



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

EERMC LEARNING, EDUCATION, AND ADVANCEMENT DISCUSSION MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 01, 2023

Council Meeting | 1:00 - 4:00 PM

President's Dining Room, Donovan Dining Center, Rhode Island College, 600 Mt. Pleasant Ave., Providence, RI 02908 with additional audio/video participation available through Zoom.

Members in Attendance: Harry Oakley, Peter Gill Case, Sue AnderBois, Joe Garlick, Kurt Teichert, Bob Izzo, Brett Feldman, Kate Grant

Others in Attendance: Rachel Sholly, Adrian Caesar, Sam Ross, Craig Johnson, Ben Smith, Chris Hunter, Anika Kreckel, Steven Chybowski, William Owen

1. Arrival, Refreshments, and Welcome

Chairperson Oakley opened the meeting at 1:03 p.m. Ms. Sholly gave an overview of the agenda.

2. EERMC Brand and Communications Focus Group

Discussion of the Council's Branding and Communications update was facilitated by Ben Smith and Chris Hunter from Advocacy Solutions beginning with an 'Elevator Pitch' exercise, focused on conveying Council Member perspectives on the value and role of the Council, target audiences and key messaging targets, and how success is defined for the Council. Focusing on the effectiveness of the efficiency programming within the state, Council discussed how to ensure the message is reaching all Rhode Island residents, and how to reinforce the legitimacy and effectiveness of the oversight of the program. The Council next discussed the educational mandate of the Council, and how the rebranding effort was an educational initiative to help bring greater awareness of climate change and emissions reductions potential of energy efficiency.

Mr. Smith asked what components are missing from the EERMC Mission Statement featured on its website. Mr. Izzo suggested that the Mission Statement differentiate the Council from program implementers and regulatory bodies. Ms. AnderBois agreed and added that the term "Rhode Islanders" may be more inclusive than "ratepayers". Chairperson Oakley said that the Mission Statement should be simplified, personable, and understandable. Mr. Gill Case recommended that the Mission Statement both position the Council as an advocate of

energy efficiency and highlight increased costs of energy absent demand-side management programs.

Mr. Smith asked how the Act on Climate and statewide climate objectives might integrate into the EERMC Mission Statement. Mr. Gill Case replied that the Mission Statement should avoid reference to specific legislation such that it is timeless.

Ms. AnderBois said that the Mission Statement should indicate how many constituents the EERMC represents. Mr. Gill Case encouraged Council members to be mindful of empty seats on the EERMC, such as the Representative of Low-Income Users, and represent their constituents by proxy. Mr. Teichert proposed that the Mission Statement differentiate environmental and health benefits, both of which are delivered to program participants and nonparticipants.

Chairperson Oakley asked how “resource management” fits into the EERMC’s roles and duties. Mr. Ross indicated that it relates to the management of resources to support energy efficiency, active demand, system reliability procurement, and demand-side management programs. Mr. Gill Case suggested that the acronym for the EERMC was too long, but in the future the Council should expand on resource management separately from energy efficiency. Chairperson Oakley replied that resource management is not clearly defined and Energy Council is broad nomenclature. Mr. Ross said that the Council can complete a survey if it would help determine an appropriate name for the EERMC.

Mr. Smith asked how the Council could effectively reach its target audiences in its communications and rebranding efforts. Chairperson Oakley noted that all Rhode Islanders are included in the target audience, so the Council needs to determine what critical message customers should derive from EERMC-related communications. Ms. AnderBois added that the messaging should clarify that the programs are legitimate and have oversight. Mr. Feldman commented that many customers engage directly with Rhode Island Energy, so the EERMC could be framed as an additional resource. Mr. Gill Case said that messaging needs to emphasize program benefits and target underserved customer segments.

Chairperson Oakley suggested that the definition of energy efficiency be better communicated, as each customer class has its own issues, needs, and resource constraints. Ms. AnderBois said that the state legislature is a key audience. Ms. Sholly agreed and noted that the legislature is a recipient of the EERMC Annual Reports. Mr. Gill Case said that the EERMC and Office of Energy Resources (OER) are connected but distinct entities, so the Council needs to advocate for itself and exercise its powers where necessary. The Council may be deemed a nonessential contributor to achieving statewide-climate goals due to its lack of visibility.

