



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

# ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

## EERMC FULL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 30, 2020 | 3:30 - 5:30 PM

Meeting conducted virtually using GoToMeeting with additional audio conference capabilities

---

**Members in attendance:** Bob White, Chris Powell, Tim Roughan, Nick Ucci, Kurt Teichert, Karen Verrengia, Anthony Hubbard, Butch Roberts, Roberta Fagan, Tom Magliocchetti, Peter Gill Case, Joe Garlick, Bill Riccio

**Others Present:** Nathan Cleveland, Becca Trietch, Joel Munoz, Adrian Caesar, Angela Li, Kerry Schlichting, Rachel Sholly, Sam Ross, Mike Guerard, Matt Chase, Matt Ray, Craig Johnson, Yasmin Yacoby, Chris Porter, Sydney Usatine, Laura Rodormer, Ben Rivers, Mona Chandra, Kevin Rose, Daniel Tukey, Kai Salem, Seth Handy

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

---

### 1. Call to Order

Chairman Powell called the meeting to order at 3:33pm

### 2. Approval of Council Meeting Minutes

Chairman Powell requested a motion to approve the March meeting minutes. Ms. Verrengia made a motion to approve March meeting minutes as written and Mr. White seconded. Mr. Riccio abstained from voting, as he was not present at the March meeting, all others approved.

### 3. Executive Director Report

#### a) General Update

Commissioner Ucci commended National Grid and other stakeholders for working to minimize workforce impacts so far from COVID-19 as well as working to ramp back up as quickly as possible to continue serving customers and deploying efficiency once able.

He also announced the Earth Day release of the Heating Sector Transformation report - which is available on the [OER website](#) and will be discussed in more detail at a future meeting – and provided some brief highlights to the group:

- Efficiency is a key solution in any decarbonization effort but cannot get us to 100% alone
- Decarbonized fuels will potentially play a part in getting to 100% carbon-free by 2050, though the full impact of costs, benefits, and scaling of these fuels is presently unclear
- Higher heating costs in 2050 may be offset by transportation costs decreasing and a customer's "energy wallet" may be similar in total costs in a decarbonized 2050 to today's

carbon intensive energy wallet. In order to achieve this though, we will need to work together to capitalize on natural replacement cycles of heating equipment and think critically on how to finance and deploy these upgrade to the benefit of all Rhode Islanders.

#### 4. Chairperson Report

##### *a) General Update*

Chairman Powell reviewed the agenda for today's meeting with the group. He noted that as a brief update on the Potential Study, the final report is forthcoming in mid-May and that the May meeting will also have updates on the targets and standards which are under review by the PUC now. Chairman Powell also provided a clarifying note that on the EERMC website, anything listed as "other meeting materials" will not be covered at today's meeting but are made available for your information and any questions can be directed to Ms. Trietch at OER or the consultant team.

#### 5. Program Oversight

##### *a) Update on COVID-19 from National Grid*

Please refer to the [Update on Program Implementation During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) presentation.

Mr. Porter presented the Company's four main priorities during the pandemic:

**Health & Safety** – a big driver in all Company activities

**Transparency** - important to keep everyone informed in a timely manner of all the efforts being made by the Company, resources available to customers and vendors, and any changes in program status

**Contractor Support & Impact Mitigation** – Implementation of virtual delivery opportunities to keep safe work moving forward and development of risk mitigation strategies to support safe delivery

**Preparation for the future** – The Company is working to build an active pipeline of work through near-term demand generation and support in order to ensure vendors are well positioned to meet demand once suspension of work is lifted.

Mr. Porter also highlighted that while on-site work is suspended, there is ongoing work still occurring such as: online assessment/audits, upstream incentive offerings, demand response programming, retail rebates, and also adjustments to some other programs like curbside refrigerator recycling efforts and the suspension of energy assessment requirement for HEAT loans.

He also made clear that the Company is not using EE customer dollars as social support fund (e.g. expanded unemployment insurance or other business continuity efforts). They are focused on communicating with and supporting contractors/vendors and developing a project pipeline for once work resumes (e.g. marketing, enhanced incentives). To that end, they have developed and are offering online training and learning modules at no cost to maintain engagement and increase workforce skills during downtime.

Lastly, Mr. Porter spoke briefly to the impacts of COVID-19 on the system benefit charge fund balances. While it is still too early to tell about yearlong impact to the numbers, energy

consumption is down so the Company is not collecting as much revenue currently. However, program expenditures are also down as well because of the suspension of work. It is also unclear to the Company what customer appetite/psychology will be towards engaging with efficiency vendors and allowing others into their buildings even once work is able to resume, which leads to lots of uncertainty in the present.

