Peacham Legislative Forum On Energy, 11-18-25: Notes

Meeting summary - Tuesday Nov 18, 16857;18842 Template: General template

Quick recap

The main focus was on energy challenges in Vermont, including rising costs and the need to transition to a less carbon-intensive energy portfolio, with discussions covering various energy solutions and their implementation challenges. The group explored community solar projects and regulatory issues, concluding with plans to collaborate with Washington Electric Cooperative on a potential pilot program to benefit local residents through community-owned solar arrays.

Next steps

- Scott Beck: connect the Peacham Energy Committee with Lewis Porter and Carrick Johnson
- Scott Beck: talk to Lewis Porter about Peacham's interest in collaborating on a community solar pilot program that would be mutually beneficial
- Peacham Energy Committee: reach out to Washington Electric Co-op first to gauge their appetite for a community solar pilot project
- Peacham Energy Committee engage with other nearby Energy Committees to seek common ground and ideas
- Peacham Energy Committee: organize a meeting with WEC, Scott Beck, and Peacham management to discuss the pilot program
- Peacham Energy Committee: visit the State House to present to Senate Natural Resources Energy committee

Key Topics

Owl Camera Setup Technical Discussion

Charlie and Ben discussed technical issues related to setting up an Owl Labs camera for a meeting. They explored options for connecting and using the camera, including downloading the necessary app and checking for available plugins. Charlie suggested asking the librarian or Susan for assistance with the Owl setup. They also briefly discussed personal topics, such as Charlie's winter home in New Orleans and their shared interest in music.

Meeting Setup and Guest Arrivals

Jock Gill introduced Scott Beck, who serves on the Senate Committee on Finance and Natural Resources, and provided some background on his committees and past military service.

Vermont's Energy Cost Challenges

The initial discussion focused on energy challenges in Vermont, with Sen. Beck highlighting rising energy costs and the need to transition to a less carbon-intensive energy portfolio. He noted that while initial energy efficiency measures like insulation and LED lights were effective, further options like geothermal heating systems are now less financially viable, despite their potential for significant carbon reduction.

As an example Scott discussed the rising costs of geothermal heat pump installations, which have become economically unfeasible since he installed one years ago, due to increased drilling and equipment prices. He shared his insights on Green Mountain Power’s current priorities, noting their focus on undergrounding infrastructure for resilience and their support for renewable energy initiatives, though he expressed frustration with the high costs of electricity.

Jock Gill highlighted advancements in battery technology, particularly sodium-ion batteries, which could improve grid storage and vehicle-to-grid integration, potentially transforming the energy landscape. He emphasized the need for further technological leaps to address energy challenges and reduce costs.

EVs and Solar Energy Discussion

The group discussed several topics, including high electric car insurance costs, which Charlie explained were potentially due to high repair costs for early EV models like Tesla. Scott shared his perspective on solar power, noting that it currently represents 2- 3% of New England's energy mix and is most effective on flat roofs and parking lots rather than open farmland. He also highlighted the limitations of solar as a non-baseload power source. Jock contrasted Vermont's approach with Texas's more flexible regulatory environment that allows for battery storage and grid flexibility.

Vermont Community Solar Policy Challenges

The discussion moved on to challenges with community solar projects in Vermont, particularly regarding regulatory and policy issues. Sen. Beck explained how utilities face cost pressures from higher community solar power costs compared to their own internal generation costs, leading to a political compromise where utilities agreed to the current Renewable Energy Standard legislation. The conversation explored how solar costs differ significantly between regions, with Australia having much lower installation costs due to their extensive renewable energy infrastructure, battery storage, and lower regulatory and bureaucratic costs. The group discussed potential solutions, including terminating fossil fuel subsidies and developing innovative financing structures for solar installations.

Rethinking Vermont's Energy System

Jock discussed the need to rethink the current energy system, aiming for a goal of 5 cent kilowatt-hours by considering alternative energy sources like solar power. He emphasized the importance of addressing rising electric rates and the potential for community solar projects to reduce costs.

Tom Bryer suggested exploring short-term solutions to work with Washington Electric, such as funding a local community solar array, while acknowledging regulatory challenges. He also touched on the potential for battery storage and microgrid development in Vermont's context. Electric Utility Challenges and Solutions.

Sen Beck discussed the challenges and priorities of electric utilities, emphasizing the critical need for reliable electricity, especially during winter months when demand is high. He highlighted the importance of balancing solar energy production with traditional power sources to ensure consistent service. Beck also criticized the current net metering model, suggesting a more equitable system where excess energy could be stored or sold at a fair rate. Jock proposed exploring community solar arrays and battery storage as potential solutions to benefit both utilities and ratepayers.

Vermont Renewable Energy Policy Challenges

Charlie and others discussed the challenges and regulatory issues surrounding community-based renewable energy projects in Vermont, particularly the difficulties of implementing shared batteries and the current state of the Renewable Energy Standard (RES) legislation. Sen Beck highlighted how the

RES is being exploited by large industrial solar projects, which receive tax subsidies while damaging the environment and not benefiting local communities.

Charlie also questioned if there is political gridlock in the Vermont legislature, where dissatisfaction with energy policies like the RES and Clean Heat Standard may be preventing any legislative progress on reform or repeal. Beck speculated that a ratepayer revolt might eventually force political change, while the Clean Heat Standard might be repealed if Republicans gain full control of the state government.

Community Solar Pilot Program Discussion

The group discussed implementing community solar projects, particularly in Peacham, with a focus on creating a pilot program. Sen Beck suggested working with Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) to explore options for a community-owned solar array that could benefit local residents. The conversation touched on the need for innovative financing solutions to make solar energy more accessible to all income levels. Charlie emphasized the importance of clear communication with WEC to demonstrate the group's willingness to negotiate and find mutually beneficial solutions. Sen Beck discussed the power of collective action to influence the Legislature, and urged the Committee to explore ways to collaborate with nearby localities in developing their proposals. The conversation ended with Sen., Beck offering to connect the group with WEC representatives to discuss potential pilot programs and explore ways to collaborate for the community's energy future; and potentially in the future to facilitate meetings with members of the Legislature.

about these Notes

These notes are drawn from the meeting notes generated by Zoom’s AI facility, as edited and reviewed by the Peacham Energy Committee. At this time we have not used the recorded transcript of the meeting to vet them, so there may be inaccuracies.