Mr. Gill Case stated that the EERMC Education Committee has substantive, relevant discussion and public education, which is a legislated duty of the EERMC’s, can be used to expand the Council’s reach. Ms. AnderBois commented that the EERMC does not have support beyond the Consultant Team and OER to actively promote and implement communication efforts. Mr. Gill Case asked if additional budget would be required to effectively reach the Council’s target audiences and fulfill its duties for public education.

Mr. Smith asked what outcomes would result from a successful rebranding and communications effort. Chairperson Oakley replied that improved program performance

and state rankings for demand-side management programs would be discrete outcomes, but more broadly, increased engagement with the Council and programs would indicate success. Mr. Gill Case suggested highly targeted outreach in a specific neighborhood to determine if such communications increase participation. Ms. AnderBois said that targeting the oldest, least energy-efficient buildings would generate the greatest reductions in greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. Mr. Teichert commented that it would be difficult to attribute reductions in energy consumption and GHG emissions to the Council's rebranding, but such reductions are the ultimate goal.

Ms. AnderBois suggested that the Council separate goals for the rebranding and communications efforts from its broader goals. Mr. Chybowski said that the EERMC website is a library of all program resources and reports even though much content is suited for a technical audience. Mr. Ross said that the website could aggregate resources and use common terms. Mr. Gill Case added that issues in climate change need to be framed as household issues and suggested that Advocacy Solutions provide strategic recommendations for creating outbound content.

3. Updates to Least Cost Procurement Standards

Mr. Ross and Mr. Johnson of the Council's Consultant Team opened a discussion on the proposed updates to the LCP Standards underway at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), noting the proposed changes, items for additional consideration, and the overall timing of the plan components. The Council discussed how a Three-Year binding energy efficiency plan functions and what steps might be needed to transition Rhode Island to that structure, as well as the potential benefit to Council's activity and budgeting.

Mr. Ross explained pros and cons regarding the transition to a framework for a binding three-year plan. Mr. Gill Case said that the Council would need to thoroughly vet the new framework. Chairperson Oakley commented that the simultaneous development of three-year plans and annual plans requires significant work and asked how the EERMC could support the framework for a binding three-year plan. Mr. Ross responded that the timing is not ideal since the 2024-2026 Three-Year Plan is in development; however, the Council could communicate support for a binding three-year plan to the PUC and Rhode Island Energy.

Chairperson Oakley and Mr. Gill Case expressed support for OER's recommendation that the LCP Standards define equity and require additional reporting on GHG emissions. They also supported the Consultant Team's recommended language in Chapter 7 regarding EERMC oversight of demand-side management proposals.

4. EC4 Activities Update

Ms. Kreckel from the Office of Energy Resources gave a presentation on the EC4's efforts in producing the 2022 Update to the 2016 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan, and the effort being undertaken to develop the more robust 2025 Climate Strategy. The Council discussed the progress made to date, the state's achievement of the 2020 emissions mandate and the remaining effort to reach the 2030 mandate. The overview of the work to develop the 2025 Climate Strategy highlighted the analyses that would be conducted, what the public listening sessions would contribute, and tying the Council's work to reduce emissions to the climate targets.

Mr. Chybowski asked how the EERMC would contribute to the development of the 2025 Climate Strategy or other EC4 work. Mr. Johnson suggested that the Council might submit public comments during EC4 meetings or directly comment on documents produced by the EC4, such as its request for information (RFI) tied to the 2025 Climate Strategy.

5. Upcoming EERMC RFPs & Budgeting Process

Ms. Sholly lead a discussion on the Council's budget planning for 2024, the scope of RFP effort in the months ahead, how to increase funding for the EE and Climate Public Awareness Campaign. The Consultant Team also described the potential for the market-based solutions study to elicit effective programming models, and how a three-year planning process could affect the Council's efforts and budgeting.

6. Public Comment

None.

7. Adjournment

Chairperson Oakley adjourned the session at 3:58 p.m. Council Member Gill Case seconded. All in favor, none opposed.