Team Proposed 2021 Energy Efficiency Planning Timeline](#) presentation.

Mr. Guerard reviewed the proposed 2021 timeline for the Energy Efficiency Annual Plan review process and key deliverable dates for the Council to review. He indicated that this schedule is informed by the Three-Year Plan we just developed and will follow the same principles of ensuring alignment with Least Cost Procurement (LCP) standards and statute and address key council and stakeholder priorities.

He noted that one key deliverable to ensure this proposed timeline proceeds smoothly is the adherence of all parties (National Grid, Office of Energy Resources, and the Consultant Team) to submitting meeting materials for distribution to the Council one week in advance of the scheduled meeting.

Mr. Riccio advocated for as much review time as possible for both the Council, consultant team, and the public to ensure we have a transparent process in place that all can meaningfully engage with. He asked if the proposed timeline being voted on sets a standard of operation that we will abide by, or is it more of a suggestion?

Acting Chair Hubbard indicated that, if voted on, the Council could make this proposal or portions thereof a standard of operation for how the Council will conduct itself and the expectations for how meeting materials will be submitted.

Ms. Trietch confirmed that the Council has never had a formal standard for procedure like this and that this is an opportunity to create one if the Council so desires.

Mr. White asked if National Grid could adhere to the schedule as proposed?

Mr. Ray indicated that they want the process to be useful, transparent, and helpful and will aim to adhere to any timeline proposed. He did mention that he wanted to review the specific dates in this proposal with this team before committing to ensure alignment with some key dates internal to National Grid, such as sales forecasting.

Mr. White indicated that perhaps in the spirit of collaboration the Council holds off on voting until National Grid has the opportunity to review and comment on the timeline.

Mr. Gill Case indicated that he wanted to get a sense of what the expectation for Council member time commitment and engagement was? How many one-on-one meetings should a council member have in a year, for example? He has been trying to attend other process meetings (like the Technical Working Group) and has found that that extra engagement has helped him better understand the process and made digesting the plans and proposed changes easier.

Acting Chair Hubbard indicated that he has also found value in attending some of the other forums of discussion on energy efficiency, like the Technical Working Group or other meetings, has made things easier for him as well and that he often relies on one-on-one engagement with the consultant team for support and education as well.

Mr. Teichert indicated he felt it was premature to vote at this time, and a better understanding of the pressure points for them and consultant team will help inform their stance and perhaps a more rigid stance is needed to dictate upstream the timeline needed for appropriate review.

Ms. Trietch indicated that the Office of Energy Resources is happy to work with the consultant team and National Grid to refine and review the proposed timeline and propose something in January for review. She also asked the Council to review the list of meeting topics proposed for 2021 and inform her what your individual priorities or preferences are, which will help as agendas for 2021 meetings are developed.

b) Presentation on Council Public Education Efforts in 2020

Please refer to the [Consultant Team 2020 Public Education Efforts](#) presentation

Ms. Sholly reviewed the slate of 2020 activities the Council funded from their public education budget, which included a public forum, a lecture series, National Energy Education Development (NEED) curriculum development, and a Farm Energy Fellow.

Ms. Sholly shared that the public forum was conducted with The University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Center's support and management and it focused on COVID-19 and its impact on energy efficiency and health outcomes, held on September 24th. Experts from across the country were able participate given virtual nature of event and the event was a success in terms of attendance, engagement, and feedback and it is [available to view on YouTube now](#).

Ms. Sholly continued, noting that the lecture series was also organized by URI's Cooperative Extension with the Council's sponsorship and there were three sessions held across October and November, with solid attendance at each event and all events are available to view on YouTube. The topics for the three lectures were as follows:

1. [Energy Efficiency, Human Health, and COVID-19](#)
2. [Energy Efficiency in Schools: Safer Buildings, Healthier Students](#)
3. [Barriers to Energy Efficiency in Rental and Affordable Housing](#)

Ms. Sholly noted that the other major education budget allocation was the NEED curriculum development on energy efficiency, health, and equity for K-12 teachers. The Council's investment helped develop cutting edge curriculums on these topics, including teacher's guides. She noted that teacher trainings would be conducted in 2021 using these resources in Rhode Island schools.

Mr. Cleveland then briefly reviewed the achievements of the Farm Energy Fellow during 2020. The Energy Fellow supported two Farm Program funding rounds in 2020 that awarded \$160,000 to Rhode Island farmers, as well as organized a webinar to provide information about the program as well as business tips for small businesses. Mr. Cleveland noted that the Farm Energy Fellow was also able to continue managing the social media pages for the Farm Energy Program and engage with a new demographic through those channels, as well as creating and updating several important databases and resources.

Ms. Sholly then reviewed a list of proposed allocations for the 2021 Council Public Education Funds for consideration. That list included some similar items from 2020 – a Farm Energy Fellow, working with NEED on additional energy training for K-12 teachers – and also some new additions like Energy 101 education video production, as well as incorporating the public facing event and lecture series as part of a package that includes marketing of the energy 101 videos.

Mr. Magliocchetti indicated that he felt the Energy 101 videos were a great way to engage with the public and convey important information in a new and more digestible format; though he feels the messaging and tone will be critical to their success.

Ms. Fagan indicated that having a video series catalog that future Council members could refer to as a resource would also be of value.

Mr. Gill Case indicated that he was interested in participating in the education group and also was curious if the budget allocation for the video series was high enough to support the scope of what we are trying to achieve.