As the Company is safely able to resume services, they will focus on un-suspending those with the biggest impact on savings without good virtual alternatives and reasonable risk-mitigation (e.g. external weatherization, basement-only HVAC work, unoccupied buildings like schools etc.). National Grid is also working regionally with other utilities to develop best practices for vendors to follow for safely delivering services moving forward.

*b) Discussion on National Grid's Three-Year Plan Outline Memorandum*

Please refer to the [National Grid's 2021-2023 Energy Efficiency Plan Outline Memorandum](#) presentation.

Mr. Ray began by stating that the Company wants this document to provide as early a view into what is coming in the three-year plan for all stakeholders. This document is meant to serve as a high-level preview for everyone to react to, especially key priorities from the Company and stakeholders, and allow for additional time for stakeholder review and comment throughout the process. He also noted that forthcoming Public Utilities Commission guidance on the three-year plan through the standards and targets impact the plan documents.

Mr. Ray then shared the six focus areas the Company is focusing on in the three-year plan development:

**Increase participation/customer engagement**

**Focus on comprehensive measures**

**Expand demand response programming**

**Explore cutting-edge technologies (including heat pumps, as allowable)**

Across all programs the Company will additionally be focused on:

**Workforce emphasis** especially in light of COVID-19

**Seeking alternative funding/financing opportunities** to support program development to minimize surcharge impact to customers.

Mr. Guerard then presented the consultant team's thoughts and reactions to the memorandum. He noted that the outline is consistent with prior three-year plans, while also recognizing we are still waiting on PUC guidance. He thanked National Grid for getting us this early preview of their priorities and thought processes and explained that both the Residential and Commercial and Industrial sector teams are meeting next week, as is the Technical Working Group, which will provide multiple opportunities to really begin working from this document to develop the plan and its strategies in earnest. Before opening the floor for Council discussion and input, he noted that the memorandum did not contain much mention of the potential study and targets.

Mr. Teichert commented that more lead time is certainly appreciated and inquired that the potential study was supposed to really inform this plan in a way that we haven't been able to

recently to really move past incremental adjustments, and asked if section four was supposed to be the area where that gets addressed in detail?

Mr. Ray responded that the Company intends to address this in more detail in the plan itself and that section four will be robust to include and interpret the potential study results as well as the Least Cost Procurement law and Targets.

Mr. Gill Case stated that he wants to ensure that fingerprints of potential study and target setting discussion are prevalent in the plan to provide context and represent all the work that went into this to date. He noted that he looks forward to seeing more development of the details in these key areas as we move forward.

Mr. Teichert had questions relating to Section 7, Page 15 where the qualitative description of bill impacts will be inserted. He asked if the combined effect of EE measures and a focus on deeper measures in the programs with our switch to lifetime savings would lead to lower kWh used and if it is this something the company can portray in a three-year plan document?

Mr. Ray indicated that timeline limitations (e.g. Gas bill impacts model not likely to be ready until annual plan) so quantitative aspects on this topic likely not to be robust in three-year plan primarily for those reasons.

***NOTE: Council Member Riccio had to leave the meeting at this stage, and was not involved in subsequent votes.***

*c) System Reliability Procurement (SRP) Update*

Please refer to the [System Reliability Procurement Update](#) presentation.

Mr. Chase provided an update on National Grid's 2019 SRP activities, of which four related to the system data portal and one was related to marketing and outreach targeting 3<sup>rd</sup> party solution providers. All of these objectives were completed in 2019, though he noted that marketing efforts remain ongoing.

Mr. Chase noted that National Grid created a Non-Wires Alternatives (NWA) website in November 2019 to centralize data and promote the opportunities available. He also reminded the Council that while three NWA opportunities were put out for competitive bid in 2019, no viable proposals were received, but that two of the three opportunities are still being investigated for NWA options, as the window of opportunity is still open to address those grid needs.

He also announced that the SRP Accounting errors identified in the annual planning process last year have been rectified and error resolution testing was completed in March of 2020, so those errors will be avoided moving forward by the new processes and protocols put in place.

Mr. Chase also updated the Council on the marketing efforts and noted that Google Ads and Rankings remain strong and had the Company has an in-person marketing meeting in quarter one of 2020. Additionally, the System Data Portal has been significantly enhanced and will serve as a key tool for 3<sup>rd</sup> party solution providers with robust data to support bids and hopefully enable more bids for future opportunities. Moving into 2020, the data portal will stay in alignment with the Company's Grid Modernization Plan and the eventual inclusion of hourly data to the portal, though that is not going to be completed in 2020.

