

Minutes of the Peacham Energy Committee – May 20, 2026

Zoom Meeting hosted in Peacham, VT

Time	May 20, 2026, 7:05 PM - 8:49 PM (EST)
Committee Members	Charlie Byron (chair), Bevin Barber-Campbell, Tom Bryer, Dick Browne, Jock Gill
Participants	Louis Porter, General Manager Washington Electric Coop

Executive Summary

The Peacham Energy Committee met on May 20, 2026, with guest speaker Louis Porter, the General Manager of Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC). The discussion centered on WEC's unique rural territory challenges, its 100% renewable energy portfolio, the systemic financial inequities of current net metering policies, and upcoming technological initiatives like utility-scale battery storage and modernized metering infrastructure.

Topic-Based Summary

1. WEC Background, Territory, and Operational Challenges

- **Demanding Service Territory:** Formed in the 1930s to provide power where private utilities would not, WEC manages a deeply rural territory with an average of just 9 members per mile of line. The highly difficult, off-road terrain requires specialized equipment and creates hazardous maintenance conditions for lineworkers.
- **Leadership Context:** Louis Porter took over as General Manager in late 2021 during a challenging period defined by financial strains and leadership turnover.
- **Modernization & Metering Obstacles:** Currently, 200–300 meters cannot be read due to signal interference caused by member solar installations and heat pumps. WEC plans to transition to RF mesh radio meters over the next two years to enable reliable, hourly data collection and pave the way for universal time-of-use rates.
- **Microgrid Feasibility:** Due to the low population density of their territory, traditional microgrid implementation is structurally difficult, though WEC is exploring microgrid opportunities for mobile home parks and substation-based solutions.

2. Renewable Energy Generation & The Coventry Landfill

- **100% Renewable System:** WEC's power supply is entirely renewable, primarily generated by burning landfill gas from the Casella facility in Coventry. WEC locked in a favorable contract price due to early risk-taking in building the generation facility, though upcoming negotiations in 2038 are anticipated to yield higher costs.
- **Environmental Policy Impacts:** Vermont's food scrap landfill ban has had a minimal

impact on gas generation, diverting only 13% of food waste and impacting storage space needs more than landfill content. Addressing health concerns, Porter noted that PFAS compounds are contained within the liquid leachate rather than the gas itself, and Casella is working on removal technologies.

- **Debate on Methane Renewables:** Committee member Jock Gill voiced concerns that methane-based gas should not be considered truly renewable. He advocated for Vermont to target a goal of producing electricity at five cents per kilowatt-hour utilizing a combination of solar, wind, and battery storage.

3. Net Metering Reform and Cost-Shifting Inequities

- **Regressive Cost Shifts:** While WEC supports renewable energy, the current net metering structure creates an unsustainable \$1 million annual cost shift (~\$60 monthly deficit per net-metered asset) across their system. Non-net-metering members (often in lower-income areas) end up subsidizing wealthier members who afford solar installations.
- **Grid Infrastructure Tension:** Solar-owning members are insulated from the direct investment costs of upgrading the grid, creating friction between maintaining service quality and keeping member bills affordable. Additionally, because WEC lacks adequate storage, excess solar power generated during peak daylight hours is exported to Massachusetts and Connecticut at low, unfavorable rates.
- **Proposed Policy Adjustments:** Peacham representatives and WEC discussed transitioning away from fixed net metering rates toward an "avoided costs" model similar to California's framework. Jock Gill suggested creating a state green bank to make batteries and solar accessible to all income brackets, alongside redirecting Efficiency Vermont funds to support time-of-use advantages.

4. Battery Storage, EV Integration, and Grid Technology

- **Utility-Scale Storage:** WEC is deploying a 5-megawatt battery at an existing substation. Managed via a hybrid agreement, this battery represents over half the capacity of the Coventry generation plant and allows WEC to share in cost savings while controlling peak-time discharge schedules.
- **Bring Your Own Battery (BYOB):** WEC plans to offer a BYOB program where members purchase their own batteries and receive monthly bill credits for allowing peak-time discharges. WEC faces higher administrative costs per member for this program than larger utilities like Green Mountain Power due to its smaller overall membership base.
- **Low-Income Battery Pilot:** Utilizing a federal grant distributed through the State Department of Public Service, WEC is launching a pilot program to lease 25 in-home batteries to low-income members on a 10-year lease-to-own track. WEC cannot replicate larger utility utility-lease models due to distinct borrowing constraints.
- **Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) Technology:** While V2G technology has immense grid potential, it remains restricted by non-standardized and expensive equipment. WEC proposes starting with an incentive program modeled after their EV charging framework, compensating vehicle owners based on avoided costs for a fixed number of monthly battery discharges.

5. Utility Regulation and Public Ownership

- **Defense of Public Power:** Louis strongly defended Vermont's non-deregulated, vertically integrated electrical system. He argued that publicly owned frameworks like Velco offer superior public accountability and lower transmission costs compared to private, deregulated transmission entities in other New England states.

Committee Action Items & Next Steps

Policy Advocacy & Administration

- **Net Metering Advocacy:** Charlie and the committee will draft and review a position paper on net metering compensation changes, integrating counter-ideas generated by Gemini.
- **Network Collaboration:** Coordinate net metering advocacy efforts with Ali Webster and the broader regional network of energy committees.
- **Committee Outreach:** Charlie will send a draft update letter to Tom Galinat and inquire if he has interest in joining or rejoining the Energy Committee. He will also check in with Bruce regarding his availability for the Volunteer Energy Assistance Group.

Community Resilience & Program Management

- **Battery Pilot Selection:** Support outreach to low-income residents for WEC's 25-battery pilot program, prioritizing individuals with medical needs or high outage vulnerabilities.
- **Financing Investigation:** Explore state- or utility-backed financing models to assist Peacham residents with community-level battery installations.
- **Resilience Education:** Organize outage-resilience education programs in Peacham, collaborating with the "Aging Well in Peacham" group and planning potential Town Meeting presentations.
- **Volunteer Energy Visits:** Tom and Bruce will connect with the town clerk to evaluate liability, legal protections, and the overall status of the volunteer home energy visit program.
- **Regional Program Support:** Pass along promotional outreach to ensure participation from the town of Barnet in the WindowDressers insulation program. Bevin will also coordinate with Melissa Hough to join the collaborators meeting distribution list.