Ms. Sholly indicated that we did have some unallocated funds that could augment that budget and that these projects will be bid out and so those numbers could shift.

c) Council Discussion and Vote on Consultant Service 2021 Work Plan

Please refer to the [Consultant Team 2021 Proposed Scope of Work presentation](#) and [2021 Scope of Work Memo](#)

Mr. Guerard reviewed the proposed Scope of Work for 2021 for the Consultant team, which is based on their winning bid from the recently completed Request for Proposals (RFP) for consultant services. It meets all of the key objectives put forward by the Council in that RFP process and he noted that the hourly billing rates will remain constant for 2021 and 2022 and a scope of work for 2022 will be reviewed and approved by the Council at the end of 2021.

He reviewed the full scope of work by task, including hours and costs, and noted the several new items in each category that were part of the recent proposal that will be incorporated into their scope of work that had not previously been undertaken.

Mr. Teichert made a motion to approve the consultant team's 2021 scope of work as presented. Mr. Riccio seconded the motion and all approved by roll call vote.

d) Council Discussion and Vote on 2021 Council Budget

Please refer to the [Proposed 2021 Council Budget](#)

Ms. Trietch reviewed the proposed 2021 budget for the Council and broke down the income streams, contracts approved for 2021, and other spending items as presented, such as public education funding. An important distinction was made that the system benefit charge (SBC)

collection amounts for 2021 are tentative, as the Public Utilities Commission has not yet approved them.

Mr. Teichert asked for a clarification on how the Council funding was derived from SBC collections.

Ms. Trietch indicated that the Council is statutorily obligated to a percentage (up to 1%) of the customer collections from the SBC charge and that is how the Council funding is derived.

Mr. White made a motion to approve the 2021 Energy Efficiency and Resource Management Council (EERMC) Budget as proposed and Mr. Riccio seconded the motion.

During discussion of the motion, Mr. Gill Case asked if the Council could make allocations to other line items or projects outside of what is approved here, should the need arise?

Ms. Trietch indicated that they could definitely make additional allocations of unallocated funds during the year as needed.

After discussion concluded, all Council members approved of the motion by roll call vote.

Ms. Trietch also indicated that a motion and vote was required to enable the Office of Energy Resources to draft and develop Request for Proposals (RFPs) for the several education initiatives proposed in the budget process, should the Council desire to have them move those items forward.

Mr. Teichert made a motion to approve the Office of Energy Resources to draft three Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the educational projects – for education videos, for K-12 teacher trainings, and for public facing events and video marketing – and Mr. Garlick seconded the motion. All approved by roll call vote.

7. Special Topics

a) Energy Justice Presentation

Please refer to the [Office of Energy Resources Energy Justice Presentation](#)

Ms. Yacoby reviewed some key terms used in discussing environmental and energy justice topics and socialized some key definitions. She noted that it is important to recognize that energy and environmental impacts are often borne most by people of color and other marginalized communities who contributed least to these issues.

She then reviewed how these issues have taken shape in Rhode Island with a focus on the energy burden borne by customers across Rhode Island, noting that the energy burden is largest in Providence and other economically depressed areas. This also happens to be the areas that were most heavily impacted by redlining practices and are the most racially diverse in the state.

Ms. Yacoby indicated that the Office of Energy Resources (OER) is working to address these issues through justice literacy – both internally at OER and through important engagement with the public, including those most impacted by these issues.

b) Presentation on RI Municipal Utility Energy Efficiency Efforts

Please refer to the [Office of Energy Resources Municipal Utility Energy Efficiency Efforts](#) presentation.

Mr. Cleveland shared with the Council the progress and achievements of the State's two Municipal Utility Districts with the Council.

Starting first with Pascoag Utility District (PUD), Mr. Cleveland noted that 2020 was the second of three years of a planned investment of Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) proceeds from the Office of Energy Resources (OER) to support the growth and scaling of PUD's energy efficiency programming. 2019, the first year of OER's investment, was a marked improvement on their prior achievement with many more customers being serviced and benefitting from energy efficiency improvements. While 2020 was a challenge for the Utility, in large part due to COVID-19 severely limiting the reach of their home energy audit and weatherization program, Mr. Cleveland noted that the adjustments made in year to adapt and be more flexible eventually received some traction and were incorporated into the plan proposed to the Public Utilities Commission for 2021. He indicated that both OER and the Utility feel confident that program outcomes will improve in 2021 and that he would be working directly with the Utility on implementation throughout the year.

Mr. Cleveland then discussed the energy efficiency work taking place with the Block Island Utility District (BIUD), which established its first energy efficiency program in 2020 with support from the Office of Energy Resources (OER) and an investment of Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) proceeds. He noted that the BIUD is very focused on alleviating peak demand issues and providing relief to constrained feeders on the island, and they are excited about the potential of the energy efficiency program to address some of these concerns.

Mr. Cleveland detailed how after significant public and Utility Board input, the 2020 Plan was put before the Public Utilities Commission in May, and over the summer BIUD was able to solicit for and hire vendors to implement and help oversee and manage the program. As of November 2020 the program was operational and had been advertised to customers and they had already been able to conduct 6 audits, including one virtual audit. They are pleased with the initial returns and will be working on making updates and adjustments for the 2021 program year, which begins in May of 2021.

8. Public Comment

None.

9. Adjournment

Acting Chairman Hubbard called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. White moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Teichert seconded the motion and all approved. Meeting adjourned at 5:42pm.

Outstanding Council Member Questions Requiring a Written Response:

Mr. Riccio asked if the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has made certain efficiency measures or levels of performance conditions of approval for any of the new schools that are being discussed for construction in several municipalities?