Lastly Mr. Chase highlighted their 2020 SRP commitments (12 in total) and noted that all are in-progress at this time, including exploration of alternative solutions (e.g. non-pipe alternatives) on the gas side of the business and the integration of SRP work with other areas of the Company's work (such as Infrastructure, Safety, and Reliability; Energy Efficiency; Advanced Metering Functionality, etc.).

## **6. Council Business**

### *a) Review and Discuss Draft Sections of the Council's Annual Report to the General Assembly*

Please refer to the [2020 EERMC Annual Report to the General Assembly](#) presentation.

Ms. Sholly provided an overview of the draft report in preparation for a vote on it at next month's meeting. She noted that the structure of the document remains largely the same however there are a couple of changes to note:

- Added the ACEEE scorecard as an Appendix of the report to showcase Rhode Island's national leadership in EE
- Consolidated the vendor list and a few other areas to decrease overall document size as requested.
- Policy recommendations are for the general assembly, not programmatic related improvements which we would focus on in the planning process.

She also highlighted two new graphs added to the report – on page 11, the cumulative impact of efficiency investments over time (almost 19% of load in 2019) and on page 12, the cumulative value of EE program benefits, by category, compared to total program costs (over \$3B in benefits vs. \$1B in costs).

She closed by asked that any feedback on the report be provided to her by May 7<sup>th</sup>, as she'll then finalize and circulate the final version in advance of the next meeting for a vote by the Council.

### *b) Discussion and Vote on Recommended Education Funding Proposals*

Please refer to the [Printing of the Farm Energy Guide](#), the [URI Energy Literacy Proposal](#), and the [NEED Project Proposal](#), respectively.

Ms. Trietch reviews the proposals for the Council.

**Printing Farmer's Guides** – print guides created by EERMC's 2019 intern to use as a resource to promote and educate farmers on efficiency and renewables as well as the grant/programmatic opportunities available to support those efforts.

### **URI Proposal – EERMC Public Forum and Lecture Series:**

As they did last year, URI wants to organize and host an education event on behalf of the EERMC for the public (with contingency in case COVID-19 prevents in-person gathering) alongside an energy lecture series for a total ask of \$20,000

**NEED Curriculum Proposal** – Expanded climate science and energy justice modules within existing work already being done with NEED and in Rhode Island schools. This proposals looks

to expand the work being done through this program and add in a focus on adjacent issues of health and energy burden.

Option 1 – \$37,225 for 75 students

Option 2 - \$29,600 for 50 students

Chairman Powell asked if the education proposal was assumed to be conducted in person or of remote learning possible?

Ms. Trietch indicated that NEED will ensure that curriculum is distance learning accessible and approved, noting that they included a paragraph speaking to that in the proposal they submitted.

Ms. Verrengia commented that the Education Committee felt that the second option, for fifty education kits, might be the better approach to allow for some additional money in the education budget and also her experience indicates that seventy-five people may not be actively engaged and so the second option is her suggestion.

Ms. Trietch highlighted the total education budget available - \$62,500 – so there is plenty of budget available should the Council want to adopt all three proposals.

Mr. Hubbard asked if the NEED contract would be written so that if a portion of work is not delivered that the EERMC would not be obligated to pay for those undelivered services?

Ms. Verrengia commented that we should write contracts to ensure that is the case.

Ms. Verrengia then made a motion to approve Farm Energy Guide printing, as proposed. Mr. Roberts seconded the motion. Chairman Powell then called for a vote by roll call and all approved.

Ms. Verrengia then made a motion to approve URI's Public Forum and Lecture Series proposal as written and to have OER contract with URI as soon as possible; Mr. Roberts seconded the motion and Chairman Powell called for a roll call vote. All approved.

Ms. Verrengia then made a motion to approve the NEED funding proposal with amendments to allow for the final contract to include language ensuring that money is not spent for kits or trainings if in-person trainings are not conducted. Mr. Hubbard seconded the motion and Chairman Powell called for a roll call vote. All Approved.

#### **7. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

#### **8. Adjournment**

Chairman Powell called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Verrengia made a motion to adjourn, which Mr. White seconded. All Approved and the meeting was adjourned at 5:38pm.

#### **Outstanding Council Member Questions Requiring a Written Response:**

None